

Socialist Socrates

Ernst Bloch in the GDR

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A philosopher is being 'turned'

Ernst Bloch is experiencing a peculiar revival. Peculiar in the sense that, currently fashionable discourses of 'the future' notwithstanding, contemporary interest in his philosophy focuses not so much on his concept of concrete utopia as on reshaping the Bloch image. This is no coincidence. Ever since the German 'turn' (*Wende*) of 1989, German philosophy has singled out Ernst Bloch for particular consideration. Bloch was a philosopher whose writings were, among other things, consistently geared towards interventions in the concrete political issues and constellations of his time. The entire 'German wretchedness' of this century, including the era of Wilhelm II and World War I, the Nazi regime, World War II, and the subsequent division of Germany, are reflected in his writings. During the period of exile, Bloch was involved in battles between the different political fractions concerning issues of anti-fascism and Stalinism. Returning from exile, Bloch entered the German Democratic Republic, where he found himself straitjacketed by the dogmatic application of GDR-style Marxism-Leninism. In 1956 he finally broke with a version of socialism he recognized to be incapable of reform. Upon his crossing over into West Germany in 1961, he became a leading figure for the student movement.

All of these events, even at a cursory glance, provide sufficient reason and ample material for reviewing a portion of the contemporary history of philosophy. What is at issue here are current attempts to re-evaluate twentieth-century German history in the light of the 1989 'turn'. These have occasioned embittered contestations of interpretation, which have come to dominate the recent reception of Ernst Bloch, resulting in a plethora of Bloch images and interventions motivated by particular slants in the politics of interpretation.

In his book *Der zerstörte Traum. Vom Ende des utopischen Zeitalters* (*The Dream Destroyed: On the*

End of the Age of Utopia, 1991), Joachim Fest, veteran editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, attempts to make the failure of law-and-order socialism the nail in the coffin of any social-utopian notion of a just society. The principle of hope, vital motor of any social movement, is thereby eliminated in the name of the status quo. Fest sketches Bloch as an apocalyptic rider of Stalin, deriving from Marxism 'only the messianic motif', the 'Marxian prophecy'. For Fest, the figure of Bloch the prophet exemplifies the fact that a socialist utopia did not experience its violation at the hands of Stalinism, but found its actual fulfilment there. It followed the 'inevitability by which utopian ideas of world redemption make their way into totalitarianism'. Bloch 'saw the Soviet Union as a precedent of Christ's ascension to power as Caesar; he celebrated Lenin as Caesar and toed the line of every twist and turn of Moscow politics – an exercise that degraded his thinking and his person. He still celebrated Stalin and sang his praises at a time when he could have known better, and, with a categorical shotgun in hand, declared the Moscow Trials to herald a better future'.¹ Such are the coarse methods used to discredit Bloch; they brush over the distinctions to be drawn between political and philosophical, private and public pronouncements, as well as over the specificities of changing historical and political constellations.

Manfred Riedel's picture of Bloch, outlined in *Tradition und Utopie. Ernst Blochs Philosophie im Lichte unserer geschichtlichen Denkerfahrung* (*Tradition and Utopia: Ernst Bloch's Philosophy in the Light of Reflection on Our Historical Experience*), looks very different. A conservative adherent of Bloch's philosophy, the author is confronted by the problem that 'Bloch's ideas have become devalued with the downfall of Marxism'.² Hence his intention of drawing a neat distinction between the actual consistent themes in Bloch's thinking on the one hand, and a particular version of Marxism accompanied by a particular con-

temporary type of commitment to socialist principles, on the other. What Riedel sees as politically decisive is Bloch's 'dream of a "true Germany"'. With this vision, Bloch was drawn into the whirlpool of the 'civil war in Europe' and was thrown backwards and forwards between an eastward and a westward orientation. The motifs that henceforth become decisive in characterizing Bloch's stance, according to Riedel, include 'home country' (*Heimat*), 'Germany', 'European fatherland', 'democracy', and 'human rights'. These topoi seem apt to reconcile Bloch with the conservative zeitgeist. Their meaning, however, remains indeterminate. What is of interest, rather, is the precise way in which these themes feature in Bloch's writings.

The Left, likewise, has its problems in dealing with Bloch. He forms the centre of diverging lines leading to contradictory positions: to Stalin, whose trials Bloch defended, on the one hand; and to the de-Stalinization efforts of Eastern reform communism, the Western Marxism of the New Left, and the student movement, on the other hand. The extent of the narrow-mindedness evident here is shown by the journal *utopie kreativ*. This journal, whose name ostensibly refers to what Bloch has come to stand for, makes it its task to present revealing archival documents of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands). These show SED functionaries intent on rectifying Bloch's 1956 oppositional stance in the Cultural Association for the Democratic Renewal of Germany by means of a tribunal. Exposing this plan of the SED might have been a meaningful contribution to the restoration of historical truth, especially when embarked on by a PDS-oriented journal. (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus succeeded the East German SED after 1989.) However, it relies on a portrait of Bloch drawn by the East German philosopher Arnold Schölzel, which distorts perspectives in a bizarre way. Schölzel shows little or no interest in the tribunal instituted against Bloch. While he contents himself with denouncing it as 'unspeakable', shunning the effort to find words to understand it, he is alerted to the 'malicious slander' that Bloch experienced in the West at the hands of the 'Raddatz of all times' after leaving the GDR.³ The East German philosopher Irrlitz, in contrast, gave a sigh of relief, as it were, at Bloch's decision. Counting Bloch among the 'intellectual fathers of the civic movement', the German 'turn', according to Irrlitz, was in part Bloch's triumph.⁴

The question as to how Bloch will find his place in history has been opened once again, this time by the German 'turn'; not least because the GDR archives have now been opened and contemporary witnesses

are coming forward. A piece of contemporary history of philosophy is on view.

The homecoming of the Other Germany

When Ernst Bloch returned from exile in the USA to accept a professorship at the University of Leipzig, like Bertolt Brecht, Hans Mayer and other intellectuals, he thereby affirmed the emergence of the GDR as a new German state. To them it meant the possibility of realizing their hopes for the socialist and democratic Germany for which they had fought.⁵ The miserable end to which these hopes would come was not foreseeable in those days. But soon afterwards, the Cold War was to force, by hook or by crook, any thought of a Third Way into the scheme of Friend or Foe. The forces of democratic socialism were destroyed in the wear and tear of continuous conflict between Party, bureaucracy and ideological orthodoxy. Whatever remained was labelled 'enemy of the state', and ground to bits in the mills of repression.

However, Bloch's 1949 appointment as successor to Gadamer in the first Chair of Philosophy at the University of Leipzig saw him happy and confident, undaunted by the delays resulting from the political controversy sparked by his appointment. This was partly the doing of Werner Krauss, then Romance Studies specialist and literary historian at Leipzig University, and member of the executive committee of the SED. The conservative old guard of professors around Menzel, Baetke and Kühn feared the establishment of a Marxist outpost in the traditional territory to which they themselves laid claim. They resisted Bloch's appointment by claiming that Bloch was not an academically accredited philosopher. As absurd as this may sound, it is not entirely unfounded. At that time, Bloch's great works existed only in the form of manuscripts, waiting to appear for the first time in the GDR. The majority of old-guard professors staunchly opposed Bloch's appointment, and sought to relegate him to the Chair of Sociology vacated by Freyer, who was discredited for his Nazi past. At this point, the Provincial Government Ministry of Education stepped in. Bloch was appointed against the will of the faculty, to take up office on 1 June 1948. It was argued that if Nazi injustice was to be made good, a positive gesture had to be made towards the exiles. The Ministry's decision was backed politically by the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD), which had signalled an interest in Bloch at an early stage.⁶

For Bloch, who was oblivious to much of this behind-the-scenes activity, the relatively comfortable

existence which the Chair of Philosophy promised came as a relief following long years of intellectual existence outside the institution of the university. What attracted Bloch in particular was the prospect of publishing his ‘overflowing and still homeless manuscripts of the last twenty years’. Thus, he writes to Schumacher in a letter from the USA, on 16 March 1948:

Finally I am, believe it or not, Spinoza and Schopenhauer may pardon me, a civil servant, expert, a recognized professor, holder of the chair of philosophy.... Being picked up from Hamburg by car, being assured of sufficiently spacious accommodation, extra pay for heavy duty, salary equivalent to the 1932 buying power of 15–20,000 Mark. In short, my bum in butter, as the saying goes. I am ashamed and am again longing for my dream.⁷

In contrast to Brecht, who was nauseated by the ‘stinking breath of the province’ soon after settling in the GDR,⁸ Bloch was positively surprised by the city of Leipzig. Two months after his return, he reported to Schumacher:

I am happy and content here. Sufficient food, due to ample rations, and due to the fact that in certain restaurants one can get virtually everything, at a cost, of course, but still, without any food stamps. ... Life: One can speak one’s mind, i.e. my mind; that initially seems highly surprising; and one can do so again and again, in the sense of complete freedom. University: fully equipped; the level among academics surprisingly a lot higher than that

of students. Solidarity with the cause remarkable.... Edition of my collected works will get under way sooner or later in Berlin. For the servile Germans, the professorial title breaks the ice that I felt at ease in.⁹

It was to the special conditions obtaining in Leipzig at the time that Bloch owed his sense of well-being. For it was here that the university politics of the SED, with Werner Krauss at its helm, was concerned to counterbalance the large contingent of old-guard professors with the appointment of returning emigrants. This is how the former West German emigrants, including Budzislawski, Herzfelde, Boehnheim, Bloch and others, came to make their mark on intellectual life in Leipzig during the first years of the GDR’s existence.¹⁰

Gradually university life normalized. Bloch’s Philosophical Seminar became fertile intellectual ground.

On the whole, one could say, he did not have a fixed circle, neither of assistants (since these were provisional appointees), nor among newly enrolled or senior students studying philosophy as their major subject. His students and adherents came from all faculties, but especially from History, German Studies, Musicology, Theology.... Nevertheless, the initial period was such that one could say, there’s someone sitting in Ritterstrasse, on the third floor of that brick building, someone who sits up there thinking up some crazy ideas.¹¹

What to unsuspecting students initially seemed like some ‘crazy ideas’, soon turned out to be the most interesting philosophy on offer in the GDR. Bloch was one of the few people who could provide students with something new. Wolfgang Harich, collaborating with Bloch on the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, describes his impression:

You got the sense that you were coming face to face with an absolute genius, once he got going in discussions, also with his fantastic anecdotes and jokes, and so forth. He was a veritable bird of paradise in what we might want to call a rather mediocre GDR – he could make the whole thing so interesting.¹²

La cathédrale – c’est moi!

To understand the power of this fascination, one has to look at the position occupied by Bloch within philosophy in the GDR. Bloch’s



Ernst and Karola Bloch, Leipzig 1952

position was marked by tense relations to two camps. On the one hand, there was traditional bourgeois philosophy, represented by someone like Menzel. It found itself sidelined by the tertiary education reforms of the early 1950s, and was decimated by the fact that its adherents emigrated to West Germany. Menzel was left as representative of an atrophied school, with equally atrophied articulations. In addition, there was the rising star of Marxism-Leninism, solidified into state ideology. In philosophy, it featured as orthodoxy, with privileged access to dialectics, the supposed pillar of Marxism. This summed up the situation of philosophy: the exodus of the old guard of professors, on the one hand, and the dogmatic sterility of official Marxism-Leninism, on the other. The traditional bourgeois tradition had found an abrupt end, without being replaced by a new, lively culture of philosophical thought.

One can guess at the electrifying effects of Bloch's teaching, which brought these different and distinct positions into confusion. In his inaugural lecture on 'University, Marxism, Philosophy', Bloch outlined his programme. He was intent on subjecting the storehouse of ideas of traditional bourgeois philosophy to Marxist scrutiny; bourgeois philosophy was to be opened up for the possibility of serving Marxism and the GDR as the latter's inheritance. Harich sums up Bloch's achievements as follows:

The reason why I have always held Bloch in high esteem is that he managed to carry with him an enormous store of knowledge and insights in a situation of spiritual and intellectual drought. The transmission of this knowledge was something that just had to be promoted, as a matter of keeping the cultural heritage alive.¹³

This particular notion of 'heritage' soon aroused the suspicion of the orthodoxy. What challenged and daunted the Party-Marxist theorists of heresy (such as Rubert-Otto Gropp, who presided over the Department for Dialectical and Historical Materialism in Leipzig), was the fact that Bloch claimed the name of Marxist philosophy for his enterprise. For that, he attracted the interest and acclaim of students, which is more than any of the obligatory courses on the basics of official Marxism-Leninism could muster.¹⁴

'Is Bloch a Marxist or not?' This was the ideological cardinal question, which remained unspoken, and yet exercised the minds of the guardians of official Marxism-Leninism from the outset. Bloch's students settled for Bloch the Marxist. 'What was expected of him was to raise the standard of philosophical discussion in this place, this much is true, but also

to bring with him a detailed and in-depth knowledge of Marxist philosophy – that much, likewise, remains indisputable.'¹⁵ The ordering schemes of what in the tradition of Lukács was deemed authentic classical Marxism answered the above-stated cardinal question with a resounding 'no'. Harich, reader in the publishing house Aufbau Verlag and vested by the Party with considerable power in decisions concerning publishing, is prepared to accept Bloch's ingenuity, but, being a friend of Lukács, reacts with puritanical defensiveness when it comes to Bloch's version of Marxism. He considers the line traced by Bloch in relation to Marxism too obscure; and the basic pattern too transparent, which for him amounts to 'a philosophy of sympathisers', patched together from the fashion of the day in combination with communism.

It is obvious that it is made up of two basic components. One is the pursuit of things famous and fashionable, of 'in' things, which are given a new slant. Thus: 'Heidegger has *Angst*, so I have *Hoffnung*.' The new slant which he invents for things is now supposed to appeal to the communists whose credo he politically endorses, but without entering into the barracks where they are being taught discipline. In the same way he deals with Freud's work, which is also *en vogue*. Bloch says: 'The sexual drive – all well and good, I also have got one – so what. But hunger! That is the most fundamental instinct.' There he's back with the proles. Somehow the man lacks seriousness of purpose. He is forever fooling around, in what one might be tempted to call frivolous thinking... Bloch in actual fact was considered philosophically harmless, because nobody could understand his writings – they were esoteric; his stylistic idiosyncracies did not appeal to the masses – no reason for concern in that respect. And, most importantly, it was clear to everybody who knew anything about Marxism that he was not a Marxist.¹⁶

Bloch mockingly shrugged off such small-minded litmus-tests with apparent unconcern. That he was above such petty opprobrium is demonstrated by the following telling anecdote.

Bloch claimed to be a Marxist, but privately he tended to admit: 'I am the cathedral. And in the cathedral there is an altar, one of many altars, maybe the inner shrine – that is what Marxism is, maybe even only a side chapel... I don't know. But I would say that here in the GDR the inner shrine is in the cathedral, but then *I am the cathedral!*'¹⁷

The Bloch who could assert this was still confident in his attack and critique. He publicly denounced the schematism of a bigoted Party Marxism as 'Marxism of the narrow lane', which held an original idea to be nothing but the 'link between two quotes'.¹⁸ Bloch was

no doubt a leading figure in the intellectual landscape of the GDR. He was influential and highly acclaimed, as is evident in the positions and honours bestowed upon him: editor of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (1953), member of the presiding council of the Kulturbund (1954), member of the Academy of Sciences and recipient of the National Prize and of the Patriotic Order of Merit (1955).

A modus vivendi

The philosophers of Marxism-Leninism held Bloch's position to be sacrosanct. It was clear to the cultural commissars of the SED, first and foremost among them Kurt Hager, that a mind like Bloch's constituted a rarity and a difficulty.¹⁹ He was not to be butchered by the knives of dogmatism. The official Party philosophers did not exercise their discriminatory powers in demarcating Bloch's philosophy from the official one, but instead sought ways to integrate this philosophical monster into their politics of ideas. Harich provides an impression of the way in which the engineers of knowledge attempted to mobilize Bloch for what they claimed as their superstructural achievements.

