KAROL SAUERLAND

MY UNBURIED FATHER

For two, perhaps three, years I used to have a photograph cut out of a Polish newspaper hanging from my bookshelf. It showed a worker holding up a human bone. He had found it while working on a road in Moscow. I thought to myself that bone might have been one of my father's, who was murdered in Lubyanka prison. At the time, those who had been shot were not cremated, but simply carted off somewhere. The photograph has unfortunately disappeared. It is likely that I had not fastened it to the shelf firmly enough. The cleaner will have been delighted to take the opportunity of throwing it out. My father was executed on 22 March 1938. It was, however, not until 1963 that my mother received information of his death. I had just passed my master's examination in mathematics when her letter arrived with this news. Although I had stopped harbouring any illusions that he might still be alive, I was deeply shaken and burst into tears. I read the letter on the bus and so failed to notice the stop where I should have alighted. I finally found myself in a village a long way from Warsaw and had to wait there for several hours until there was transport back again.

As communists, my parents had emigrated to Paris in March 1933, travelling separately, only days after they had looked on as SA men had ransacked their Berlin flat on the same day as the Reichstag fire. My parents had returned from somewhere that evening, probably from a party gathering or an editorial meeting, when the concierge warned them to stay out of their flat because there were thugs in there. The two of them went into a building across the road, from where they watched those men throwing books out of the window. A pre-empted autodafé. Since May 1929, my father had been editor-in-chief of a periodical called *Roter Aufbau*, which was published monthly by the Münzen Group, the second largest media undertaking in the Weimar Republic. *Roter Aufbau* was regarded as the only theoretical communist magazine. In 1932, my father had published a highly controversial book with the title of *Der dialektische Materialismus*. In Paris he worked as an editor on the magazine *Unsere Zeit*. The acquaintances with whom my parents used to drink coffee in Paris included the formerly influential official of the German communist party, Horst Neumann, who was proud to have once visited Stalin, his partner, Margarethe Buber-Neumann, and other leading communists of that time. They also met up again with Karl August Wittfogel (who is known today particularly as the author of the book *Der orientalische Despotismus*) after he had been released from Emsland concentration camp in December 1933. Wittfogel would have liked to persuade my father to go to America with him. I regret right up until the present day that he did not accept that proposal. I would have been born in New York! It was in 1991 that I first visited that city, where I was able to admire Wittfogel's large apartment in Manhattan. His secretary had taken it over. He told me that he had mentioned my father in his work on Wittfogel. It was only three years after the latter's death that I paid my visit to New York! He had lived to be 92.

It was as early as May 1934 that my father was invited – or it might be better to say ordered – to go to Moscow to take up a post with in the Communist International or Comintern. He travelled to the Soviet metropolis with my mother through Sweden and Finland. He apparently expressed doubt while in Stockholm as to whether he was doing the right thing, and wondered whether they should not turn round. After all, he spoke perfect French. During the occupation of the Rhineland, when my father had a senior position in the post office in the Deutz district of Cologne, he had polished off the language he had learned at school with the help of a French officer billeted with them. It seems probable that while they were in Stockholm they stayed with my mother's younger sister, who had fled from Berlin with her husband shortly before for political reasons.

At the beginning of his time in Moscow, my father worked as a head of section in the publishing house of the Communist International. At the same time, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR chose him to be their honorary German member, probably on account of his book and a work translated into Ukrainian presenting an overview of the development of German philosophy; allegedly, it was published without his consent. Later on, he was given a job in the section of Bela Kuns' bureau of the executive committee of the Communist International. In August 1939, Kuns suffered the same fate as my father and was also arrested on the same day. I wonder if they shared the same cell, at least for some of the time. My father was subjected to continuous interrogation. It is reported that he remained in an optimistic frame of mind for a long time, believing that a mistake had been made. When he appeared before the notorious court troika, he did not confess to any guilt, but admitted that he had not reported on one encounter with comrades in Paris. The discussion with this kangaroo court lasted something like fifteen to twenty minutes (for a long time, I had been assuming it was half an hour). After that, the death sentence was read out to him and it was carried out the same day. I spent years believing that he might have had one last night in a special cell and imagined him wanting to write a letter to us. But farewell letters were not envisaged in that system. It came as a big shock to me several years ago, through a Russian film reporting on how four daughters found out about the fate of their father, to learn that the detainees were locked up in prison underground and thus never saw the light of day. I doubt there was anything like walks in the yard. Those nine months of

