

ERWIN SCHULZ (GERMANY)

CLIP 01

My name is Erwin Schulz. I was born on 13th of October 1912 in Tempelhof (Berlin). Two years before the beginning of the First World War.

My mother definitely had a hard time during the war. In 1915 my sister was born. It was especially hard in 1917 (as my father was conscripted as a soldier) during the „rutabagas winter“, where the food situation for the German population became more and more difficult.

I started school in 1919. The school was not far away from our parents' flat. Role model functions developed later – you know – with progressing age. But there was no role model between the teachers I had. Partly, they were teachers who had been demobbed by the imperial army and who were put into teaching profession; like the sports teacher or the teacher of religious education – you know – who had no educational skills. And characteristic for this time was that we had a teacher who was a real bully. When the lesson was about to start, first two or three pupils were given a good thrashing, with the cane. Well, that was normal when he came. Maybe another thing: I was malnourished and was given 'Quaker feeding'. That was from the United States, from the Quaker association and there I got half a litre of milk soup and a bread roll. That obviously helped to give extra nourishment. You have to see that this was 1920/21, where a lot of problems occurred in this post-war period.

CLIP 02

I can't remember when my father came back home. When soldiers, who were demobbed, came through Tempelhof, I always used to run there but I never saw my father with them.

Later on in life, we used to like singing. That did have its origin! One thing that just belongs to this time: 1923, the inflation. Then, my sister used to stand in front of the baker's shop, me at the butcher's and we used to wait until my father came back from work and he had a backpack full of money. Then he used to give us bundles of it and with them we paid for the bread or a 250 g of sausage or a 500 g of meat – you know – the money was worthless the next day – you know – during this time many sank into poverty. A lot of people had paid war bonds and they became invalid – were not worth anything. So, whoever had no material goods, lost everything.

1927 I left the 8th class or 1st class; (I don't know what the classes were at that time) the school year was over. Then I tried for an apprenticeship. I didn't get one, although I had good school reports. It was in this time, as well, that the grammar school pupils were older. There is a difference between the strength of a fourteen year old boy or a seventeen/eighteen year old young man. I wanted to become a type setter. My uncle sought for a place – rejected. Then another uncle said: "Well, then you become a bricklayer" – as well, no success. My father was a metal worker – again, nothing. Well, all the efforts failed, so to speak. And then I started at the company 'Jonas' as an adolescent employee. In that time I was more or less an errand boy. That was in 1927. During this time I joined the trade union, the central association of the employees. The head office was in the same building. Later on, that led to my dismissal, because of my activity in the union.

CLIP 03

1922 I joined the labourer sports club 'Fichte'. And all the following years – we practiced gymnastics twice a week – influenced us there.

My sister was in 'Fichte', and that was the reason why I joined them, too. I was the only one in my class. There were mainly reactionary teachers there. They did not have anything in mind with 'Fichte'. Here in 'Fichte' I felt comfortable. It was nice for a child to be and to do sports with others, who were of similar age. On Sundays we sometimes went on excursions into the proximity of Berlin. You just felt secure there in the circle of peers under the supervision of older people, who pointed out a lot of things when we were walking – you know – and that was something that impressed us especially.

The labourer sports movement had already been founded in the previous century as a counter organisation to the civil sports movement that went more the chauvinistic way. From that period the labourer sports movement occurred.

CLIP 04

Something else particularly helped my attitude along and that was the year 1929, I think. That was when the book "All quiet on the Western Front", by Remarque was published. This book was read by the organised youngsters of the union, in the SAJ (socialistic labourer youth) or communistic labourer youth or by the labourer sportsmen. And that was contributed to the fact that the older ones, who took part in the First World War, had to report at our youth centre evenings: "What was it like in Verdun, or somewhere else?" - Your Experiences! And that strengthened many youngsters in their fight against the fascist danger that appeared over the years. The SA (storm troopers) tried to ban the film and did manage. That is something – I can say for myself – that accompanied me further on in my life; against war and against fascism, too.

