

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY RON JACOBS

28.11.2022

1972: The Year I Figured out the USA



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Fifty years is a long time. I was seventeen years old in 1972 and a senior in a high school set up for children of US military members in what was then called West Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland or BRD). In 1972, the Cold War was real, but the war against the Red Armeefraktion(RAF), which was waging a campaign against NATO, the US war on the Vietnamese and Germany's complicity in that war among other things, was hot as hell there. At least four US military members had been killed in the spring and a few US-occupied buildings had been damaged, including the IG Farben building in Frankfurt. This particular building was the headquarters for several US military commands, including V Corps and the Northern Area Command (NACOM). There was a ticket office on the ground floor of the building that sold travel packages and tickets to

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

concerts and other entertainment all over the Frankfurt area at a discount. The building had been saved from the allied carpet bombing that wiped out much of the rest of the city, despite the corporation's war criminal status. Rumor had it that Eisenhower wanted it for the US army.

In the wake of the attacks on the US military infrastructure, the German and US authorities tightened security at all US installations. What this meant in practice was that streets that were once open passing through US-controlled areas were less open. Some were manned by military police checking identification and sometimes searching vehicles and bags. Protests in downtown Frankfurt and in the university district were monitored by more police who were often much more heavily armed than before. I remember going to a meeting where Ulrike Meinhof, one of the RAF's leaders, was supposed to appear. There were dozens of police, many of them carrying automatic weapons. As the police searched each individual wanting to enter the lecture hall, I managed to slip in unnoticed. I didn't stay long after realizing the potential trouble I could end up in if discovered at the meeting. I was in class when the German authorities raided an apartment near the US military commissary and arrested RAF leader Andreas Baader.

Anyhow, the autumn began quietly enough. The summer had seen George McGovern get the Democratic nomination for president and Nixon get the Republican one. It had also seen the brief candidacy of Thomas Eagleton as McGovern's Vice President and his dismissal from the ticket after it was revealed that he had received electroshock treatments. The GOP convention in Miami, Florida was the scene of multiple protests and lots of police. Perhaps the most memorable protest was one where Vietnam Veterans Against the War member Ron Kovic got onto the convention floor in his wheelchair. After shouting a slogan and holding up a sign, he was quickly and harshly escorted from the hall by Nixon's brutish security guards. Meanwhile, we were told that the last official US combat troops had left Vietnam in August. There were still thousands of US forces in the country. Nixon won reelection in a landslide in November. The world was as bad as I thought it was.

My sister was attending college at a small University of Maryland campus in Munich when the Olympics began. If I remember correctly, she and her friends attended a couple of events, although Oktoberfest was the event they were truly interested in. I began watching the events on German television. When the Black September fighters attacked the residences where Israeli athletes were housed, the television screens in Germany went black. They stayed that way until the police and military attack was over. The streets of

Munich were once more under heavy guard. Between the RAF and Palestinian fighters, authorities in Germany were nervous, to say the least.

In October, Henry Kissinger told the world that peace was at hand. Little did we know that he, Nixon, and the rest of the men who did such things were planning the most massive bombing campaign in history. It was a campaign that would take place over the Christmas holidays and would drop more than 20,000 tons of ordnance over northern Vietnam in ten days. Some of the targets included Bach Mai hospital in Hanoi. It was estimated that the bombing raids killed more than 2,500 civilians. I remember attending one very angry protest at Frankfurt's Opernplatz called by leftists and student groups in reaction to the bombings. I also remember attending a smaller protest called by some church organizations that was funereal in nature. Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme compared the bombings to Nazi massacres and cut diplomatic ties with Washington. Joan Baez and Nuremberg prosecutor Telford Taylor were stuck in Hanoi during the bombings. The intention of their visit was to deliver holiday mail to POWs held by Hanoi. Taylor's 1970 book *Nuremberg and Vietnam: An American Tragedy* still occupies a prime spot on my bookshelves.

I saw Pink Floyd in concert that fall after having seen the Who in late summer. Both groups were pretty much at their peak then. It was around the time of the Pink Floyd show that a friend told me about a bunch of indigenous people who had occupied the site off San Francisco known as Alcatraz. The *Stars and Stripes* newspaper had an article about the action that mentioned the American Indian Movement, or AIM. It turned out my friend, whose family was from the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, was a member. He would graduate early that school year and end up at Wounded Knee, helping to smuggle food and medical supplies past the federal forces arrayed against the AIM members and their supporters under siege by US marshals and the military..

The base library was on the high school campus. I spent lots of time there, reading, studying, meeting friends, and bargaining for small amounts of hashish. There was a GI who worked there who wore his Vietnam Veterans Against the War button proudly but discreetly. He turned me on to the journal *Radical America*. It was that journal together with *Ramparts* and *Rolling Stone* that served as my primary info channels to the USA I wanted to become part of. I received my *Ramparts* via international mail and the others through the library. My GI buddy at the library subscribed to *Radical America* while the library subscribed to *Rolling Stone*. I looked forward to every new installment of Hunter S.

Thompson's coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign in the latter. Each episode of Thompson's reporting was like a hit of DMT.

The first Tuesday in November 1972 made a lifelong impression on me. The people of the United States overwhelmingly reelected Richard Nixon to a second term. The first president with fascist inclinations in my lifetime was America's choice. It was a realization made worse by my natural tendency to see the good in people. While this was still possible on a very personal level, never again would I assume that US citizens as a demographic were decent people; that they cared about their fellow humans. I am grateful I came to that understanding at a fairly young age. As I move ever closer toward my eighth decade on earth, that one-time assumption seems ever more absurd.

Ron Jacobs is the author of [Daydream Sunset: Sixties Counterculture in the Seventies](#) published by CounterPunch Books. His latest offering is a pamphlet titled [Capitalism: Is the Problem](#). He lives in Vermont. He can be reached at: ronj1955@gmail.com.

CounterPunch 25.11.2022