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<i>Basic biographical data</i>	
Name:	Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht
Other names (by-names, pseud. etc.):	Erwin Ackerknecht ; Erwin Henry Ackerknecht ; B. ; E.B. ; E. Bauer ; Emma Bauer ; Erwin Bauer ; Eugen Bauer
Date and place of birth:	June 1, 1906, Stettin (Germany)
Date and place of death:	November 18, 1988, Zürich (Switzerland)
Professions, careers, etc.:	Medical historian, Professor Dr. med.
Nationality:	German, later: U.S.
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	1928 - 1934

Biographical sketch

Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht was born in Stettin (Pomerania, Germany) – which after World War II became Polish and is now called Szczecin – as son of Dr. Erwin Ackerknecht (1880-1960), an eminent librarian, renowned library director, author, literary critic and professor of literary history, and his wife Clara, b. Pfitzer (1879-1958). His uncle, Eberhard Ackerknecht (1883-1968), was a renowned veterinary anatom. His parents were protestants (Ackerknecht later became non-denominational) originating from Swabia.

He got married three times: in 1932 he married Helene Rother (from whom he soon divorced), in 1943 Lucy Krüger, and after divorce from his second wife he married Edith Weinberg in 1958 with whom he had already been acquainted in his Leipzig years [see below]. Ackerknecht had 3 daughters: Ina (b. 1932) from his first wife, Sylvia (b. 1941, married name: Gonzales), and Ellen (b. 1944, married name: Dollar) from his second wife. His third wife had two children from an earlier marriage, Christine (married name: Gohl) and Stefan Schuler who became part of the Ackerknecht family.

Deprived of German citizenship, Ackerknecht became (and remained to the end) a naturalized US citizen in 1948. He spent the greatest part of his adult life outside Germany, namely in France, the United States and Switzerland and a few weeks in Czechoslovakia and Trinidad, respectively.

Ackerknecht spent his childhood together with his younger sister Inge in Stettin; his parents' home was characterized by a lively, intellectual middle-class atmosphere. He was educated at a humanistic gymnasium and for some time he wished to become a painter, but his father disapproved. Thus after finishing his secondary education he studied medicine (and sporadically also economics, history of literature and arts, too) at the universities of Freiburg i.Br., Kiel, Berlin, Vienna and eventually Leipzig where in 1931 he graduated with a dissertation on a subject of German medical history [see below]; the thesis

was directed by Prof. Henry Ernest Sigerist. After examination for a short span of time Dr. med. Ackerknecht was employed as assistant doctor with a Leipzig clinic before moving to Berlin in January 1932 where he got a job as assistant physician at a psychiatric clinic at Berlin-Buch.

Already as a very young student Ackerknecht affiliated with communist student groups in Freiburg, Berlin and Vienna; in 1926 he became an active member first of the *KJVD (Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands, Communist Youth Federation of Germany)* and then of the *KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, Communist Party of Germany)*. At Leipzig University he was known as leader of the *KoStuFra (Kommunistische Studentenfraktion, Communist Students' Faction)*. Still a member of the *KPD*, Ackerknecht in 1928 co-founded a small oppositional group at Leipzig called *Bolschewistische Einheit (Bolshevik Unity)* together with Ruvelis Sobolevicius (better known by his pseudonyms Roman Well and Robert Soblen who several years later was exposed as a GPU provocateur) and Otto Schüssler (also known by his pseudonym Oskar Fischer). He affiliated, too, with the *Leninbund (Lenin League)* led by Hugo Urbahns.

In March 1930 Ackerknecht was one of the founding members of the *Vereinigte Linke Opposition (United Left Opposition)* which already in 1931 split into two rival wings both calling themselves *Linke Opposition der KPD (Bolschewiki-Leninisten)*. In the meanwhile officially expelled from the *KPD*, Ackerknecht after having moved from Leipzig to Berlin became a member of the *Reichsleitung* (the political committee) of the *LO (Linke Opposition der KPD, Bolschewiki-Leninisten) (Left Opposition of the KPD, Bolshevik-Leninists)*, the official German section of the *ILO (International Left Opposition)* led by Leon Trotsky and his son Lev Sedov who at that time lived in Berlin as a student and as one of the leading figures of the *International Secretariat of the International Left Opposition*. Ackerknecht closely co-operated with Sedov, Grylewicz and other prominent activists of the Trotskyist movement and became a co-editor and staff writer of *LO's* central organ *Permanente Revolution*. At that time Ackerknecht began to use the pseudonym *Bauer*. It goes without saying that he took active part in the not ending factional quarrels which took place inside the German Trotskyist scene, for instance the struggle against the tendency led by Kurt Landau. In November 1932 Ackerknecht travelled to Copenhagen where he met Trotsky for the first time who gave there his famous speech on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the October revolution.