Lubyanka imprisonment keep coming back to occupy my thoughts. What ups and downs (with more downs than ups) might my father have gone through there?

My parents lived in the famous Hotel Lux in Moscow, and right next to them was Palmiro Togliatti, who was to become secretary general of the Italian communist party after the end of the war. My mother stressed this neighbourly relationship on several occasions. That made Togliatti appear like a good acquaintance. The same could be said of Georg Lukács, who reportedly often engaged in debate with my father. I tried to convince my mother to get in touch with him again, but she declined. It was only later that I realised that she did not feel herself to be intellectually up to his level.

The room in the Hotel Lux must have been a big one, because my mother told me proudly several times over that she had put curtains up in the middle, making a separate bedroom and a living room.

I am regarded as a Hotel Lux child. I do not know how many of us there are. There has never been a reunion of Hotel Lux children. Nearly all of them must have had some tale of suffering to tell. I had been an unwanted baby, as I was repeatedly told. My existence, however, made my mother's struggle for survival easier, given that she had someone to provide for, or rather someone to look after: her baby son, whom they had even wanted to take away from her. I was to be brought up in a children's home to become a genuine Soviet citizen. I had already been moved to a highly polished institution on the Crimea fit for the purpose, but somehow or other, however, my mother managed to retrieve me. Later on, at the age of 14, I attended Birkenwerder Boarding School near Berlin, where I got to know four girls and boys who had been brought up in homes in the Soviet Union. They preferred to speak Russian with one another. It was only in 1950 or thereabouts that they had returned to their German parents or next of kin. We felt a tinge of pleasure at that. In them I saw potential companions in distress. They had only recently got to know their German parents, at least those parents who were still alive. The four disappeared relatively quickly to another boarding school. It is not until now that I have started wondering if there might have been some reason for that.

After I had reached a certain age, my grandmother and aunt on my father's side used to comment that, on coming in through the door, I looked like my father (presumably in his younger years) or shared his mannerisms. After some time had gone by, this apparent similarity began to annoy me. That was probably also the reason why I let my beard grow at a very early age – much to my mother's disdain. I gave in the first time she complained and shaved it off again, but after that the change in my external appearance had come to stay. At the same time, my mother also wanted to see in me the husband she had never stopped loving. That did not even change when she married Paul Friedländer, also a communist, who had survived the Third Reich as an emigrant in Sweden. I do not know how he put up with the competition with my undead father. He certainly did not have an easy time with my mother. After a while, I struck up a very good rapport with him. When my mother, however, proposed that I change my surname from Sauerland to Friedländer I bluntly refused. I had always been called Sauerland, and it would be to betray my father. The answer came to me so much as a matter-of-course, that I never even thought about it, although it is certainly worth pondering on. Why did I want to cling to the man who was almost certainly dead? For me, he remained undead in reality, especially since he kept on being presented to me as a role model. He always used to read the latest books and review them in *Roter Aufbau*. These reviews took the form of short annotations, as I found out later on. In order to make sure that he was writing comprehensibly, he often read his texts aloud to my mother, who came from a simple background. She had progressed no further than primary school, but it must have been a very good school, since there was never a hint of spelling mistakes in anything she wrote. She endeavoured constantly to better herself.

The fact of reading aloud exercised my thoughts in my younger years. How simple ought writing to be, I wondered, as it began to dawn on me that I was growing into a writer too. In the final analysis, explaining things simply means having to get by without complicated lines of thought. I believe that the conclusion I drew from all this was that it would always be wrong to lapse into scientific jargon, because that would put off any reader not initiated to that sort of language. However, the writer must always also set his or her sights high in order not to be spurned by the true and less-true specialists.