For propagandistic purposes and to the outside world he could be held up as a bird of paradise, but to the inside he was the transmitter of an enormous store of cultural values.... To understand and utilize a recalcitrant and philosophically hostile individual means, in this case, to avert the impoverishment of intellectual life as it has befallen the young generation especially. Therefore the motto is to enter into an alliance with him!²⁰

What Harich formulates in the thought-style of a cultural commissar, namely an informal type of repressive tolerance, might actually have been what the Party aspired to at the time. It soon turned out, however, that any notion of an ideal balance was highly precarious. Law-and-order Marxism and the creative adaptation of traditional learning did not make for a stable, harmonious synthesis. With his subversive dialectics, Bloch played his own tune, so as to make the iron laws of official Marxism-Leninism dance.

He was known to be a fellow comrade. But now it turned out that this man, in the manner of Socrates, exerted a fascination on scores of young people.... Probably without intending to, he taught people to rethink and think through communist dogma, the dogma of historical or dialectical materialism. The end result, as can be shown in a number of cases, was that party functionaries became incapable of fulfilling their official duties. Under Bloch's supervision, they had worked their way through this dogma. And this, of course, made him highly dangerous.²¹

However, both sides managed to retain the balance of some *modus vivendi* for another few years. This was facilitated partly through the repressive tolerance of the Party, which kept its law-enforcing watchdogs on a short leash; and partly through Bloch's not involuntarily rendered loyalty to state and Party. Occasionally Bloch's loyalty was reduced to lip service. On the occasion of Stalin's death, the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (February 1953) published a memorial speech composed by the Secretariat for Tertiary Education, in which Stalin is praised as the 'greatest scientist of our epoch'. Bloch tunes into this song of praise. In his essay on the *Theses on Feuerbach* in the same edition, he inserts the well-known icon of Stalin into the series of portraits of the forefathers: 'There are, indeed, philosophers who have since changed the world: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin.'

17 June 1953

It was the momentous events of 17 June 1953 that shook the compromise. Bloch intervened by calling for the democratization of the socialist state. The critical remarks, ventured by Bloch after the tanks of the Red Army had subdued the protesting workers, were actually aimed at political conditions in the GDR as a whole, even though he presented the bitter truths on a silver platter of loyalty. In his letter, he writes:

We have to pay much closer attention, with much greater commitment, to the grievances of our people. In searching for the causes, it would be equally important not to rest content once the Western agents have been identified. They carry the full share of the blame and will have to be dealt with accordingly, so as to set an example; but they should not be used as an alibi for different, deeper causes of the manifest discontent. The advances towards the building of socialism have obviously proceeded at too rapid a pace, outstripping the masses whose co-operation should be sought. The building of socialism requires sacrifices, but those of whom it asks them have not in every case been sufficiently conscientized in the socialist spirit. Added to this were the unnecessary sacrifices that were brought about not by the building of socialism, but by inefficiency, bureaucracy, and rigid schematism. In fact, it was a complacent, cowardly schematism which has hampered socialist conscientization where it should have been promoted. Far too often does it exhaust itself in always presenting the self-same store of quotes; it remains trapped in formalistic politics of delayed reaction, shunning any notion of individual responsibility, while being quite happy to preach lessons from above.²²

These were candid words, for which anyone lesser than Bloch would have probably been persecuted. However,

Bloch's address met a fate similar to that of Brecht, which reached the public only in a truncated version: it was filed in the archives and remained without consequence. The Ulbricht regime, whose replacement would have even pleased Moscow, was trembling in its boots. It learnt its own bitter lesson, realizing that it had been kept in power only by the tanks of the Red Army. This realization, brought home to the regime through the events of 17 June, marked the birth of the Stasi-state (*Staatssicherheit* – literally, State Security): the latter tightened its ideological controls. At the University of Leipzig, a witchhunt got underway to sniff out 'elements hostile to the Party' and '*provocateurs* and counter-revolutionaries'. With the allegation that a 'forum hostile to the Party' had been formed around the person of Teller, a student of Bloch, individual members of the Institute of Philosophy were expelled from the Party. It became clear that the forces of the 'other' Germany – that is, of a democratic-socialist Germany – no longer had any influence on the Party line, not even as a subset of checks and balances. Any attempts at democratizing the Party and society as a whole became subject to persecution, being labelled 'counter-revolutionary fraction formation', 'social democratism', or 'restoration of capitalism'. The Party got rid of the intellectual vanguard by means of a golden handshake. Brecht received his own theatre, in order to silence him. The honours bestowed on Bloch on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1955 were designed to elevate him into an ivory tower far away from active politics; the Academy of Sciences received him into its ranks.

The peaceful dusk that was to envelop the democratic line of socialism did not settle in, though. In the face of a growing silence, Bloch became more vociferous. He went on a veritable campaign against the bigoted rigidity of 'Marxism of the narrow lane' which he found prevalent in the universities and which was keeping the lid on intellectual life. In lectures and university committees he mocked the lecturers of Marxism-Leninism in terms of the 'pairing of non-scientificity and mediocrity' that characterized their teaching. He vehemently defended the intellectual spaces of science and Marxism. The requirement of 'ideological clarity' served as the padlock of orthodox hermeticism. At the 4th Congress of Writers in January 1956, an anti-scholasticist Bloch gave an address adopting this motto and leading it *ad absurdum*.

Ideological clarity, ladies and gentlemen, is a serious and difficult business. You will permit me, whose subject is philosophy and whose concern is ideological clarity, to say this: What Thomas Mann

says about the writer could just as well be said about the thinker: thinkers are people who take thinking a bit more seriously than other people. So that must then yield ideological clarity.... But even to writers ... ideological instruction is not always of the kind that we need. That would be one of having one's nose rubbed in the dirt, plastering it over with schemata. Gottfried Keller, one of our great writers, once came up with the very apt picture of a dog who had his nose smeared all over with cottage cheese, and who henceforth saw the whole world as cottage cheese. There are hazy horizons, we are dealing with a partly de-natured spirit of revolution, one which has lost its alcohol content, like the pieces of music that are played in Bad Pyrmont accompanying the stroll to the fountains: eternal repetition, eternal copying, eternal harping and resting on quotes, and parthenogenesis, immaculate conception from one quote to the next. We would have achieved much more if Marxism could become indispensable, not by occupying the moral high ground, but by encouraging a scientific imagination and inventiveness which could easily ally itself with creative imagination.... Well, all of this has to do with the fact that ideological clarity is easy in theory and difficult in practice, but nevertheless most honourable to be worked out. The space in Marxism for this kind of clarity is wide open, provided we're talking about a clarity that is real, not strangled by schematism, not covered with the mildew of boredom.²³

Away with the pointed beard

The year 1956 saw events following upon one another at a breathtaking pace. The 20th Party Congress in Moscow (14–25 February) seemed to bring the long-awaited turn. Khrushchev's secret speech on Stalin's crimes made waves. For a brief moment, de-Stalinization and the democratic reform of socialism were on the agenda. In Poland, a reform communist by the name of Gomulka took over the reins. The slogan of a 'Polish spring in October' made the rounds. Ernst and Karola Bloch attentively registered any and every sign that could strengthen their own position. Karola Bloch sat in front of the radio, listening to the first declaration by Gomulka, translating it there and then.

