

LORENZ KNORR (GERMANY)

CLIP 01

My name is Lorenz Knorr; born in 1921 and grown up in Eger, now Cheb, in the German populated areas of Czechoslovakia. I am a trained typesetter and typographer. After 1945 I was active in the socialistic youth as a state and federation secretary. For 25 years I was the head of the German Union of Peace and then federation spokesman for the Association of the victims of persecution by the Nazi regime. If you grew up in a family of a labour union official, in the German populated areas of Czechoslovakia during the twenties and thirties, of the last century, you encountered the political problems and the political fights from early childhood. In Eger my father was the most popular strike-leader before the First World War and afterwards he was, although not fit for work, still speaker at demonstrations and meetings of the union. As his son, I obviously experienced this first hand, because my parents often took me with them to political activities; especially on the 1st May or on other red-letter days of the labour movement.

The moulding and forming impressions were: 1. the year 1933, when the German corpus and the German General staff shifted the power towards the Nazi leading clique and: 2. the year 1934, in Austria, when the latter gave power to the cleric-fascists who broke up the labour movement. According to our understanding the development of mankind goes from lower forms to increasing forms of living together, therefore that was obviously a heavy setback. The German labour movement was the strongest and ideologically most consolidated one in the '1st International', and you could say the same about the Austrian labour movement. We learned not only of the dirty fortunes of antifascists through the immigrants, but also experienced the international effects of what happened to the setback of civilization in 1933. Up to this time in Czechoslovakia the focus of the German, as well as the Czechoslovakian labour parties, was on the class struggle, which meant the fight for better material and cultural living conditions. In 1933 this obviously didn't stop, but the more the Nazis, the Hitler supporters in the German areas of Czechoslovakia developed, the more it amounted to a new political front status. On one side, supporters of Hitler in the German areas of Czechoslovakia, became increasingly aggressive and on the other side were the German and Czech antifascists. So it was not really the way it is now being claimed quite often, that the Germans stood side by side with the Czechs. A nationalistic perspective is a belated attempt to distract from the real problems we had at that time.

CLIP 02

These preparations that we were able to make before German fascism marched into the German areas of Czechoslovakia, became relevant after German fascism got rid of the Austrian cleric-fascism in 1934 and replaced it by the Nazi regime and then proclaimed the 'Großdeutsches Reich' (Greater German Reich). That took place on the 12th and 13th March 1938. Ever since then we knew that the next victim would be Czechoslovakia, the last democratic stronghold in central Europe. That meant we had enough room to prepare ourselves for the illegal work, the anti-fascist fight from March 1938 until the Munich Agreement on 29th September 1938. That made the difference between the anti-fascist fight in the German areas of Czechoslovakia, which are now called 'Sudetenland', and the fight of the German and Austrian anti-fascists who did neither have these experiences, nor these preparation times. Therefore the efficiency of our fight was higher. There were no party obligations to take part in the resistance. It was a voluntary decision whether or not you put up a fight, whether you would take the risk one foot in the grave. This decision had to be made by everyone alone.

CLIP 03

The party my parents were functionaries in, was called the 'German Social Democratic Labour Party in Czechoslovakia'. But the name was a diversion, it was a socialistic, an Austro-Marxian party. Our party did not belong to the '1st International' but to the '2.5th International', the 'Vienna International', with the slogan: No social democratic opportunism and no Bolshevistic dogmatism. We worked according to this guideline, but of course even in this party and in the youth association, which was a part of the party, there were different positions. That showed especially in 1936, when the

popular front became relevant, but the politics of the popular front demanded for working closely together with the communists. The ideological discrepancies were known. They were out of question. We shared the same enemy, which was fascism and which had to be fought together - within the popular front. In Léon Blum in France we had the example of a socialist of the popular front, socialists, communists and the radical socialists. That were the civil liberals, who wanted to fight the fascism together and with us it was the same. At the basis nobody asked anymore: "Where do you come from? Are you from the CY, the communistic youth, the socialist youth or the 'bündische Jugend' (union of several youth associations)?" The question was: „What can you do against fascism? “ Because we followed the example of France, the calling up of German intellectuals from Paris, now all dividing differences on the left had to be put aside, to concentrate the strength against the fascist attack, which was going on everywhere at that time.

