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Basic biographical data

Name:	Franz Meyer
Other names (bynames, pseud., etc.):	H. ; Franz Holß ; Holz ; Franz Wilhelm Meyer
Date and place of birth:	May 2, 1906, Gelsenkirchen (Germany)
Date and place of death:	February 9, 1957, New York, NY (USA)
Nationality:	German, USA
Occupations, careers:	Painter, drawer, caricaturist, political activist
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	ca. 1930 - 1943

Biographical sketch

Relatively little biographical information is known about Franz Meyer who was born in Gelsenkirchen (Germany) on May 2, 1906 where he went to school and later learnt technical drawing. After earning his living in an engineering office and completing his education by years of apprenticeship in Germany, Austria and other countries, he studied painting and graphic arts at the *Folkwangschule für Gestaltung* in Essen (Germany) and soon became a passionate watercolourist, creator of linocuts and wood engravings. His paintings, drawings and other works were chiefly those of social criticism, full of satirical and vitriolic criticism of the ruling classes and of reformist politics. In the second half of the 1920s, Meyer engaged first in the youth arm of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD, Communist Party of Germany)* and then in the party itself; drawings from his pen appeared in communist papers such as for example in the *Ruhrecho : Organ der KPD Ruhrgebiet*. In the early 1930s, Meyer left the *KPD* because he refused its ultraleft, sectarian and suicidal policy dictated by the Stalinist theory of 'social fascism'. He joined the ranks of the Gelsenkirchen group of the *Linke Opposition der KPD (Bolschewiki-Leninisten) (LO, Left Opposition of the KPD, Bolshevik-Leninists)*, the German section of the *International Left Opposition (ILO)* founded and led by Leon Trotsky. The Gelsenkirchen branch under the leadership of musician Josef Weber – better known by his party name Jahre – was one of the most active and powerful groups of the *LO*. When in 1933 Hitler seized power in Germany, several hundred militants of the *LO*, which in 1933 was renamed *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands (IKD)*,

International Communists of Germany), went underground and engaged themselves in resistance struggle under conditions of sharp repression and persecution. However, most of them could continue their fight for some 3 years before the fascist repression organs could arrest some 150 of them, put on trial and jail them. Most *LO* and *IKD* leaders were forced to emigrate immediately after Hitler's seizure of power. Thus, Meyer's close friend and comrade Josef Weber (Johre) emigrated to Amsterdam (The Netherlands) in 1933 trying to maintain close connections to the militants in the Gelsenkirchen area and smuggling leaflets and *IKD*'s journal *Unser Wort* to Germany. Weber (Johre) soon became one of the leading figures of the *Auslandskomitee* (*AK*, *Foreign Committee*) of the *IKD*, now the German section of the *International Communist League* (*ICL*, renamed *Movement for the Fourth International* in 1936). The *AK* of the *IKD* was created in 1933* in order to secure the political leadership of the *IKD* and to maintain liaison with other members and tendencies of the emigration and last but not least with the local Trotskyist underground groups operating in Germany under the difficult conditions of a fascist dictatorship.

Franz Meyer was one of those who for a while remained in Germany, but in 1934, together with some other comrades of the Gelsenkirchen branch, he emigrated to the Netherlands in order to escape the Nazi henchman. However, the Dutch authorities refused to grant asylum to them and Meyer eventually was expelled to Belgium. There he had also to live illegally, as a refugee without any passport since he was deprived of German citizenship. For a couple of years, Meyer lived in Antwerpen, a cosmopolitan and industrial area where several thousand immigrants, refugees, and Jews had found a hiding place. Together with his friend and co-fighter Fritz Besser and five other Trotskyist refugees from Germany, he formed the Antwerpen cell of the *IKD*. From December 1936 to July 1939, Meyer and Besser took care of the regular appearance of the exile organ of the German Trotskyists, *Unser Wort*, which previously had been edited first in Prague and then in Paris by Josef Weber (Johre), Otto Schüssler (Fischer) and others. Franz Meyer was known in Antwerpen as 'Holz' (or, 'H' for short) signing his political caricatures with this acronym, too, which now appeared as drawings or linocuts in several organs of the Belgian and Dutch Trotskyists and in organs close to Trotskyism such as for example in *La lutte ouvrière*, *De Rode October*, *De Arbeid*, *Die Nieuwe Fakkel*. Meyer and the small Antwerpen *IKD* cell in 1936 launched there a small press, *Dynamo-Verlag*, which published material in German language, particularly pamphlets written by Leon Trotsky, e.g. his *Verratene Revolution* (*The revolution betrayed*). Helpful not only in founding this little publishing house was Henri Mandel (Almond), a cosmopolitan Jew, internationalist and sympathizer of Trotsky, living in Antwerpen since the 1920s whose house was a very popular meeting place for leftist emigrants from Germany, Austria and other countries. The open-minded and internationalist atmosphere of the Mandel house vigorously shaped the later life and thought of Henri Mandel's son, Ernest, who eventually should become one of the chief leaders of the Trotskyist *Fourth International* after the War. Meyer and the other *IKD* members living in Antwerpen also took part in the organizational life of the Antwerpen branch of the Belgian section of the *Fourth International*.