When some months later the Nazis seized power in Germany, Ackerknecht, now one of the central figures of German Trotskyism, only by chance escaped arrestation, went underground and for some months took responsibility of the illegal work of the German Trotskyists who of course had become targets of harsh Nazi repression and persecution. On behalf of the *International Secretariat of the ILO* as well as of the German section – which in August 1933 was renamed *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands (International Communists of Germany)* – Ackerknecht fled Germany in June 1933, spent a short time in Czechoslovakia, paid visit to Leon Trotsky (July/August 1933) who then lived in exile at Büyük Ada (Prinkipo Islands, Turkey) and eventually settled in Paris. There he formed together with 4 (later: 7) other comrades the *AK (Auslandskomitee, Foreign Committee)* of the *IKD*, worked on the editorial board of *IKD's* organ *Unser Wort* and took special responsibility for contact work with other German left oppositional groups and parties in exile such as for example the exiled *SAPD (Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands) (Socialist Workers' Party of Germany)* which was led by Jacob Walcher. Furthermore Ackerknecht was co-opted to the *International Secretariat of the ICL (International Communist League, Bolsheviks-Leninists)*, the successor of the *ILO* and forerunner of the *Movement for the Fourth International*.

But soon Ackerknecht came into conflict with Trotsky and with the majority of the leaders of the *ICL* since he only half-heartedly shared Trotsky's re-orientation towards the building of *new* communist parties (since 1933) and since he opposed Trotsky's advice to co-opt ex-Zinovievists Ruth Fischer and Arkadij Maslow into the *IKD*. He also objected to the new Trotskyist policy of *entrism*, which became known as the so-called *French turn* in 1934, when the *Ligue Communiste Internationaliste (Internationalist Communist League)* joined the ranks of the *SFIO (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, the then French socialist party)*.

Thus Ackerknecht eventually broke with Trotskyism, left the *IKD* after having been excluded from the *AK* and in March 1935 became a member of the *SAPD* in which he formed, together with Walter Fabian, a small leftist group opposing against *SAPD*'s attitudes towards people's frontism and towards the Spanish *POUM*. After his exclusion from *SAPD* at the beginning of 1937 Ackerknecht launched another tiny exile organization named after its paper, *Neuer Weg*, but in February 1938, the day his friend Lev Sedov was cremated at *Père Lachaise* cemetery, he broke with Marxism and turned his back to political activism once and for all. However, his opposition against Nazism and rightism of all kind remained unaltered.

In his Paris exile Ackerknecht earned his living as a translator and began to study ethnology at *Musée de l'homme*; in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, he took his exams in ethnology at the *Sorbonne* and graduated with a diploma. From September 1939 to February 1940 Ackerknecht was interned by the French government as a stateless person; after release he was on active duty in the French Army and eventually fled the German troops to southern France in July 1940. For several months he impatiently waited for a visa to the USA. When he finally got it, he embarked at Marseille for an adventurous passage to the United States. After several weeks of internment at Trinidad, he arrived at New York in July 1941 together with his second wife Lucy. Living in the USA from 1941 to 1957 the couple got two daughters, Sylvia and Ellen [see above].

Life in the USA was quite difficult during the first years, but eventually Ackerknecht could catch on. After jobbing as packer and male nurse he was employed as a fellow in the history of medicine with the renowned *Johns Hopkins Institute*, then as an assistant curator of anthropology at the *American Museum of Natural History* before in 1947 he got a call to the chair of medical history at the *University of Wisconsin* (Madison, Wis.). During the following years he became a renowned professor and distinguished expert of medical history, ethnology and anthropology who as teacher and lecturer could stimulate his audience both by what he had to say and by his wit. He began to publish significant scholarly books and articles on ethnomedical, anthropological and medical-historical subjects; perhaps the most renowned and best selling were his *A short history of medicine*, first published in English in 1955 and a great biography of Rudolf Virchow originally published in 1953.