Amongst the few mementos of my father there used to be a small, black, round writing table, which had somehow been kept through the years of the Third Reich. I took it over when I asked to be allowed to live in the Finish-style cabin standing in the grounds of the house my parents had moved into on the outskirts of Berlin. My mother gave me permission, although I was still not fifteen. There I was able to do what I wanted at night (like walking in the woods or meeting a girl) without my parents knowing anything about it. I had the inside walls of the cabin painted white in oil paint, which was difficult to come by at the time, and got my grandfather to construct some large shelves for me. I was then able to sit at my father's writing table and study all sorts of things, not just the anatomy of butterflies (which it was my passion to catch for some time, and whose wings I was able to explore more precisely under the microscope) but also the volumes of Lasson's edition of Hegel, which my father had adorned with his initials. I had discovered it in my aunt's flat and taken it with me. She was pleased that I was interested in her beloved brother. Perhaps it was those volumes of Hegel that made me determined to study philosophy – against my mother's will. She was afraid that I, like my father, might go astray, and she was not entirely wrong in that. It was only very much later that I discovered his student records, which showed that he had attended lectures by Max Scheler at Cologne University. He also participated in a seminar on Marx's *Capital*. Without knowing that at the time, I had studied the first volume meticulously at the age of sixteen and had forced my parents to listen to the fruits of my reading. They sat obediently at a table and listened to me giving my interpretation of *Capital*. My methodology was structuralist, as people would say today. My stepfather made a relatively cautious reference to the classical historical sequence: primitive society, slavery, feudalism, capitalism. In short: I ought to read Marx historically, in the categories of historical materialism. That would be more opportune – is what he seemed to be wanting to say.

Somehow we were convinced that my father had been sentenced to twenty or twenty-five years of banishment. I had read numerous stories about the banishing of Russian intellectuals in the days of the czars. They were not placed in a gulag but in a shack far away in Siberia, where they did a lot of reading and had contact with women. Some even escaped. There used to be fantastic tales about Stalin's secret trip to and escape from Siberia. One thought that used to fill me with fear was that my father might turn up one day with a Russian woman – particularly wondering what my mother would have to say. She was a jealous woman, and the Russian woman might have been a Sonya, who had always been there to assist my father. At all events, I was unable to imagine him "womanless", which was the term people used at the time.

The idea that he had been banished arose fairly early. After her husband's arrest, my mother had regularly taken small parcels to the Lubyanka, but one day they were no longer accepted. He is no longer here, she was told. In those days, that used to be interpreted as sentenced to the usual twenty years of banishment, added to which she had been told in 1939 that her husband was in a remote camp where he was prohibited from writing. That is when the search began to find where that camp was. Naturally, nothing came of it. I remember that, at the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s, my mother thought about writing a letter to Stalin. One of us was to ask if he might not be able to tell us the whereabouts of Kurt Sauerland, the upright communist. She was obviously convinced that Stalin knew nothing of his innocence. He would stand up for him, especially since my father had included the following quotation in his 1932 book on dialectic materialism:

> There exist a dogmatic and a creative Marxism. I have decided in favour of the latter.[1]