In August 1939, shortly before World War II began, Meyer was arrested by the Belgian police and some months later found guilty of possessing a fake passport and of having published seditious and subversive drawings. He was put into an internment camp from which – after the German Wehrmacht had begun to occupy Belgium in May 1940 – he was committed in a cattle waggon to a concentration camp in Vernet d'Ariège (Southern [Vichy] France) where he had to spend several months under most miserable conditions. Several years later, Meyer digested his fate in a series of drawings, sketches of which he was

* At the beginning, the *AK* consisted of E.H. Ackerknecht (Bauer), Otto Schüssler (Fischer), E. Wolf (Braun), Josef Weber (Johre), W. Schmuschkowitz (Schmidt), Samuel Hundert (Lehmann), Paul Kirchhoff (Eiffel), and Artur Goldstein (Stahl); later, the *AK* was joined by Walter Nettelbeck (Bur) and Rudolf Klement.

able to smuggle through all searchings. Eventually, Meyer was allowed to go to the USA as was Weber (Johre), too, in 1941. The two old friends, together with some other comrades who could escape to the USA, formed the small New York group of exiled *IKD* members for a couple of years. However, under the strong influence of Weber (Johre), the *IKD* during World War II developed positions which called into question some very essentials of Trotskyism and thus were no longer compatible to those held by the *International Secretariat of the Fourth International*; the *IKD* as a section of the *FI* factually did no longer exist at the end of the War. When Weber (Johre) became an advocate of what he called the *Bewegung für Inhaltliche Demokratie* (*Movement for a Democracy of Content*) and began publishing the journal *Dinge der Zeit : Hefte für inhaltliche Demokratie* (London, later Grafenau) after the War, Meyer for some years associated with Weber's group before in the 1950s he broke off these relations, remaining unaffiliated since then.

On February 9, 1957, Franz Meyer lost his life in a car accident on George Washington Bridge, New York.

His book *Flucht aus Deutschland : Bilder aus dem Exil* (*Flight from Germany : pictures from exile*), consisting chiefly of illustrations (see above), is an impressive document about the fate of those anti-fascists who had to emigrate from Germany for political reasons and who were often treated in an almost inhuman and vilely manner by most of the governments, the police and the courts of the countries of refuge.

*Selective bibliography**

- ***Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets authored by Meyer***

Meyer, Franz: *Flucht aus Deutschland : Bilder aus dem Exil*. - Frankfurt a.M. : ISP-Verl., 1984. - VII, VII, 122 pp. [Chiefly ill. - Introd. by Rodolphe Prager in German and French]

- ***Selective bibliography: Journals, bulletins to which Meyer contributed***

De Arbeid / Nationaal Arbeidssecretariaat in Nederland (Amsterdam)

Dinge der Zeit : Hefte für inhaltliche Demokratie (London, later: Grafenau)

Lutte ouvrière (Gilly) <TSB 0955>

De Nieuwe Fakkell / Revolutionnair-Socialistische Arbeiders Partij (Amsterdam) <TSB 1104>

De Rode October / Revolutionnair Socialistische Arbeiders Partij (Amsterdam) <TSB 1407>

Unser Wort (Prag, later: Paris; later: Antwerpen; later: New York, NY) <TSB 1761>

* TSB item numbers (e.g. <TSB 0716>) refer to Lubitz' *Trotskyist Serials Bibliography*, München [etc.] : Saur, 1993, which is out of print but available as PDF file within the framework of *TrotskyanaNet*. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions concerning the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

- ***Selective bibliography: Book about Meyer***

Winter, Dick de: Franz Holß : kunstenaar op de vlucht voor Hitler / [eindred.: Ton Geurtsen}. - Breda : Papieren Tijger, 2001. - 146 pp. [With German and French summary]

W. Lubitz, rev. Sept. 2006

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