CLIP 04

Fascism was a subject, because of the experiences that we picked up from the immigrants. In our youth group we occasionally invited immigrants from Austria and Germany so they could tell us their story. And we already knew before the high finance and the generals pushed the power towards the Nazi leading clique: Hitler means war. That means we not only grew into the anti-fascist fight, but as well into the fight for peace. That was the same question to us: the anti-fascist fight and the fight for peace. That obviously assumed that we threw light on it. After my youth consecration, when I left school, I took part in my first Marxist seminar. That obviously went further and there, young people, who were interested, learned all the basics of what they needed to know, if they wanted to become a functionary of the labour movement. So they were not only practical experiences that were being reflected, but we also had seminars where we learned to deal with the political opponent. For example, it was obligatory for a functionary of the socialist youth to have read Hitler's book ‚Mein Kampf‘. So we could tell the Nazi officials, who didn't know as well as we did, what the real aims were. They did not believe that Hitler wanted war. We kept hearing again and again: „They will not be so stupid to go against the whole world on their own.“ But we were able to quote from ‚Mein Kampf‘ that the annexation of new living space in the east was one main issue of the Nazis' fight. If we were able to bring the better arguments into discussions with the Nazis, in the companies, in the schools or wherever, it would have an effect on the undecided. But still the Nazis became stronger and stronger; for one, because of the social problems and for two, because the imperial German broadcasting service had an immense influence. Many Germans did not speak Czech, but you could hear the broadcast stations Königs Wusterhausen and Seesen, the two Nazi stations, very well; and this influence, in which social problems were misleadingly passed off as national problems, were surely effective. - Especially when the mass-unemployment affected the German areas.

CLIP 05

Well, of course, at first, we debated with the young people. But more and more we were forced to debate with the adults, as well. It was not, as if only the youth was discussing fascism. We knew exactly how to distinguish between the Italian fascism, the black fascism in Austria and the brown fascism in Germany. There was a difference – you had to know and consider that. But we were also forced into conflict by that, because there were (this is a historical term) 'saloon battles' going on right from the beginning. The Nazis for example tried to attack the events of the anti-fascists or to make them impossible and the anti-fascists tried to make the Nazis' events impossible, as well. Of course there were rows and because I was quite strong, I went to anti-fascist's events when I was fifteen, against my parent's will. When the Nazis had stormed or tried to storm, you had to defend yourself, of course. We did that and there always were oral disputes before the rows took place. But as it went to that time there were different tendencies between us. My father belonged to the tendency, who said that the Nazis could not be beaten by their own weapons. We were not supposed to take over the violence of the Nazis, but focus on enlightenment. Others, our metal workers in the companies said: "But that is what we witness daily, they only understand the language of violence. Our arguments bounce off like the raindrops on a raincoat. We can only succeed the Nazis with violence." And in the socialistic youth we did both. We acquired the theoretical qualifications to be able to debate with the Nazis and at the same time we defended ourselves. We had no choice. Until 1936 we sang: "We