For the first time, we heard a speaker giving expression to the need for a 'human socialism'. Ernst and I were taking heart, hoping that the spell was broken and that this would be followed by the form of socialism that we had dreamt about. In front of my comrades, I was singing Gomulka's praises.²⁴

Bloch, who after all had defended the Moscow trials against left-wing criticism, was shocked at the revelations of Stalin's reign of terror. For him, the 20th Party Congress was the unmistakable signal for

renewal and democratization. He was hoping for the end of his own marginalization, now that even Moscow was signalling the go-ahead for reforms. But it was not to be. At the Third (SED) Party Conference in March 1956, Ulbricht made it clear that he rejected all reforms in the GDR. Bloch, who attended this conference as an observer, did not hide his disappointment over this 'One Man Show, directed by Walter Ulbricht', as he told the Scientific Council of his Institute. In overcrowded lecturing halls, with students circulating their lecture notes, Bloch criticized the SED regime. As the Secretary of the steering committee of the Party's university branch reported, Bloch even demanded the resignation of Ulbricht, so as not to jeopardize German unity.²⁵

It is not entirely clear how far Bloch was prepared to go. His thinking is evident from a publication 'On the Significance of the 20th Party Congress', which was written in May 1956, but only published later.

The 20th Party Congress must ... be brought to its logical conclusions, and with its own measure *inherent in its own logic*.... But this task is not to be delegated to a single man.... For at the 20th Party Congress, it was brought to light for the first time, and to the outside world as well, that millions of noiselessly executed murders throughout Russia, turning ordinary people, unsuspecting communists, innocent helpless people into victims – that these were sheer bestialities, without any 'barbaric admixture of personality cult'. Admittedly, these crimes were given over to subaltern sadism only through Moscow's centrally administered showcases....

It was the 20th Party Congress which has given

Marxists an alternative yardstick, which will now have to prove its worth in its application all over the place. Its proof would lie in inner-party democracy throughout the entire socialist camp, and the re-establishment, at long last, of a theory activated in research, learning and teaching. An additional criterion would be the formation of a new popular front.²⁶

Bloch demanded that the GDR government free itself from the fixation on the Soviet model. The opportunity of a German road to socialism, opened up by the 20th Party Congress, would have to be seized. The 20th Party Congress had 'opened up the possibility of fighting the notion that the Soviet Union was the *one and only model* of socialism.... Devoutness, as in the case of the defeated, might have had a place in the initial period of touch and go, of a Soviet Sector virtually paralysed; but this is certainly not appropriate in the times of the German Democratic Republic.'²⁷

These words found a resounding echo, first among students, later among the critical heads of the SED. The students adopted the polemics against the compulsory courses in Marxism-Leninism for their own cause, and fought, up to the point of lecture boycotts, for the abolition of these courses. Students of Bloch gained popularity, were politicized, and made a name for themselves as members of a 'Bloch Circle'.

There was a Bloch Circle in Leipzig, which naturally did not perceive itself as a resistance grouping by Stasi definition. It was a circle of approximately ten young people, who got together in their digs, where there was the possibility of establishing some hu-



Photo: Ingrid Zwerenz ©

Bloch with students, Leipzig 1955

man contact. But of course it was the actual Bloch Circle that was eyed and placed under a spotlight by those students who were regularly composing reports for the Stasi. We did not identify with anti-communism, not in the least. We wanted what in those days was called a human socialism. Neither were we in favour of free elections or for German reunification, or for contacts with other, Western philosophical institutes and schools; no, we just wanted to serve the Party, but as human socialists. We were given to the illusion that we could practise highfalutin philosophy and nevertheless remain loyal to the Party.²⁸

Students at other universities also got moving. In Jena, the Eisenberger Circle went so far as demanding free elections. When Ulbricht held a speech at the agricultural-horticultural faculty of Leipzig University, things came to a head. The agrarian policy of collectivization and of the undermining of peasant farming met with vociferous resistance. Ulbricht was made to feel the massive indignation of the students. SED District Secretary Fröhlich was alarmed. The party reports, hurriedly commissioned and collected, conveniently identified Bloch as instigator, on account of his 'political-ideological derailments'. Comrades Schleifstein and Handel were ordered to check 'the ideological situation at the Institute of Philosophy'.²⁹ The Party leadership of the university was brought into line, and the defiant Party grouping at Bloch's Institute was called to order. The first in a series of measures to restore order was the requirement of submitting fully written-up lectures of basic core courses for purposes of control.

But even within the SED, the demand for reform was articulated by members who allied themselves with the name of Bloch. These reformers, whose efforts were aimed ultimately at the 'disempowerment of the criminal Ulbricht group', Party reform, and a 'special German road to socialism', were making themselves heard in intellectual circles. The mood of reform spread to the Kulturbund, the quasi-state-sponsored organization of intellectuals in the GDR. Their most important journal, *Sonntag*, was published by Aufbau Verlag. The directors of this publishing house were Walter Janka and Wolfgang Harich, both of whom were oriented towards Bloch. Bloch was

the ideological backbone, a very important backbone without, however, belonging to this group. We were influenced by him, because he was a strong personality with international reputation; he was a great figure and defended certain positions. And since Bloch's pronouncements came in conjunction with the criticism of Stalinism and with the programmatic positions of his friend-foe Lukács, and now

even with Brecht, this was irresistible. If the great Bloch says, 'Away with the pointed beard! The Party needs a new head and a new body' and 'It is unbearable to see a little sergeant-major from the province occupying the positions of Karl and Rosa' – this is enormously influential.³⁰

People grew more daring; they wanted to take action. The people in the forefront believed themselves to be on the eve of a 'red 20 July' and prepared an internal revolution. The coup was to take place at a meeting of the Central Committee. A paper entitled 'Platform for a Special German Road to Socialism' was to force Ulbricht to resign. Paul Merker, a well-respected figure, was prepared to succeed Ulbricht as Party leader, and Bloch was earmarked for the office of new state president. In preparation for this coup, contact had been established with the Western office of the SPD; contacts with the Soviet ambassador had reportedly met with a positive response.³¹

The new enemies of the state

But in Moscow the die had been cast against democratization and de-Stalinization. The Kremlin saw its control threatened by reform moves in the socialist camp. When transformation in Hungary turned into open civil war, the Red Army was called in. The literary circle around Petöfi was declared to be the centre of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, and its members were arrested and sentenced.

Having been dealt some severe blows, the Ulbricht regime managed to stabilize itself by conjuring up the image of the dragon of counter-revolution which had to be put down. The end of November saw the arrest of Harich, Janka, Just and Zöger. The Plattform group was presented as the Petöfi circle of the GDR, and sentenced in the course of show-trials. As for Bloch, Ulbricht was keen to find out whether he was one of the rebels. On the basis of IM (unofficial collaborators') reports, the Stasi reckoned that Bloch shared their positions, but did not belong to the core group. This explains why Bloch, as one of the intellectual leading lights of the Plattform group, was not initially removed from the scene. This might well have been calculated policy. For Ulbricht could now announce with conviction that no prominent writer or thinker of the GDR had participated in the attempted coup. In the background, however, there were renewed efforts to convert Bloch to Party doctrine; these were without success. Karola Bloch, summoned to the Party for a discussion, did not budge. She protested against Harich's detention, against the accompanying lies propagated in the press, and the neglected promise

of help for Lukács, who was sitting in prison in Hungary. Karola and Ernst Bloch organized a lawyer for Harich.

Hand in hand with the criminalization of the Party opposition, the universities were subjected to intervention by the Party. Teller was punitively placed in production, where he lost an arm. Zehm was imprisoned for several years in Torgau. Bloch's assistant, the Party Secretary of the Institute by the name of Horn, who still allowed himself to be used as an informant against Bloch, ended up hanging himself. Others, like Zwerenz, fled to the West in time. The crushing of the circle of students around Bloch had left Bloch unscathed, but it dried up his field of activity.