CLIP 05

At that time the communists propagated the slogan: "Who votes for Hindenburg, votes for Hitler and who votes for Hitler, votes for war." The Great Depression affected Germany. There were more than 6 millions of unemployed people. Companies put signs up: "We do not recruit." Nowadays you would not put signs like these up. But this is how things change.

And the troubles well, - you know – youngsters mainly, who did not have a job. That led to radicalizations. So many murders happened at that time, as well. Political opponents were murdered. We witnessed something like this, too. One day, we were out and about, when we were attacked by SA people. And then another example: In 1932 we went on a holiday to the Baltic Sea with the children from 'Fichte'. During this time a holiday camp (which had been organized by people who liked children, by the social democrats) was attacked by the SA. Children and adults were injured during this attack. We were meant to be attacked, too, but we still carried on with our camp, as we had received support by labourer's organisations from a village. And fortunately there was no attack. Who knows what that would have turned out to be like.

Hitler, he received the power through Hindenburg. And the labour movement was so divided that no unified resistance could be formed. There were a lot of protest demonstrations. That led to the provocation later on – the burning of the Reichstag – after which many people were arrested – you know – it had all been prepared for. There were mass arrests of the labour officials.

CLIP 06

We were ready for getting prohibited. We knew we would find a way to keep going somehow. For that reason the members (not all of them) divided into groups of five; one led a few groups of five and then, later on, we changed it into groups of three. That way it was easier to keep track of it. And for the meetings – you did not know so many that were working illegally. 'Fichte' was forbidden in the end and so the rest of the work was illegal.

Afterwards we organized the leadership for Tempelhof in our flat – these music circles. My sister used to play the violin and we played the mandolin. The people in the house liked it: "Oh, there are the musicians again." And there we planned the flyers and organized the work, the meetings and all the problems that resulted of this.

Maybe one more thing: Before the 1st May 1933 the leaders of the union, of the German Trade Union Federation, called the workers to go to 'Tempelhofer Feld' on that day. That was such a case where the union men thought it to be a betrayal ... We went out there on our bicycles on the 30th April and celebrated May day out there. When we came back we stopped for a bite to eat somewhere at Samitzsee and had a drink and sang. And the people liked that. Someone said: "I will do some collecting." And the money we collected there, we used for the 'Rote Hilfe' (political helping organisation). That way you could sometimes raise money to finance things. Even SA people, who were on their way back from the Baltic Sea, gave money.

CLIP 07

I think we had to walk in chains from the station through Luckau, as well. And then behind us the gates were closed. When we were dressed in the jail clothes our private belongings were all taken away. Then we were put into a prison cell, about 2x4 metres in size, with three men. That was where we had to live for the next months and years. At this time Luckau prison was overcrowded. There were three

men in a solitary cell. I don't know how it was in the bigger cells. We were isolated. We only got out of the cell in our release time, for half an hour. There we had to keep distance to the others and were not allowed to talk.

We had to arrange ourselves in this cell. There was one bed under the window, the other bed was tipped up on the wall and the third man had to lie on the floor on mattresses. That's the way we lived in this cell. We even had to relieve ourselves in the cell.

We had no work at first. Later on, we were given some work. There we had to untie and undo jute from the threshing machines. The harvesters had sheaved automatically – you know. And that jute we had to undo again. There was always so much dirt in the cell. Later on we had to put our prison clothes and shoes outside in the evenings, because they were frightened that we would escape – or whatever.

I received mail from my sister. She reported about things and sent greetings from my parents, too – and wrote about scientific subjects quite often. That animated discussions, because we were three men. The other two were there because of 'the sports case', as well. Later on I got permission to learn shorthand writing. But for practicing we only had a slate. On that of course shorthand – is quite an illusion. But I did learn it then though.