never want to carry weapons again! Never, ever do we want war again. Let the ones at the top fight each other on their own, we just won't take part any more." Then the old comrades came and said that Hitler was standing in front of the door with armed arguments, and you do not intend to defend yourself. There was a giant discussion in the youth association and then we decided to do military training. We learned to shoot and we learned a new martial art. The Nazis did not even know the name of it. Nowadays it is an old hat, at that time the latest achievement: Jiu-Jitsu, training blows with the edge of your hand. With that we were able to prevail against the majority of the Nazis. If, for example one of our youth centres was closed in by Nazi rowdies and their supporters, how were we supposed to liberate the group in the youth centre? With defensive methods? That would not do. We had to attack and once their blows were overcome then the others would lose ground and we were able to get our people out of the youth centre. That happened from time to time, the adult's organisation of the social democrats, the socialists, "Rote Wehr", later on "Republikanische Wehr" (republican force), was strictly adjusted to defensive. That was good when a public house was to be defended against the attack of the Nazis. That was good at demonstrations, where the 'Rote Wehr' was walking at the front and at the back, but if, the way it happened a few times, a location in a small village was encircled by the Nazis, some of our people were already inside and some still wanted to get in to the event and couldn't, well, then the pioneer fraction was called. Then we made sure that the ring around the house was burst through with our fighting tactics; with our new fighting methods that was possible.

CLIP 06

We for example carried our knowledge out into the villages. The labour movement was strong in the towns, in the villages lived mainly rural population and a few craftsmen. In order to get an influence there, we, from the Socialist Youth, cycled to those places, carried out some events, tried to involve the people and at these cultural events tried to point out to the people with speeches what fascism meant, what it meant when you support Hitler – in this case with us Hänlein - what would it mean. It was awareness training and we had even with us own 'agitprop-groups', that were trained to achieve something with cultural methods, that you will not be able to achieve by speeches. To that time we were aware of the fact, that it does not only depend on the intellect of a person, but we also knew that the human being should be looked at as a whole, consisting of emotions and driving powers, as well. And with our cultural work, with our 'agitprop-groups', we did not only address the human head, but the whole person. And that, I think, did sink in.

CLIP 07

Well, we worked in groups of three, made agreements, always in a group of three. We met somewhere, where we could not be overheard, to prepare missions. Whether they were campaigns with flyers or posters or later on, when we realised that we did not achieve enough, acts of sabotage - that did not matter. So we thought: "Now the time is right for a big poster campaign!" Half a year after the invasion the two biggest companies in Eger, two bicycle companies, were halfway changed into armament factories. As a matter of fact every group of three put up 10 posters during the night and apart from one exception, which was the market square opposite the SS, the posters were hanging. All the other posters were hanging and in the morning the people walked past these posters, on which was written: "This is how the war is being prepared, resist early enough, before it is too late. The posters were hanging up, but when we then analysed and asked ourselves: "What did we achieve?" – We had learned that illegal work must move the crowds. – Then we realised that we had achieved only little and decided: "From now on we will work at a stronger pace." Many of us knew how to handle explosives and possessed fuses. As my home town Eger was a railway junction and therefore a strategically important line from Eger via Hof went to Berlin, the other one from Karlsbad Reichenberg to Breslau, the next one via Marktredwitz to Munich and another one via Frankfurt/Oder towards west, we said we will demolish the tracks. That is what we did and they were not able to carry out any armament transports, strategic transports and no passenger transports on this line for two days. It took them a while to manage that and they could not find out who did it.