As a young lad, I naturally took this motto very literally. I was always on the side of creativity. It became a tenet of my academic activity and teaching. In other words, I demanded creativity both of myself and others. At some point I recognised, probably with the assistance of my stepfather, that this had been a gesture of might: it is I, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, who determine what is creative and, above all, it is I too who determine what is to be condemned as dogmatic. My father is counted as having been a Stalinist, in other words as having been one of those who helped steer the party line the way Stalin wanted it. My mother kept on stressing that it was on account of the controversy surrounding his book that he had been summoned to Moscow, where he met with support from Kuusinen, a Finn by birth. Kuusinen had been the secretary of the executive committee of the Communist International after the defeat of the communists in Finland in 1921. He held the post until 1939 and the key decisions were in his hands, although Sinovyev figured as first secretary. My father had produced a separate statement defending the book against the reproaches from his German comrades, and my mother considered that to have been decisive. He had a small number of copies of his statement printed in the publishing house as galley proofs. When Thomas Höhle referred to this statement of defence in the preface to his book about Franz Mehring in 1956, he attacked it in Marxist-Stalinist jargon, prompting my mother to demand that she be given access to it. Ernst Engelberg, a leading historian in the German Democratic Republic and still known today as the author of a two-volume work on Bismarck, had lent it to Höhle, who was then a student of his. It is claimed that Höhle returned it. My mother therefore wrote to Engelberg asking him to make the statement of defence available to her, as it had never been intended for publication. After some considerable pressure, he explained that he had kept it hidden in a secret compartment of his bureau throughout the entire Nazi period but that it had now been mislaid. Extensive correspondence exists on this subject. As misfortune would have it, Höhle became professor of German studies in Warsaw a few years later, and my mother requested me to draw his attention to this document once again – perhaps it was still in his possession after all, or at least a copy of it. The replies I received from Höhle were very hostile. It was a really convoluted situation. I did not know what was in Kurt Sauerland's statement of defence; I had in the meantime become extremely bothered by the Stalin quotation in my father's book; but I found Höhle's work on Mehring dogmatically clumsy. I also found it hard to believe that the document had simply been lost. At the same time, I was a student of Höhle's, who held the chair in German studies at Warsaw University, and was thus dependent on him. At the end of the day, I was going to have to sit examinations under him. I was annoyed by his style of lecturing, which was one of extremely popularised science, but always adhering strictly to the party line. Thank heavens that he left Warsaw again after two years. The statement of defence has never reappeared.

---

[1] Stalin at the Sixth Bolshevik Party Conference, August 1917.

That was already the time when it was clear that my father had been among the victims of the great purge, when there no longer had to be fuzzy answers to the questions about my father's whereabouts. There is one incident that I still remember particularly well. It was in the boarding school and I was in the eighth year, i.e. the last compulsory year, and somehow I had let it out that my father was a victim of the Soviet regime. The headmaster, a young graduate of the "worker and peasant faculty",[2] who had been appointed instead of a so-called bourgeois headmaster, summonsed my parents in order to find out if there might be any truth in my comment. I shall never forget his name; it was "Lade" (for which there are several possible translations, one of which is "summons"). He died while still fairly young, as I found out later on. Being the son of a "traitor to the grand cause", someone excluded from the communist ranks, I faced the threat of expulsion from the boarding school. I denied to my parents that I had said anything specific about my father to the headmaster. He must have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. I was not present at the conversation he had with my parents. It ended on a more or less conciliatory note. I take it that the headmaster had felt afraid of my parents, who at the time held relatively high functions within the GDR regime. My mother was no less than a deputy in the People's Chamber during the first legislative period following the creation of the GDR in October 1949. At the same time, she was principal secretary of the Association of German Consumer Cooperatives and for some time head of the press department.

In 1955, a friend of my mother's, Elfriede Klaege, returned from the Soviet Union. Legend has it that she had been the first person to take me in hers arms when I was born. Following my father's arrest, she refused to shake hands with my mother any more, which my mother hardly forgave, even after her return, although she had subsequently had much to endure in the Soviet empire. Elfriede Klaege first spent some time in a camp in the far north. After that, like many Germans and Poles, she had been transferred to Karaganda in Kazakhstan, where she had to construct a mud hut for herself along with others. She, the piano-playing daughter from a sheltered bourgeois home, was allowed to work as a cleaner in a hospital. In 1956, a job was found for her at the *Komisches Oper* in East Berlin, looking after Russian ballet dancers, which she did with great passion. In my eyes, she had become very Russian. She also spoke about my father in a tone of utmost esteem. She did not allow herself to be drawn on the subject of what might have happened to him. Speculation on questions of that nature seemed not to have been permitted. The subject was taboo amongst comrades. It was not the done thing to ask direct questions. Elfriede Klaege had gone to Moscow in 1933, even before my parents' arrival there, following a Polish-Jewish communist, an actor and a big favourite with the ladies. There she had lost track of him. I do not know if the same fate befell him as my father before her arrest or if there were other reasons for it. When I went to Poland, she asked me to look for him. He had been expelled from the Soviet Union. It was possible he might after all have survived, she felt. It goes without saying that there was no trace of him to be found. It emerged sometime later that he, like Münzenberg, had been murdered in France. Doubtlessly the work of KGB agents.