The most productive years of his academic life, however, should only come when Ackerknecht left Wisconsin University in 1957 and accepted a professorship of medical history at the university of *Zürich* (Switzerland), a position he kept until his retirement in 1971, only interrupted in 1961 when he was visiting professor at Baltimore, Md. Of course, he gave guest lectures at many European universities, too. In *Zürich* Ackerknecht could enjoy best working and research conditions; most of his books and articles are from the *Zürich* years, and even as professor emeritus he did not at all stop writing and editing. He was highly esteemed as teacher, scientist and medical historian, and it was under his direction that the *Medizinhistorisches Institut und Museum der Universität Zürich* (*Institute and Museum of Medical History of Zurich University*) gained a worldwide reputation.

After he had suffered a heart attack and being plagued by constant pain, he died at *Zürich* (his last address was *Ottikerstrasse 42, 8006 Zürich*) on Nov. 18, 1988 at the age of 82, leaving his third wife Edith, his daughters and some grand-children.

*Selective bibliography*¹

Note: Ackerknecht was a renowned medical historian and a distinguished writer on subjects like medical biography, ethno-medicine, history of medicine and of infectious diseases, epidemiology and related issues. Since 1942 he wrote some 20 scholarly books, some 300 articles and several 100 book reviews and review articles. Many of his works were translated into other languages, even into Japanese. He contributed articles and reviews to a considerable number of renowned American, German, Swiss, Austrian, French and British medical journals;

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

no less than 255 reviews from his pen appeared in *Gesnerus*, a distinguished Swiss quarterly devoted to the history of medicine and science. Furthermore, no less than 140 medical dissertations were prepared under his direction.

Since a fairly **complete bibliography** of his writings as medical historian has already been published [see below], we are dealing here only with Ackerknecht's writings published *prior to 1940* and with writings about him.

Please find here the bibliographical data of the just-mentioned bibliography of Ackerknecht's medical and science history writings (books, pamphlets, articles, other contributions):

Publikationen von Prof. Dr. med. Erwin H. Ackerknecht / zusammengest. nach einer im Medizinhistorischen Institut der Universität Zürich geführten Liste / [erstellt von Margret Curti]. - [Pt. 1-4], in: *Gesnerus* (Basel), 23.1966 (1/2), pp. 5-12; 33.1976 (1/2), pp. 3-7; 43.1986 (1/2), pp. 6-10; 45.1988 (3/4), pp. 311-312. [A list of more than 300 items published between 1942 and 1988.]

- **Selective bibliography: Books and pamphlets (co-)authored by Ackerknecht**²

Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Medizinalreform von 1848. - Leipzig : Univ., 1931. [Also publ. in: *Sudhoffs Archiv der Geschichte der Medizin* (Leipzig), 25.1932, pp. 61-183.]

Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz: Österreich - eine Lehre für alle / Eugen Bauer [i.e. Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht]. Österreich 1929-1933 / Leo Trotzki. - Prag : Kopp, 1934. - 32 pp.

- **Selective bibliography: Books, journals and bulletins to which Ackerknecht contributed**³

Boletín internacional de la Oposición Comunista de Izquierda (Madrid) <TSB 0126>

Bulletin de la Ligue Communiste Internationaliste (Bolcheviks-Léninistes) (Bruxelles) <TSB 0176>

Bulletin de la Ligue des Communistes Internationalistes (Bolcheviks-Léninistes) (Amsterdam) <TSB 0178>

Bulletin intérieur / Section Belge de l'Opposition Communiste Internationale (Bruxelles) <TSB 1463>

Bulletin intérieur de la Ligue Communiste (Paris) <TSB 0226>

Bulletin international de l'Opposition Communiste de Gauche = Internationales Bulletin der Kommunistischen Links-Opposition (Paris) <TSB 0234>

Cahiers Léon Trotsky (Various places) <TSB 0277>

Internal Bulletin : for discussion / British Section, International Left Opposition (Bolsheviks-Leninists) (London) <TSB 0356>

International Bulletin of the League of Communist Internationalists (New York, NY) <TSB 0680>

Internationales Bulletin der Kommunistischen Links-Opposition (Berlin) <TSB 0758>

Mitteilungen der Bolschewiki-Leninisten (Wien) <TSB 1056>

Mitteilungsblatt der Reichsleitung der Linken Opposition der KPD (Bolschewiki-Leninisten, Sektion der Internationalen Linken Opposition) (Berlin) <TSB 1065>

Permanente Revolution / Linke Opposition der KPD (Bolschewiki-Leninisten), Sektion der Internationalen Linken Opposition (Berlin) <TSB 1192>

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

Wochenbriefe / AK der IKD [Auslandskomitee der Internationalen Kommunisten Deutschlands] (Paris) <TSB 1826>

- **Selective bibliography: Literature about Ackerknecht**

[Anon.]: Ackerknecht, Dr. Erwin H(entry) [sic!], in: *American men of science : the physical & biological sciences*, 11. ed., vol. 1, New York, NY, 1965, p. 14. [Biographical sketch]

[Anon.]: Ackerknecht, Erwin H., in: *Who's who in medicine : Edition Germany, Austria, Switzerland*, 2. ed., Ottobrunn, 1975, p. 335. [Biographical sketch]

[Anon.]: Ackerknecht, Erwin Henry (Heinz), in: *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration*

2) Prior to 1940 only [see above].