CLIP 08

After the 'Munich Agreement' we had the 36 divisions, which marched into Czechoslovakia from all sides. Bohemia and Moravia were encircled by 'Großdeutschland' from the north, west and south. At this time it was that for start you worked as a civilian and only when in 1939 the war began, the enlistments then started. I myself was not enlisted until the end of 1940, so that we had two years of time for the illegal work as civilians. Only then, when we had to join the 'Wehrmacht', where the only alternative would have been going to a concentration camp, the work in the 'Wehrmacht' started and the attempt to form anti-fascist cells, wherever you were standing in each case. Like many others of us, I was enlisted to the 'Wehrmacht' after doing illegal work for nearly two years, or the alternative would have been concentration camp. We discussed what we were going to do; either refuse to accept the enlisting order, meaning torture and concentration camp or agree that we have more opportunities as soldiers. That was our collective decision. So as a recruit I already had to do a probationary test as a soldier in the anti-fascist fight. My time as a recruit I was in Bayreuth and there was an illegal group. A commercial traveller, an anti-fascist who commuted between the borders, associated me with the anti-fascist group, there. For them I was a stranger, they wanted proof: How reliable is this man and what can he do? They said: "We need ammunition. Can you provide us with a box of hand grenades? We have explosives - not enough - but everything else is available!" It was a tough job, but during a transport I put aside a box of hand grenades at the risk of losing my life and let them know. Three days later the district recruiting office in Bayreuth was blown up with the entire file. In the ammunition factory the most important machine was blown up and the most difficult: on the air field we blew up two out of three machines. It wasn't me, that were the anti-fascists from Bayreuth, but I helped even as a recruit. The question was what you were able to do as a soldier in an unfamiliar environment. We always tried to build anti-fascist cells and if it was one man or two. It was not easy to find out where somebody was, thinking the same as you. You had to proceed carefully with those questions. Sometimes somebody told a joke and you could tell by the kind of reaction: is he an opponent of fascism or is he disgusted when a joke against the Nazis is being told. Anyway tests were very often. Wherever I went, within short time I always had an anti-fascist cell in my unit, where I was as a soldier. That was a lot easier afterwards, after I was badly wounded and we tried as a small group to do what we could, like throw a spanner in the works a little bit; being aware that the single one cannot achieve a lot. But if something like that keeps happening frequently, it is not only a question of calming your conscience: I was against it; I have done something about it. On the other side you could show: "You cannot do what you want. We are here and we are keeping an eye on you!"

CLIP 09

In the summer of 1938, before the Nazis marched in, we agreed that we not only want to keep in touch, but as well that we wanted to develop a cipher, a secure code in which we were able to correspond politically, not only in the general and personal way. That was a cipher which the Gestapo was not able to figure out until the end: A very shifty system, the so called „two-box-system“. Which is commonly known, but you could still see that it was a cipher. When something like that was found, you only needed to press out the sender and the addressee to find out more. That was why the code had to be masked again – that was my idea. We then arranged that we would use the Goebbel's weekly article, that he used to write either in the 'Völkischer Beobachter' or in the 'Reich', as a disguise. We then underlined in red and in the accompanying letter we wrote this sentence of Goebbels is important, you need to discuss this sentence with others, and you need to consider this and so on. The only function was to distract, because this article was carrying the cipher; that is to say in the way that the encoded text was to be pricked from the back side with a needle at certain letters. The letters had to be filtered out by holding the paper into the light and only then it was decoded. It was not noticeable that we were communicating in cipher. And when the war began, another really important thing happened. With the attack on Poland the 'Wehrmacht' and the German air force were looking for 'Blitzmädchen' (female military Helpers during World War II), which were able to help as switchboard operators or radio operators in the occupied areas. Eight of our female comrades, which did not belong to the hard core, volunteered. We thought this to be good. They had to be let in on our cipher, which only the hard core had known. We had to keep up the contact, and they had to, wherever they were, get in touch with the local partisans. After having been badly wounded, I was

retrained as a radio operator in the punishment battalion in Africa. Of course this was a second option to communicate quickly. Every radio operator had the opportunity to communicate via radio as long as there was another radio operator somewhere else. You only had to be careful, because the 'Gestapo' and the 'SS' intercepted everything; but it worked, so you could communicate via radio, as well. Me, for example, and there are not many who achieved something like that, I had connection to my party leader exiled in London from 1941 until 1945. Coded mail went to Bergen in Norway. There sat a comrade of ours as a 'Blitzmädchen', she had connection to the partisans. They took the mail to Sweden. In Stockholm was the secretary general of my party and he established the connection from Stockholm to London via plane. Until the enquiry came back: "How is the mood in the population? Where are places for paratroopers to jump where to the same time a social background can be found, so they can live and operate safely?" These were the demands. It was not enough for them just to jump off. These sorts of questions came and they were answered. Later on it worked even faster, because a comrade, who had emigrated to London with her parents, got a new identity and was infiltrated into Denmark where she got married to a Danish member of the resistance. So this was double secured. She applied at the German commandant's office and nobody knew that she spoke Jewish. She also spoke German, French, English and then she even learned Danish as well and after that applied at the German commandant's office. Because she was perfect in type writing and shorthand she was taken on immediately and because of her capability and her linguistic knowledge it did not take long and she was sitting in the outer office of the general in command – the German general in command! She therefore had access to all the files. Everything that went to the general or that came from the general, even if it came from the 'Fuehrer', went through her hands. That naturally was a source and as she had direct connection to London, the way was shorter; so that the connection from and to London worked in no time. It did not take six weeks any more, but took fourteen days or three weeks until the message moved back and forth – coded, of course.