CLIP 08

When we arrived in the moor and got off, the constable, who was accompanying us, said: "Poor boys." He knew what was going on in the moor. We were then handed over to the SA. It already started then – the yelling: "Face Left! Who steps out of line will be shot." And so on. That's how we got to 'Börgermoor'. Then we were taken there by a narrow-gauge railway. There we were newly clothed and the quartermaster who was a SA man, too, asked: "Why are you here?" I said: "Because of sports"; as it was because of 'the sports case'. "Well, then do 25 sweet ones." Those were 25 squats. Well, I did them. It was no problem at that time. "And, did you do well?" I said: "I hope so, Mr. Officer." "Well, then do another lot." After that they took away our leather shoes and gave us wooden ones like those worn by the Dutchmen. And then they plunked down foot rags for us and the wooden shoes. Then we had to muster again. "Well, we have a nice sports ground here we would like to show you. There you can do sports." And on the sports ground they chased us around. Squats in a group, endurance run; and we were mistreated, as well, by blows with the rifle-butts of the SA. After that we had to climb over a drill wall which is 2 metres high. Some could not get over; there were older ones, as well, who had been imprisoned for years. They did not have enough breath left. Well, then: "volunteers, step forward", and while us younger ones went over, they hit their rifle-butts against the wall. And then it started all over again.

CLIP 09

We were woken up around 6 a.m., I think. Then everything had to be done at a fast pace – you know: make the beds, have a wash, go to the toilet, which was in some sort of shed around the back. Then the food was given out. We got half a litre of soup, the daily ration of bread, a little bit of fat and jam. Brown bread and white bread were mixed. Then there was roll call – you know – that all went at a gallop, so to say. After that we went out to work, there we had to muster. I, myself used to be at the well draft most of the time. There were about 500 prisoners and they were counted again. We were counted X-times a day. When we were there, afterwards in the moor, on the terrain we were working on, we were counted and all around us was the cordon. There was one of them sitting here and there, so they would have an overview. In the evenings, we marched back around 5 o'clock, I believe. Then we were counted again to check if all had come back. After that we went back into the shack. There you always had to run to get your supper. Sometimes there were stews, 'Peluschken' which were big beans not everybody could take; or some other vegetable – those things. A really bad thing was when there was roll call while the food was given out. For the roll call you had to go out. So the food got cold - and it didn't taste any good anyway - and now you had cold food. Well, you had to eat it to take something in.

CLIP 10

In January 1940 I was taken on a transport. I was not released. During the war it was standard practice that many would not be released. It went via Hanover, where I stayed for a few days, and then to Berlin. At the Gestapo (secret state police) more interrogations took place. My sister knew that I was coming to Berlin. She daily went there and asked: "When will you release my brother?" And I affirm: if my sister would not have engaged herself so much, I would not have been released. Now, then again you have to see that I was under police supervision for five years – that was in the verdict. Any day they could have taken you again, as you could not leave Germany. A friend, whom I had been illegally working with, got me a job. He was one of the music group members. There were tickets for everything. And when I came out, friends or comrades that I had worked with, or that knew me had collected: butter, one of them must have slaughtered a chicken You were directly helped, so the one who was released had a decent welcome – you know. We could not celebrate his release, but give support like this.

CLIP 11

I had already been mustered in Aschendorfer Moor. There we got an army exclusion certificate; so we were unworthy for the army. Convicts and political prisoners were all unworthy for the army. In 1941/42 we were mustered again. That was due to the massive losses at the eastern front. They needed human material now. There may have been a decree of the 'Fuehrer' – or whatever that was so we were called up. Erwin, a colleague also working in my company, built climbing irons. He was a toolmaker and able to do things like that. I organized a rope, and we made this trip. It was a great experience; many had again and again said: "Erwin, go ahead, do that when the war has ended." I said: "What one has, one has." I wouldn't have had another possibility to make such a mountain trip on the Großglockner mountain. But I don't want to go on talking of this mountain trip... But the conscription... We had to report, I think somewhere here in Kreuzberg. And there another man and I were deferred. We got the order to take the train to Heuberg the next day or the day after. We just were two overdue ones, spare ones – you know – who went there on that day. I got to know Otto Linke's wife then, as well. Before he had been in the SAP (socialistic labour party), as well, and so we quickly got in contact with each other. So then we went to Heuberg, that training camp in Wuerttemberg. We had contact. Maybe something else that you can never really forget: The crew mentor was a bible student. He refused to take a weapon. One evening you sat together with him, during the night he was sentenced to death. The next day, the company had to muster and then watch, as he was murdered at the stake. "That will happen to you, as well," said the chief of the company or the company leader, "if you don't do as you are told."