The intervention of the repressive apparatuses was flanked by an ideological offensive. On 6 December, Ulbricht gave the go-ahead for massive purges with his 'Open Letter to the Student Youth'. A conference of SED delegates was set to take place at the University of Leipzig at the end of December, under the slogan 'Idealist Errors under the Token of "Anti-Dogmatism"'. As early as 19 December, Gropp could embark on a trial run of the set anti-Bloch theme in the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. SED members of the Institute of Philosophy vowed to support Bloch, but could not withstand the pressure from above. Ulbricht took the opportunity of a public appearance in Leipzig to engage in invective against Harich and Bloch. The ensuing witchhunt was made to seem justified. It came with the resolution that 'any effects of Harich's activities in the Philosophical Front are to be traced and liquidated'.³² Party members' slavish obedience to orders from above meant that Bloch was driven into an ambush. Even the Party leadership at the Institute of Philosophy joined in the campaign against Bloch. An open letter dated 18 January 1957 criticized Bloch's stance on Poland and Hungary, and his habit of calling the compulsory courses on official Marxism-Leninism an exercise in 'narrow-lane Marxism'. But Bloch resisted being labelled 'traitor'. He responded with a circular letter, in which he claimed ignorance of the charges against him, declaring them to be the result of misunderstandings. He purported to have welcomed the intervention of the Red Army in Hungary, and not to have known anything about Harich's plans. In the end, he offered a trade-off: his retirement and resignation from any teaching responsibilities for the right to complete his work. He tried to make this offer palatable by reminding his persecutors of the service he had done the Party while in exile: 'I have rendered loyalty to the Soviet Union as a matter of course, even throughout the period of the Moscow Trials, which I

tried to outline and interpret in articles published in *Neue Weltbühne*, Prague 1937 and 1938.'³³

West German followers of Bloch were dismayed to read this letter (published in the 1983 *Bloch-Almanach*) by the figure they had come to respect as the pioneer of the 'walk tall' campaign. To interpret the Moscow trials philosophically when it should have been a matter of openly criticizing them was considered a sacrifice of truth on the altar of the Party, as early as 1937.³⁴ By 1957, after Stalin's crimes had been exposed, this *trahison des clercs* provided all the more reason for a self-critical evaluation. But Bloch once more affirmed the clandestine Party morality, reproducing his earlier uncritical prostration to the Party. He was banking on the interests of the Party to handle things discreetly. The reference to his loyalty to the Party as a matter of exigency, the renunciation of his role as social critic, and the retreat into inner emigration – all of this was calculated to bring about a ceasefire, without having to subordinate himself to the Party in publicly denouncing his stance, and without having to break with the Party completely.

Judgement on Bloch was passed at the end of January 1957 at a conference of the Central Committee. Kurt Hager, who had counted Bloch among his associates and who had hitherto shielded him, was now prepared to sacrifice him on the altar of restoration. On 11 February, Ulbricht informed Bloch of the verdict of the Central Committee: retirement, but no prohibition on publishing. Ulbricht justified this verdict by pointing out that, 'concerning the present differences which sets us at variance, what is at issue are not your philosophical views, but your position on the politics of our workers' and peasants' state'.³⁵ At the end of August, Bloch officially retired and was deposed as director of the Institute of Philosophy. He was barred from the Institute. Karola Bloch was expelled from the Party.

The struggle against Blochism

Ulbricht's verdict fell halfway within Bloch's own suggested compromise, but it didn't remain at that. The guardians of ideological purity proceeded to stage a public sentencing, which turned inner emigration into inner banishment. In April 1957, the SED Party leadership held a so-called academic conference at the Institute of Philosophy to denounce 'the revisionist philosophy of Ernst Bloch'. The new puppets attempted to make their careers by refuting Bloch; Bloch's former adherents were made to confess their sins. Everybody was made to renounce 'Blochism', the formula being, 'Professor Bloch was not a Marxist, is not a Marxist,

and did not become a Marxist during the period of his residency in the GDR since 1949'.³⁶

There seemed to have been a plan to remove Bloch from public life in the GDR after all. He lost the editorship of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* and his seat in the presiding council of the Kulturbund. The latter is all the more remarkable, since the Kulturbund was geared towards issues not specifically dictated by the Party, and towards pluralism. It was not an unconditional and unlimited domain of the SED. It brought together intellectuals of the most varied interests, backgrounds and opinions. Since the leadership of the Kulturbund had voiced reservations against the politics of the SED after the 20th Party Congress, the Politburo raised the 'question as to the justification of the existence of the organization'. With the prospect of the dissolution of the Kulturbund, SED members in the Kulturbund were quick to act to bring the organization into line. They brought in a regulation whereby members had to conform to the requirement of finally overcoming 'all revisionist tendencies' by publicly pledging to contribute to the 'building of socialism'.

Bloch became a prominent victim of this levelling exercise. The Presiding Council instituted inquisition-style proceedings against him on two occasions, the first one in February, and the second one in December 1957.³⁷ The first time round, Bloch attempted to evade SED members handling the case: he presented the presiding members with the politely formulated concluding passage from the letter announcing his forced retirement, which he had received from Ulbricht. Bloch presented the quotes as if he were dealing with a document attesting to the most congenial agreement with the SED Party leader. The SED members in attendance promptly applauded Bloch. The next interrogation was to end with Bloch's expulsion, or at least with the impossibility of his re-election as presiding member. That was what the cadres around Kurt Hager, Alfred Kurella and Erich Wendt had decided in a preparatory meeting. Since Bloch's expulsion had to be publicly enacted within the Council, a tribunal was staged within the Presiding Council, which was to force Bloch either to renounce his views, or to face being found guilty of insufficient loyalty to the state.



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However, as is evident from the minutes of the tribunal, Bloch knew how to undermine the inquisitorial logic facing him. The herald of the 'Walk Tall' campaign proved himself to be a master at defiant manoeuvring. Whenever members of the Council were intent on finding him guilty of political treason, he wheedled his way out with undaunted insistence on his defence. His defence was: 'I have never said anything; nothing can be proven or brought against me.' In his shortsightedness, he had not noticed students applauding him as an opposition figure on the occasion of his public lecture in honour of Hegel. The theme of the address had, 'of course, not contained any topical criterion'. Neither was his Institute home to any political opposition. He had simply followed his job description in lecturing on the history of philosophy. He had never demanded Ulbricht's resignation; he had welcomed the intervention of the Red Army in Hungary. He denounced Zwerenz, who had left for the West, as a 'renegade who had changed sides'.³⁸

Bloch gave the SED members sitting in judgement of him just what they wanted, namely pledges in support of socialism and of GDR politics. In the end, they could not get more out of him than an act of distancing himself from Zwerenz, which he conceded without, however, mentioning Zwerenz's name. This

concession appeared in the daily newspaper *Neues Deutschland* (20 April 1958) under the headline 'I stand on the ground of the GDR'. Whenever anyone dared to question his writings, however, the limit had been transgressed, as far as Bloch was concerned. Then he would blow the cover of loyal phrases:

The question is just: What is all this for, and why is there no end to it? What do they want to achieve – to exacerbate the unrest? Or is it a matter of intimidation, and who is to be intimidated? I would only need to appear behind a lectern, and a wildfire would be ignited among students in Leipzig, Halle, Jena and Berlin. There are wars that have broken out for lesser reasons. I have not done this. I returned to this Republic, and it is my wish to find a proper place here for the fruits of my long labours. I came here on these conditions, that was what I was promised; this promise must be kept as a matter of course. I will remain here, and I am stating this simply and without pathos. But I will not allow my work to be further humiliated, shouted down, or insulted, as if there was nothing to the progressive elements which were conceded as recently as six months ago. In the West, this is called a witch-hunt. This word cannot be avoided. I am not a witch, and I do not need to be hunted down. I would like to find a place for my work, which would be no small honour to our cause and our state.³⁹

The SED did not manage to convict Bloch of 'treason'. Nor could they expel him on grounds of being a general nuisance. There remained only one solution, namely to refrain from nominating Bloch for the Presiding Council for a second time.

Inner emigration and the long arm of the Stasi

Bloch's expulsion from GDR cultural life had satisfied the purging urges of the Party. A few 'relatively quiet years' ensued.⁴⁰ Officially sentenced to silence, Bloch worked at the edition of his *Collected Works*, and got more involved in the Academy of Sciences. There he presented several 'hard-hitting' lectures.⁴¹ In 1960, he became chair of the Leibniz Commission. But it turned out that Ulbricht's promise to allow Bloch to publish his work was not worth much. Klaus Gysi, the newly appointed director of Aufbau Verlag, who worked for the Stasi under the name I.M. Kurt, undermined the publication of Bloch's work. Bloch knew how to defend himself. In 1959, he withdrew all contracts with Aufbau Verlag, and transferred them to the West German publishing house Suhrkamp. This threat had some effect. Gysi generously gave permission for the third volume of *The Principle of Hope* to be released, after having delayed it for years.