3) Note: Medical and science journals to which Ackerknecht contributed since 1942 have not been considered here [see above].

- nach 1933, Bd. 1, München [etc.], 1980, pp. 3-4. [Biographical sketch]
- [Anon.]: Ackerknecht, Erwin H., in: *Who's who in medicine*, 5. ed., Woerthsee, 1981, p. 4. [Biographical sketch]
- [Anon.]: Ackerknecht, Erwin H., in: *Who's who in Switzerland*, 18. ed., Geneva, 1993, p. 15. [Biographical sketch]
- [Anon.]: Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht. [Biographical sketch, Wikipedia article]
- Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz: An interview with Erwin H. Ackerknecht, in: *Ackerknecht, Erwin H.: Medicine and ethnology : selected essays / ed. by H.H. Walser and H.M. Koelbing*, Bern [etc.], 1971, pp. 7-16. [This interview, conducted by the editors, contains some interesting autobiographical details.]
- Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz: Autobiographical notes / Erwin H. Ackerknecht. - 1986. - 26 pp. [Unpubl. ms.]
- Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz: Recollections of a former Leipzig student / Erwin H. Ackerknecht, in: *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 13.1958 (2), pp. 148-150. [Autobiographical notes]
- Akert, Konrad: Erwin H. Ackerknecht zum 60. Geburtstag, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1966 (June 1=no. 2408), p. 6.
- Alles, Wolfgang: Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht (Eugen Bauer) (1906-1988), in: *Alles, Wolfgang: Einheitsfront gegen Faschismus*, Köln, 2022, pp. 263-264. [Biographical sketch]
- B[roué], P[ierre]: Ackerknecht, Erwin, Heinz, in: *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier international : L'Allemagne*, Paris, 1990, pp.79-80. [Biographical sketch]
- [Broué, Pierre?]: Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht (Bauer) (1906-1988), in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1988 (36), pp. 123-125. [Obituary]
- Cranefield, Paul F.: Erwin H. Ackerknecht 1906-1988 : some memories, in: *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 45.1990 (2), pp. 145-149. [Obituary]
- Ervino H. Ackerknecht sexegenario ex innumerabilibus amicis pauci grates agunt / [pref.:] H. Fischer. - Basel, 1966. - (Gesnerus ; 23.1966,1/2) [Festschrift]
- Fischer-Homberger, Esther: Erwin H. Ackerknecht: zum 70. Geburtstag des Zürcher Medizinhistorikers, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1976 (June 1=no. 126), pp. 31-32.
- Foitzik, Jan: Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz (Henry), Dr. med. (geb. 1906), in: *Foitzik, Jan: Zwischen den Fronten*, Bonn, 1986, p. 246. [Biographical sketch]
- Koelbing, Huldrych M.: Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz, in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, Bd. 1, Basel, 2002, p. 87. [Biographical sketch]
- Koelbing, Huldrych M.: Erwin H. Ackerknecht 60 Jahre alt, in: *National-Zeitung* (Basel), 1966 (259).
- Lesky, Erna: E.H. Ackerknecht zum 70. Geburtstag, in: *Österreichische Ärztezeitung*, 31.1976 (10), p. 655.
- Mörgeli, Christoph: Erwin H. Ackerknecht und die Affäre Berg/Rath von 1964 : zur Vergangenheitsbewältigung deutscher Medizinhistoriker / Christoph Mörgeli ; Anke Jobmann, in: *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte* (Stuttgart), 16.1997(1998), pp. 63-124.
- Mörgeli, Christoph: Ein Mediziner mit Weltruf : zum Hinschied von Prof. Dr. h.c.mult. Erwin H. Ackerknecht, in: *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 1988 (Nov.24=no. 275), p. 6. [Obituary]
- Publikationen von Prof. Dr. med. Erwin H. Ackerknecht / zusammengest. nach einer im Medizinhistorischen Institut der Universität Zürich geführten Liste / [erstellt von Margret Curt]. - [1-4], in: *Gesnerus*, 23.1966 (1/2) , pp. 5-12; 33.1976 (1/2), pp. 3-7; 43.1986 (1/2), pp. 6-10; 45.1988 (3/4), pp. 311-312. [Comprehensive bibliography of his works, 1942-1988]
- Rosenberg, Charles E.: Erwin H. Ackerknecht, social medicine, and the history of medicine, in: *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 81.2007 (3), pp. 511-532.
- Schüle, Annegret: Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz (Eugen Bauer, auch Erwin oder Emma Bauer, b.e. (geb. 1906), in: *Schüle, Annegret: Trotzismus in Deutschland bis 1933*, Köln, 1989, pp. 147-148. [Biographical sketch]
- Stobnicer, Maurice: Bauer, Erwin (Ackerknecht, dit) (1906), in: *Stobnicer, Maurice: Le mouvement trotskyste allemand sous la république de Weimar*, Paris, Univ. de Paris VIII, Thèse, 1980, p. 351. [Biographical sketch]
- Temkin, Owsei: In memoriam Erwin H. Ackerknecht (1906-1988), in: *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 63. 1989, pp. 273-275. [Obituary]
- Walser, Hans H.: Erwin H. Ackerknecht zum 60. Geburtstag : 1. Juni 1966, in: *Schweizerische medizinische Wochenschrift*, 96.1966 (21), pp. 702-703.
- Walser, Hans H.: Erwin H. Ackerknecht zum 70. Geburtstag, in: *Gesnerus*, 33.1976 (1/2), p. 1.
- Walser, Hans H.: Zum Hinscheid von Erwin H. Ackerknecht, in: *Gesnerus*, 45.1988 (3/4), pp. 309-310. [Obituary]
- Walser, Hans H.: Zum Hinscheid von Erwin H. Ackerknecht, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1988 (Nov.22=no.273), p.54. [Obituary]
- Walser, Hans H.: Zum 10. Todestag von Erwin H. Ackerknecht (1906-1988), in: *Gesnerus*, 55.1998 (3/4), pp. 175-182. [Biographical sketch]