CLIP 12

The reason was: the political prisoners, who were unworthy for the army, were living in Germany. And the Germans were dying at all possible fronts. Slowly but surely, they were short on personnel. So there was the idea to establish these ones as kamikaze mission you just throw in. That was, why we were militarily equipped like this. As a self-dependent unit, we were able to absorb counter strikes of the allies. If we would have moved back, we would have been shot down from behind. So, we were downright kamikaze missions. That was their basic idea – you know. That is how it was meant for the bigger units, for divisions. And that was how the operations were. Typical: our operation on a hillside, were we would have been shot down by the American artillery straight after our first shot. No one would have survived. So was the military operation on many sections of the front. Literature about this does exist. The principle was: extermination of the politicals; they were to perish in the war and not survive.

The companies were assembled as follows: 1/3 political prisoners, 1/3 criminals and 1/3 officers, corporals and lance-corporals who were mainly Nazis. You had to be really careful if you did not really know the political prisoners. Any comments or thoughts – it was very easy to get shot. – You know – well, some did know each other. That happened, as well. They had been in prison together and now, met again after many years. Now you didn't always know how somebody thought in 1940 or 42, who

had been imprisoned in 1934/35/36 – right? – You know – you did notice and in time you had contact to the political ones.

We were all political prisoners. We had made sure of that – you know – that no other one would join us. That was important - even there.

The training: We did not have a pass. Well, later on, when we were in Belgium, we did. There was always a corporal walking along with us (with 3 or 5 men) who had to make sure that no one started to talk to other people. But, in Belgium – as we were not the first ones there – they knew that in this punishment battalion 999 there were many political prisoners. That was known. After that we went to France and to Italy, as well.

CLIP 13

We got to Naples. There was a ship, which had been declared as a hospital ship (with a red cross on it) – that had been transporting ammunition. The Italian members of the resistance found out about it and the ship was bombarded. And so we had to take the wounded into hospital. There were things like that: ships were declared as hospital ships and they transported ammunition. From Naples we were flown to Tunisia in a Ju52. It flew close to sea level – it never went higher. Well, a few machines of that group were brought down. They all died a wretched death by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. There was no way of rescuing them. We were lucky. When we came to Tunisia they said at the airport: “What do you want here?” Many people or many soldiers were heading back. Higher units – Rommel and these were here, too. That was in March. From around the beginning of April – the Rommel-army had pulled back quite a bit – arouse this mood between us, too. And our sergeant, a confirmed Nazi, said: “Don’t you think it will be the way it was in 1918! Whoever steps out of line here, will be bumped off at once.” That was the way he tried to get control straight away.

We were in some barracks in Tunis. There we had to guard the gates. The ones who had been moved for disciplinary reasons were graded for that, and so we were there, as well. In Kairouan the front came to a deadlock. And we thought: ‘Well, if the Americans come further, we will hand over the barracks. We will be able to prevent an opposition somehow.’ But it came to nothing. Afterwards we were appointed in the mountains. I cannot remember what the area was called. Grenade launchers lie in ambush. And we were positioned on a plateau, where the Americans could see and directly shoot us. So, we were on a downright kamikaze mission. If we had shot, we would have been bombarded just like that – we wouldn’t have survived. So we placed the grenade launcher there, moved along for another 20 m, or so (I cannot remember how many) and then one said: “We will build something, so we can protect ourselves from the direct bombardment a little bit.” We fired one shot and, in return, our grenade launcher was totally destroyed. Well, that was a kamikaze mission. They wanted to exterminate us.

Later on we went back and then I spoke to some of the others: “We have to run away now.” But then – you have to see the time – it was the end of April, and on the 10th May, or so, they surrendered. There were some doubts: “They will inform Germany: “He deserted.” I said: “that is all nonsense. They won’t have any time left to do that.” But I still stayed with Otto Linke – and went into captivity with him. That was, I think, on the 30th April. I said: “Otto, from the 1st of May we will stay in the mountains, as free men.” And on the 2nd May (we went into imprisonment) we were arrested by Moroccans. They were happy about our pistols and the munition; as they were from the de-Gaulle-army and had prize weapons only. They were not regularly armed. Anyway, we were passed on to the French and after that, we came to the English, and then later on to the Americans.