The 'quiet years' were deceptive. The Stasi had long kept Bloch under surveillance and maintained an interest in his activities. Telephone conversations were tapped, mail was opened, and his house was bugged. Unofficial collaborators informed on him. On 29 November 1956, the day before Harich's arrest, a first report had been compiled *on* Bloch, from relatively thin documents on file. Not quite a month later, this was turned into a first report *against* Bloch. In May 1957, a so-called Operative Process was initiated, which was code-named OV Wildt, after Bloch's address in Wilhelm Wildt Strasse. It was not directed exclusively against Ernst Bloch, but also against Karola Bloch, against Ernst Bloch's friend Hans Mayer and his assistants Jürgen Teller and Lothar Kleine. The files were assessed by Guntolf Herzberg from the Division of Education and Research of the Gauck Commission:

What was revealed by the files, in addition, was the fact that Ernst Bloch was being interrogated along with his wife, but separately, in January 1957. The object was to try, once more, to find out by whatever means necessary what he had discussed with Harich shortly before the latter's arrest, how far he was initiated into Harich's counter-revolutionary activities, for instance into the visit of the Eastern bureau of the SPD. But both Karola and Ernst Bloch ... managed, courageously and elegantly, to evade the incriminating questions put to them.⁴²

For the Party, the case of Bloch was settled, for the time being, with his forced retirement at the end of 1957. Not so for the Ministry for Security (MfS). From 1958, the MfS files show an intensification of the campaign against Bloch. Bloch is now being accused of

views directly hostile to the Party and the State, as well as demands for the transformation of the GDR, and of the entire socialist camp. That means an adverse positioning of Bloch in the role of the accused. In that case, one only has to compile official evidence for evaluation by the courts, in order then to institute criminal proceedings against him, possibly even ending with a prison sentence.... The circle of academics at Karl Marx University included in his alleged group of friends and intellectual associates is being widened; again and again, reference is being made to the Petöfi Circle. Bloch is being systematically construed as the enemy. In summer 1958, two female unofficial collaborators are introduced into his household. Bloch, by himself and with his family, comes under continuous surveillance from unofficial collaborators accompanying him on his travels. In January 1959, something happens which probably no-one knew at the time, not even Bloch himself: the State Security, assisted by these unofficial collaborators, conducts a search of Bloch's home, in order to find incriminating

evidence which would finally conclude this Operative Process.⁴³

The results of this search, however, seemed too meagre for the Stasi to trump up a charge. Generally speaking, the intrigues of Party and Stasi are not very easy to make sense of.

At about the same time as the Stasi was preparing the charge against Bloch, the Party was planning to use him for their own purposes. He was the only one who could counterbalance Karl Jaspers' campaign against the armament politics in East and West. The great resonance that the Suhrkamp edition of Bloch's *Principle of Hope* had created, as well as the fanfares in the West in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday (which had been ignored in the GDR) roused the fears of the Party leadership that the figure of Bloch could be elevated to a weapon in the hands of the West in the ideological fronts of the Cold War. After the debacles around the publications in the West, the Central Committee's Division of Science under Kurt Hager had to admit that there was an all-round lack of clarity in matters concerning Bloch. Now, all of a sudden, 'close contact' was to be sought. Several threads running to Bloch were being spun. Klaus Gysi and the acting General Secretary of the Academy, Robert Dewey, approached Bloch in their capacity as emissaries of the Party. The threads came together in the Science Division, with Dewey and Gysi being in regular contact with the Division, coordinating every move.

The conversations recorded in the files of the SED indicate a tug-of-war: Bloch was exploring possibilities

of gaining greater elbow-room; and the Party was exploring whether he could be used as an instrument of its politics. The emissary of the Party reported to his superiors that he had gained the impression that Bloch 'wanted to overcome his condition of being insufficiently linked with the Party'.⁴⁴ In mid-September, Bloch enquired of Dewey whether there was any sign of an 'echo' from the SED Central Committee. Dewey and Gysi transmitted the message from the Party that 'there was no objection to clarifying things in public', which would best be achieved if 'Bloch himself were to appropriately outline his position on the principles of party and government politics in the sense which he himself has positively indicated to me'. But it was precisely this kind of public statement in support of Party and state that Bloch was no longer prepared to deliver. He indicated that he was prepared to prove his positive attitude 'after deliberation and agreement', and that the dispute with Jaspers was included anyway. His 'reintegration into public life', however, was to take place 'peu à peu', via the journal *Sinn und Form*, for instance.⁴⁵ But Gysi and Dewey repeatedly insisted on a public statement. It was indeed the essential condition, which Ulbricht had ordered Harich to enforce. Ulbricht's declaration reads as follows: 'It is of utmost importance to insist on a public statement by Bloch. Bloch must declare his sympathy for us and mention names.'⁴⁶ Thus the issue of a public statement in the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* became a bone of contention that prefigured a parting of the ways.



© Dr. Jan Robert Bloch

Bloch with his son, Jan Robert, 1955

The leap into the realm of freedom and the offended Alma Mater

The building of the Berlin Wall ended Bloch's commitment to the GDR. News of the Wall reached Bloch and his family while on holiday in Bavaria. Heeding the wish of the Blochs' son Jan Robert, they decided not to return to the GDR. The gravity of this decision was eased by the prospect of smuggling Bloch's manuscripts out of the GDR. On 20 September, Bloch explained himself in a letter to Werner Hartke, president of the Academy of Sciences. The latter had already received several such farewell letters from members who had left for the West 'illegally'. This time round, however, the circumstances were unusual. Bloch had also given the letter to the press, which disseminated it even before it got to Hartke. The letter read:

I returned from exile in America in May 1949, taking up an appointment to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Leipzig. Since that time, I have lived in a state which later called itself the German Democratic Republic. During the first years of my activities at the University, I enjoyed unhindered freedom of speech, of writing, and of teaching. During the last few years, this situation changed at a rapid rate. I was driven into isolation, was not granted the possibility of teaching, contacts with students were being interrupted, my best students were being persecuted and punished, avenues of publishing were being closed off, I could not publish in any journal, and Aufbau Verlag in Berlin did not meet its contractual obligations in relation to my works. This was the making of a tendency aimed at burying me in silence. After the events of 13 August, which do not leave any hope for any living and working space for independent thinkers, I am no longer prepared to expose myself and my work to undignified conditions and to the threats which are wielded to maintain them. I therefore have to inform you, honourable President, that I can regretably no longer be present at future meetings of the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, of which I am an ordinary member.⁴⁷

This statement turned into ammunition in the propaganda battles of the Cold War; it was being fired by megaphone across the wall. But Bloch surpassed this exercise in discreditation by proclaiming in a radio interview that 'the leap across the Wall was the leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom'.⁴⁸

The response to this insult was not long in coming. Soon afterwards, on 26 October, Bloch was expelled from the Academy by a resolution of the plenary. A peculiar disciplinary measure, if one considers the way in which academics usually vote on resolutions.

The expulsion of a member of the Academy was an extremely grave – indeed unprecedented – move in the history of the Academy. It smelt like the deliberate creation of a precedent. Even though the Academy was being subsidized by the GDR state, this did not mean that it was the equivalent of an intellectual and educational production collective, as it became later on. Its academics were from East and West Germany, and SED comrades were in the minority. Party structures within the Academy were weak, and at most controlled the administration and related institutes; they did not have a decisive say over the exclusively intellectual group, which constituted the highest decision-making body.