CLIP 10

Yes, I was sent to Africa. I had to fight in a motorbike patrol. I have to say that we agreed before we became soldiers we would never shoot somebody who had been said to be an enemy. We would shoot into the air, we would never shoot anybody, except in self defence; that was something different. There I kept going on with my illegal work; e.g. in the military hospital in Tripoli I was approached by an anti-fascist medical group and an anti-fascist radio operator group, whether I would be able to get fuses, as in Benghazi some comrades were ready to blow something up. They had enough explosives, but no fuses. I had to organize this by taking the alarm post together with two reliable men. Soldiers from the military hospital were used for that, convalescent soldiers, because there were not enough available and there we got the fuses. A few days later, in Benghazi, a quarter of the biggest ammunition depot the Rommel-army kept in Africa was blown up. With this a difficult problem emerged for us: Six Arabs and one German soldier were shot dead, who had not participated at all and now the question came up: "It is your fault that innocent people got shot by the 'Wehrmacht'!" It had to be weighed up: Which side has to take the higher blame? If you don't do anything against this criminal regime, if you join in silently, how much are you then to blame? War costs so many deaths - don't you have to consciously consider that even innocent people loose their life in the fight against fascism? That is already a difficult question in civil life, it was the same under war conditions, that we said the fight against the fascist regime had to come before anything else; a very difficult ethic decision. Well, the question of desertion was obviously discussed between all the people who were active as anti-fascists. Only in Africa there was no front which's lines could have been passed. In Africa warfare was mobile. There you could only change fronts if a unit was enclosed by the 'Tommies', the English. Then it was possible to say: "I would like to run over" and so on. Or to say: "I'll run away", then you avoided captivity; even that worked as well. When I came to Poland and Russia, that did not work because, as a radio operator, you were too far away from the front. As a radio operator you are, if you are no army operator, if you are not near the front, relatively far behind where the general staff sits. And they sit 50 to 60 km behind the front, if it is not a division staff. But most of the time I was with the army, army corps, at the higher posts. We were away from the front, so it did not work there, but the opportunity had to be taken. I would have done it like many others as well if the option had occurred.

CLIP 11

It was a bagatelle that brought me in front of the court martial in Africa. If they had known what I really did, I would have been summarily executed. But as it was, I was taken to the court martial and condemned to the punishment battalion in Africa. That was horrible because you were totally isolated and because you were often sent out in front of the tanks – as cannon catch, so to say; near the Highfalla Pass, near Tobruk. I was seriously wounded after six weeks in the punishment battalion. I was unconscious for two days and then came to Athens and there my eye had to be removed. The one side of my face is paralysed because of this one injury. I was not fit for war any more and was then retrained as a radio operator. In spite of all my bad luck, this was the best that could happen, because radio operators were not only privileged. Due to their occupation they were able to listen to what BBC or the station 'Freies Deutschland' were broadcasting. Every radio operator did that, regardless whether he was a Nazi or an anti-fascist. Everyone did that, when searching for his remote station he had to contact as ordered to. If he came across any other station he listened into that. But that wasn't the only thing a clever radio operator could do. He could also get in touch with another radio station where a comrade sat. My big advantage was that I gave and received the highest speed when I was retrained, that is to say 140 characters per minute, which was the police radio. The highest speed that was generally used in the 'Wehrmacht' was 120 characters, giving and receiving. Because I gave 140, I was of interest to the generals. They knew, the police radio was not intercepted by the 'Gestapo' and the 'SS'. The generals who did not agree with Hitler, also wanted to correspond with each other via radio. For that they needed people who gave 140 characters - and I was one. Insofar I got to the highest post and had contact to generals, who were anything but anti-fascists. But they were objectors to Hitler for many reasons. As a radio operator I was able to do a lot more illegally than before and that went on until the end of the war.