CLIP 14

We were shipped - or rather – we were on a ship, to travel onwards from the Mediterranean Sea. - I don’t know. – But we came back and later on (I don’t know how the agreements between the allies were) we were handed over to the Americans. We travelled to Casablanca, through Morocco, by train. Casablanca is situated quite low down.

There was a huge camp; everything after the capitulation came to Casablanca, and from there we were transported to the United States. The confrontations had already been getting stronger. The antifascists tried to stay together as far as possible and not to be solitary. The Nazis tried to keep up their former command as our officers. And they tried this also when we came over to America. In the

camps, they took over the orderly room, the kitchen, everything. They were the non-commissioned ranks, the sergeants, the sergeant majors, and we were only ordinary soldiers, as one says. We tried to get them out of the camp. We tried this there in Aliceville. And tried to influence the young soldiers who also belonged to this. This was changed around. In the night, one of us would go on guard that we were not surprised in our sleep.

Well, the American army did not treat us any better. What I remembered much later like this: officers were probably not able to understand these things in their own awareness; that soldiers who had been fighting in the Hitler-army were now turning against it. This problem of the controversy fascism against antifascism was something the officers could not understand. That happened in these days. Later on, towards the end, they got some different views; after they got to know: about the concentration camps, what happened to the people there, the way they were murdered there, and disposed off. Auschwitz was only then liberated by the Soviet army, the Red Army. That was when the exchange happened and they at least started to realise that there were people who were fighting against 'their country', as they said.

Later on I was taken back to Fort Devens, where I witnessed the end of the war. There we had the magazine 'German-American' which was edited by immigrated union men and political immigrants. 'German-American' well, it was in German and English. It was delivered into our camp. Before, in McCain, it didn't come into the camp. But now, towards the end of the war many things changed. You could buy this magazine. We also had contact to the issuers, illegal ones – you know – because the commands were working in the motor pool, where, again, progressive Americans helped us with the information. Well, that is an extra chapter that could be attended. Anyway, there some political and cultural life started.

The Americans filmed 'Buchenwald' (Nazi concentration camp in Thuringia, Germany), the heaps of dead bodies they found and the circumstances. These films were shown in the USA and then all the prisoners of war had to watch these films, as well.

Now to my release: We were transported to Belgium. There the conditions were the same as in Aliceville, where we were taken in the first prison camp. Just before I was released the documents came, like when somebody was moved to another camp.

And there was an associate, Fritz Fiedkau, who was declared (in the documents) to be an SS-man. So, in the camp, where he had been before they changed his documents in the assessment – you know – they made the antifascist into an SS-man. And an SS-man had already gone home as an antifascist! I did report that later on. We went over to Munsterlager which had the same pattern; corporals, sergeants and so on, they were in command there. "Don't let yourself get released towards the east!" and many other things. Anyway, in October 1946 I got on a transport to West-Berlin. I used to live in West-Berlin before. This is how I got home from war captivity. My parents lived somewhere else, as they had been bombed out. And now the new life began after all these incidents that you experienced over the years.

CLIP 15

When I came home, I joined (I hadn't been politically organized before) the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) – you know – that was the association of the social democrats, communists and many independent people. I worked in the ministry occasionally and was temporarily at the SED in Tempelhof as the 2nd secretary (vice-president), later on even as party secretary for a company in Johannisthal.

As a last comment: After 1989/90 I have been particularly interested in those moor soldier meetings. I arranged that moor soldiers from Köpenick could give interviews. We have good contact and I have been going there every year. I have been taking part in their meetings: against war and against fascism. – You know – and that is the conclusion: War is something terrible! It creates horrible conditions - not only for the soldiers but for civilians, as well. You have to turn against fascism and now, as well, the neo-Nazis to be able to prevent similar affairs which they are aiming for.

That could maybe be even the closing words, if you have no other questions: Well, this conclusion did not only arise in recent years. You were already living with this decision in the times, when you were imprisoned and then afterwards during the war.

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