The initiative to exclude Bloch emanated from the SED. On 26 September, a member of the Science Division of the Central Committee told Fred Oelßner, secretary of Bloch's philosophy class, about the intentions of the Party. Oelßner considered Bloch's expulsion a 'hard' measure. The constitution required a three-quarters majority of ordinary members in the plenary; moreover, invitations to meetings had to be issued in advance, including the agenda. Oelßner reckoned that the class taking philosophy, history, and political, legal and economic sciences, among whom there were numerous SED members, would have been capable of motivating Bloch's exclusion, given detailed preparation. But in other classes, strong resistance was to be expected, especially on the part of prominent opponents of the regime, like Frings, Mothes and Hertz. If subsequently prominent West German members were to leave the Academy, this would weigh more heavily than the case of Bloch taken by itself. Nevertheless, Oelßner was willing to 'go along in preparing and propagating Bloch's exclusion, in case this was demanded by the Party leadership'.⁴⁹

In order to mobilize veteran members of the Academy to support Bloch's exclusion, the Party cadres relied on a strategy of scandal-mongering and shock. Academy members Streisand and Dewey provided cogent 'argumentation', as arranged. The 'argumentation' was cunningly designed to re-address the reproaches raised by Bloch against the GDR regime to the Academy, thereby provoking the indignation of members of the Academy.

Bloch's contention that there is no hope of any living and working space for independent thinkers after 13 August constitutes an insult, especially to GDR scientists, the most prominent of whom belong to the Academy. In an act of immense arrogance, Bloch dares to insinuate that members of the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften are incapable of independent thinking.⁵⁰

The plan of scandal-mongering caught on. There was 'general indignation about Bloch's letter'.⁵¹ The philosophy class demanded Bloch's expulsion. The plenary, likewise, proceeded as anticipated by the SED. People loyal to the Party line had been mobilized; the agenda had been sent out at such short notice that the danger of West German opponents suddenly turning up was minimized. Moreover, the vote was pushed to the end of the agenda, in order to give those intent on abstaining the chance to disappear unnoticed. What provided the trigger was the fact that even conservative members of the Academy like Theodor Frings, who tried to prevent Bloch's expulsion in advance, did not take a stand in favour of Bloch, but disappeared before the resolution was put to the vote. The SED resolution was carried by the required three-quarters majority. In the Academy, up-and-coming philosophers like Manfred Buhr seized the reins. Buhr had been awarded his Ph.D under Bloch, but he earned himself a career by refuting Bloch – he exposed the alleged immanent theology in Bloch. Buhr's verdict was generally accepted until 1989; Bloch's work found only secret admiration in the GDR.

Bloch and the German Question

Bloch's departure dealt the GDR a hard blow. It meant a final parting of the ways. From this end, the question remains as to why this unorthodox and unassimilable thinker, this 'bird of paradise', could attain such eminent significance in the GDR in the first place. Or, turning the question the other way round, we could ask what kind of political line Bloch was advocating, what kind of forces were carrying him along. It is instructive to interpret the figure of Bloch from the angle of Soviet foreign policy on Germany, as Irrlitz suggests. Bloch had emigrated from the West; he is not by any means to be seen as an intellectual appendix of the group around Ulbricht. It was all the more remarkable that his appointment was effected with the approval of the SMAD.

Soviet policy on Germany was still in flux. Before embarking on the policy of 'sovietization', Stalin wanted to keep the option of a united and neutralized, democratic-parliamentary Germany open. This was an offer held out to the West, as a way of maintaining the anti-Hitler coalition as a basis for the renewal of Stalin's foreign policy, in order to get out of the cul-de-sac of 'socialism in one country' or 'socialism in one camp'. But a 'united but neutralized Germany was a variant that was not attractive to the Western powers, confronted as they were with Eastern and Western European Communist Parties gaining in strength'.⁵²

Considered in this light, the relationship between the blocs which committed the West German state to the role of a barrier against the Eastern European People's Democracies was Stalin's defeat in victory. The Soviet option of a united and neutral Germany created its offshoots in the GDR, especially among the second-in-line SED cadres.⁵³

Until 1957, the SED represented the line of a special German road to socialism (in the end, in a weaker form, represented by the group of Schirdewan, Wollweber, Herrstadt ...). Among the Party functionaries of the forties, like Selbmann, Ackermann, Fechner, Leonhard, and Wandel, the beginnings of a new partnership between workers' movement and liberal bourgeoisie were more clearly visible.⁵⁴

This option was what gave SMAD cultural politics its character; initially, it was far from embarking on 'sovietization'.⁵⁵ This was the line that carried Bloch; and he, in turn, supported it. It found its final demise in 1956. It was at this point that Bloch became untenable to the GDR.

Translated by Ulrike Kistner

Notes

1. Joachim Feste, *Vom Ende des utopischen Zeitalters*, Berlin, 1991, pp. 73, 60, 59, 69.
2. Manfred Riedel, *Tradition und Utopie. Ernst Blochs Philosophie im Lichte unserer geschichtlichen Denkerfahrung*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1994, p. 20.
3. Arnold Schölzel, 'Ernst Bloch (1885–1977)', *utopie kreativ* 15, 1991, pp. 55–7. Fritz Raddatz was the editor of the feuilleton of the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*. Schölzel was part of the East Berlin philosophy scene and allowed himself to be used as an informer by the Ministry for State Security. See Guntolf Herzberg, 'Abhängigkeit und Verstrickung', in Volker Gerhardt, Henning Ottmann and Martyn P. Thompson (eds), *Politisches Jahrbuch*, Stuttgart, Weimar, 1994, pp. 160, 170.
4. Gerd Irrlitz, 'Ein Beginn vor dem Anfang. Philosophie in Ostdeutschland 1945–1950', in Walter H. Pehle and Peter Sillem, *Wissenschaft im geteilten Deutschland. Restauration oder Neubeginn nach 1945?*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1992, p. 122.
5. According to Irrlitz (*ibid.*, p. 124), Bloch did not at the time stand a chance of obtaining a Chair at a West German university.
6. Ernst and Karola Bloch's departure from the United States was delayed due to passport problems. Their decision to return to Germany was influenced by their precarious financial situation, which mitigated Ernst Bloch's aversion against lecturing in the 'former land of the swastika'. Moreover, the rise of McCarthyism was not in any way encouraging, especially since Karola Bloch had at times been working for the Soviet secret service and had entered the US Communist Party under a pseudonym (see Karola Bloch, *Aus meinem Leben*, Pfullingen, 1981, pp. 110ff). Werner Krauss entered the KPD