CLIP 12

During the illegal fight emotions had to be pushed back as far as possible. Before the Nazis marched in at our place, from 33 activists in the anti-fascist resistance 11 were female comrades. They achieved the same as the men and there I had to kiss unwillingly, once. The pupils love hearing about that, when I relate my story in a school class. While hanging up posters, we were caught by an SS-patrol, which came along out of schedule, walking a path no patrol ever used. As I am sticking, I say: "Oh, the SS is coming!" I then instinctively put my back to the poster, and as was a cold season, I covered the bucket of glue with my coat and she snuggled up to me and said: "Now we have to kiss – it's the rule!" And then we kissed to cheat the SS-people and they really thought that is a loving couple. They actually had the cheek to say: "Kissing is not enough. Remember the 'Fuehrer' needs soldiers, the 'Fuehrer' needs offsprings!" We just went through such a thing with throbbing heart, but that had nothing to do with emotions. That was an act of necessity. Apart from that we had connections to our (female) radio operators that were abroad, but that was initially limited to radio contact and coded correspondence. Of course, when I was in Eger on holiday or because I needed my glass eye I used to say to the battalion's doctor: "Well, in Warsaw they are not able to make decent glass eyes. In Wiesbaden they make the best glass eyes. Then I got marching orders from near the front or from Russia or Poland to Wiesbaden and then I took a detour past Eger. And I told to one or two: "During this time I will be available in Eger. Can't you come there, as well?" We then met female comrades who were in Norway or Copenhagen. The other things did not work most of the time. It was very hard to co-ordinate such a holiday, but it was obviously an exchange of experience that was thorough, because you had to confine yourself to communicating in telegram styles during radio or coded correspondence. And now you were able to analyse together: What has happened and what needs to be done? These meetings took place, but it was really a thing that was quite free of emotions. It was sober-minded about what you could achieve as an anti-fascist and what does not work under these conditions.

CLIP 13

Towards the end of the war I was seriously wounded another time. I was buried by a British aircraft-bomb for a short time and was then unconscious for two days. The 8th May I witnessed in an auxiliary military hospital in British captivity. There were only few who were pleased like me. Some just did not care. At the best the war was over. But what was to come towards us now? Some, mostly young

officers that were in the military hospital with me, were set really hostile towards the change. Somehow like this: "Now it has to keep on going, we have to keep on fighting!" Some of them played a role in the so called 'Werewolf' as a leader of young people who put up a fight against the occupants. But that did not last long. That collapsed very soon.

CLIP 14

I would have been disloyal to my own convictions, if I hadn't joined the resistance. My grandfather was jailed in the KUK Empire, Emperor Royal Monarchy of the Habsburgs, because he fought for socialism. My father was jailed because he fought for socialism. It was obvious, that I would work in the same track, therefore would not passively let it wash over me, but work against it. I was not alone and we had learned not just to back off when the enemy attacked, but to think about where to start a counter-attack. If you were sure about being needed in the time after Hitler, to that time this was an important sentence: "...for the time after Hitler." So you would work illegally but do not take unnecessary risks. It was obvious that you would deliberately throw a spanner in the works, as long as you could and as long as you could breathe. It was the same with many – I was not on my own – with many others. We were deeply confident in winning and making preparations for a later time within our resistance.

www.resistance-archive.org