Wendt, Eckhard: Ackerknecht, Erwin Heinz (1906-1988), in: *Wendt, Eckard: Stettiner Lebensbilder*, Köln, 2004, pp. 26-28. [Biographical sketch]

Note: More informations about Ackerknecht are likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapters of the *Lubitz' Leon Trotsky Bibliography [ISSN 2190-0183]*, e.g. in chapter [7.5.08](#).

Sidelines, notes on archives

— Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht held the title *Prof. Dr. med. Dr. h.c.mult.*

— He received a lot of honours, honorary degrees, honorary memberships and awards. Thus e.g. he twice get the famous *William H. Welch medal* from the *American Association for the History of Medicine*. He was an honorary member of that association as well as of the *Royal Society of Medicine* and he got the honorary degree of a Dr. med. h.c. from the universities of Genf (Geneva) and Bern (Berne). Ackerknecht was a member of many national and international associations in the field of medicine, anthropology and science. He was awarded the *Federal Service Cross* of the Federal Republic of Germany and the *Palmes académiques* of the French Republic. He was deeply impressed by the fact that he was invited to give a speech when in 1981 the venerable *Académie de médecine* (Paris) celebrated the 200th anniversary of René Hyacinthe Laennec (the opening speech was given by French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing).

— Ackerknecht's literary estate is hosted by the *Medizinhistorisches Institut und Museum der Universität Zürich* (call-no.: NLA Ackerknecht). Documents, however, originating from Ackerknecht's activities as member of the leading bodies of the *ILO/ICL* and of its German section such as his considerable correspondence with Trotsky, Sedov and others can be found in the renowned Trotsky archival collections, e.g. in the *Leon Trotsky exile papers* (MS Russ 13.1) at *Houghton Library* (Cambridge, Mass.), in the *Trotskii-Sedov Papers* (series 231 of the *Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection*) in the *Hoover Institution* (Stanford, Cal.) and in the collection *Lev Trotsky and the International Left Opposition*, held at the *International Institute of Social History* (Amsterdam) as well as in the archives of some deceased (ex-) Trotskyists such as for example in the *Georg Scheuer Collection* stored at the *International Institute of Social History* (Amsterdam), too⁴.

— Most of his scientific books and of his articles published in medical and science history journals can easily be found in university libraries and similar facilities.

Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, 2005
last (slightly) rev. November 2022

4) For finding aids and for some details about the mentioned public archives in general see also the chapters on [Archives : America](#) and on [Archives : Europe](#) within the framework of our *Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet* website.