- (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) via his role in the anti-fascist resistance. A member of the Rote Kapelle, he had been sentenced to death and had escaped execution by a hair's breadth. On Krauss, see Gerwin Klinger, 'Werner Krauss (1900–1976) – ein Intellektuellen-Leben in deutschen Diktaturen', *Jahrbuch des Mitteldeutschen Kulturrates* 1995, 1995.
7. Ernst Bloch, *Briefe 1903–1975*, 2 vols, ed. Karola Bloch, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1985, pp. 593, 597, 592f.
 8. Bertold Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal 1942 bis 1955*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1974, diary entry 6 January 1949.
 9. Bloch, *Briefe 1903–1975*, pp. 599f.
 10. Exiles originally from West Germany returning to East Germany were eyed suspiciously by the Moscow clique within the SED. During the 1950s, when the SED felt it had repaid its debt by neutralizing the old guard in the universities, the returning exiles were sent into retirement so as to ensure their intellectual extinction.
 11. Jürgen Teller, Interview, 15 December 1993, Leipzig.
 12. Wolfgang Harich, Interview, 20 August 1993, Berlin.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Official Marxism-Leninism staked its sphere of influence with the issuing of the *Standing Orders for the Restructuring of Tertiary Education* (1951). It was imposed on students through the Social Sciences Faculty and Core Courses on the Basics of Marxism-Leninism.
 15. Teller, Interview.
 16. Harich, Interview.
 17. Ibid.
 18. A phrase paraded by Ulbricht. Bloch adopts and adapts it to characterize official Marxism-Leninism. Minutes of the meeting of the presiding council of the Kulturbund, 22 February 1957, Archiv des KB Akte 268. See also Anna-Sabine Ernst and Gerwin Klinger, "Wenn es mich nicht überzeugt, kann ich keine Selbstkritik üben". Die Verhandlungen gegen Ernst Bloch im Kulturbund der DDR', *Bloch-Almanach* 12, 1992, p. 136.
 19. In the aftermath of the Formalism Debate of 1954, carried out in the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Rugard-Otto Gropp, director of the DHM Division and master of ideological intrigue, accused Bloch of revisionism. Bloch demanded that Gropp leave the Institute of Philosophy at Leipzig University. Hager, the SED's chief in charge of cultural affairs, intervened in a moderating function. He ordered Gropp to retreat and whipped the Party section. It is ironic that Gropp had to co-ordinate the Festschrift in honour of Bloch on the occasion of the latter's seventieth birthday one year later.
 20. Harich, Interview.
 21. Günther Zehm, Interview, 3 February 1994, Jena. Günther Zehm studied under Bloch and belonged to the Bloch circle. He was transferred from Leipzig to Jena in 1956. One year later, he was arrested and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He later became editor of the feuilleton of the politically conservative newspaper *Die Welt*.
 22. Bloch's letter was found in the SED Party Archive in a file with explanatory notes added by intelligence agents assessing information on the events surrounding 17 June (SAPMO-ZPA IV 2/904/426, pp. 93–4). It is not entirely clear who the addressee of Bloch's letter was; most probably the letter was addressed to the university Party leadership.
 23. Ernst Bloch's address to the 4th Writers' Congress, January 1956, from an edited tape recording in the Deutsches Rundfunk Archiv (Archive of the German Broadcasting Service), Berlin.
 24. Karola Bloch, *Aus meinem Leben*.
 25. Volker Caysa, ed., *'Hoffnung kann enttäuscht werden' – Ernst Bloch in Leipzig*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1992, p. 40.
 26. Ernst Bloch, 'Über die Bedeutung des XX. Parteitags', in *Bloch Ernst: Politische Messungen, Pestzeit, Vormärz*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1985, pp. 359ff.
 27. Ibid., p. 362.
 28. Zehm, Interview.
 29. Quoted in Caysa, *'Hoffnung kann enttäuscht werden'*, p. 41.
 30. Harich, Interview. Ulbricht had a pointed beard.
 31. Telephone communication with Harich, 7 February 1994. The title of the paper (reprinted in Wolfgang Harich, *Keine Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit. Zur national-kommunistischen Opposition 1956 in der DDR*, Berlin, 1993) provided the name for the 'Plattform Gruppe'. After his return from exile in Mexico in 1946 (where he co-founded the movement Neues Deutschland), Paul Merker was a member of the SED Party leadership. In 1950, he was expelled from the SED in connection with the 'Noel Field Affair'. He was detained in 1952. At the instigation of the Soviets, a show-trial was to be staged. But since they could not extract a confession even after 29 months of detention, he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in March 1955. In February 1956, on the eve of the 20th Party Congress, he was discharged on grounds of serious illness. He was officially acquitted in July 1956. From 1957 onwards, the publishing house Volk und Welt employed him as a reader. After the detention of Harich and Janka, Merker was 'forced by Erich Mielke to state the nature of his relation to the Party in writing' (Harich, *Keine Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit*, p. 83). In the main trial against Harich, he was made state witness, together with Zöger, Just and Richard Wolf (ibid., p. 88).
 32. Quoted in Caysa, *'Hoffnung kann enttäuscht werden'*, p. 44.
 33. Open Letter from Bloch to the district leadership of the SED, 21 January 1957, quoted in Caysa *'Hoffnung kann enttäuscht werden'*, p. 141.
 34. Bloch commented on the Moscow trials on two occasions, in 'Kritik einer Prozeßkritik. Hypnose, Mescaline und die Wirklichkeit', *Neue Weltbühne* vol. 14, no. 33, 4 March 1937, and 'Bucharin's Schlußwort', *Neue Weltbühne*, vol. 18, no. 34, 5 May 1938. As Hans-Albert Walter has shown in a reconstruction of the context ("Stalin – Richtgestalt der Liebe". Ernst Bloch und die Moskauer Prozesse', manuscript, Sendung des Hessischen Rundfunk, 17 April 1992), Bloch's interventions were aimed at taking the wind out of the sails of the criticisms directed against the Moscow trials in the liberal-left exile press. In the *Neues Tage-Buch*, Bornstein had adduced substantial evidence which led him to talk of a 'witches' trial in Moscow'. These arguments were not of interest to Bloch. He relegates the editors of the *Neues Tage-Buch* to the 'gravitational field of the Nazis', in order to separate them, as 'reactionary intruders', from the designation of 'political exile'.
 35. Ulbricht, quoted in Caysa, *'Hoffnung kann enttäuscht werden'*, p. 53.
 36. Quoted from a document in the files of the SED district committee. It is dated April 1957; no further details are given. Quoted in Caysa *'Hoffnung kann enttäuscht werden'*, p. 168.

37. For a detailed outline, see Ernst and Klinger, “‘Wenn es mich nicht überzeugt, kann ich keine Selbstkritik üben’”. Excerpts of minutes were published in *utopie kreativ* 15, 1991.
38. Quotes from the statement of Bloch at the Conference of the Presiding Council of the Kulturbund, 13 December 1957, Kulturbund Archive, File no. 266.
39. Statement by Ernst Bloch, presented to the Conference of the Presiding Council of the Kulturbund, 13 December 1957, Kulturbund Archive, File no. 320 GV.
40. Karola Bloch, *Aus meinem Leben*, p. 231.
41. Bloch, *Briefe 1903–1975*, p. 615.
42. Herzberg, Interview, 10 January 1994, Berlin.
43. Ibid.
44. Abtlg. Wiss. ZK, Möhwald, Information on the conduct of Prof. Dr Bloch, 9 October 1959, SAPMO-ZPA IV 2/904/163, p. 44.
45. Report Dewey, 26 September 1960, SAPMO-ZPA IV 2/904/163, pp. 61–4. Bloch tried to avert the impending summons to make a public statement, by suggesting that the Party would thereby harm its own image. He was said to ‘consider himself a “Trojan Horse in West Germany”. A public statement would prevent him from continuing to appear publicly in West Germany.’ Hausmitteilung Abtlg. Wissenschaft, Hörnig to Ulbricht, 23 July 1960, SAPMO-ZPA IV 2/904/163, p. 45.
46. Internal memo handwritten by Ulbricht, Abtlg. Wiss., Hörnig, 23 July 1960, informing him of the efforts undertaken by Gysi, SAPMO-ZPA 2/904/163, p. 45.
47. Quoted in Peter Zudeick, *Der Hintern des Teufels*.
Ernst Bloch – Leben und Werk, Moos, Baden-Baden, p. 245.
48. This statement by Bloch, made during the course of a radio interview, is reported by both Harich (Interview) and Buhr (Interview, 2 November 1993, Berlin).
49. Aktennotiz Abtlg. Wissenschaft des ZK, 27 September 1961, SAPMO-ZPA IV 2/904/163, pp. 97–8.
50. Begründung zum Antrag auf Ausschluß von Ernst Boch, SAPMO-ZPA, SAMPO-ZPA IV 2/904/163, pp. 99–102.
51. Aktennotiz Abtlg. Wissenschaft, 27 September 1961, SAPMO-ZPA IV 2/904/163, pp. 97–8.
52. Irrlitz, ‘Ein Beginn vor dem Anfang’, p. 118.
53. Wolfgang Zank (‘Als Stalin Demokratie befahl’, *Die Zeit* 25, 16 June 1995) presented an SED document which shows Stalin impressing upon the leadership of the German Communist Party in 1945 that a policy of sovietization was not the way to avoid the division of Germany. Both tendencies were present in the SED at the time: the policy of sovietization represented by Ulbricht, on the one hand, and the German Road to Socialism represented by Ackermann, on the other hand. They converged in the figure of Stalin.
54. Irrlitz, ‘Ein Beginn vor dem Anfang’, p. 118.
55. On the contrary, the SMAD tried to retain bourgeois-liberal professors like Gadamer or Litt. In Berlin, if the SMAD had had its way, Nicolai Hartmann would have been preferred to Bloch (see Irrlitz, ‘Ein Beginn vor dem Anfang’, p. 121).