---

[2] In German "ABF" or "Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät". In the GDR this was a fast-track route for preparing for the "abitur" (secondary-school leaving examination) for young people considered to be workers or peasants.

I did not have a clear picture of my father's probable fate until the occasion of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and Khrushchev's "secret speech" of 25 February 1956. I managed to get hold of the text when I was permitted to travel on a summer holiday to visit my aunt and grandmother, who used to live in Göttingen. Despite the open border, someone like me, the son of party members, was not automatically able to travel to the West. I smuggled the secret speech across the border and handed it to my parents. We already knew more or less what was in it from western wireless broadcasts, but now we were able to read sentence for sentence how Stalin had treated his comrades-in-arms. It prompted my mother to try once again to find out more. She contacted the comrades she still knew from Moscow, although she had only little confidence in them. They had, after all, not helped her in Moscow – on the contrary: a mere month after his arrest, Kurt Sauerland had been expelled from the party at their request, and after the war they had not even allowed her to attend the party academy (*Parteihochschule*). In 1949, she had been going to spend a year there, studying Marxism-Leninism and the history of the workers' movement. Since, however, she was still searching for her husband, a party inquiry was launched against her, without her knowing about it. A certain Phillip Daub, the head of the cadre department in the SED's central committee finally suggested to the party's first secretary, Walter Ulbricht, that she should not be admitted to the party academy. She was not to be trusted. She had after all been married to Kurt Sauerland. "He will not be unknown to you", he wrote, "he was taken by the scruff of the neck in 1937". That is the way people used to talk in those days: "take someone by the scruff of the neck". On the one hand, it is a contemptuous way to refer to human beings, considering the consequences that such arrests used to have. On the other hand, those who used it seemed to have known full well that innocent people might also be drawn into this mill (presupposing that there was any scope for a concept of guilt in this situation). Kurt Sauerland's wife had not been arrested – Daub added in a tone that made that sound astonishing. And, in point of fact, it was, but it was Daub's supposition that was something about which my mother would not come clean.

In 1962, people working for the SED's central committee advised my mother to contact the Red Cross. She regarded that organisation as bourgeois and most certainly not at all interested in communist victims. She was, however, assured that the Red Cross in the GDR was firmly in the hands of the comrades. Through that route she was told, in 1963, the precise date of Kurt Sauerland's death, seven years after the Twentieth Party Congress. She went wild with disgust at having been treated in such a way by her comrades and wrote the following letter to Hermann Matern, who was in charge of such questions:

> Esteemed Comrade Hermann Matern!

> I write to you about my husband, Kurt Sauerland, whose death was reported to me by the German Red Cross in May 1963. The content of that letter is, I believe, known to you as well. For half a year, I have been waiting in vain, day in day out, for an expression of sympathy from my party, of which I shall have been a member for forty years in July. For Kurt Sauerland, 22 March 1938 was the last agonising day of his life. He was taken away from us, my son and me, under a false name on 15 May 1937 and ten months later he was dead, then aged 32. For 26 years, I endeavoured to shed light in the darkness. Now it has been established that Kurt Sauerland never left the Moscow prison walls. Now, small pieces of mosaic are being added to one another, and I see a plastic image in front of me. I have often asked you to obtain news about Kurt Sauerland. I was repeatedly fobbed off. In 1962, after 25 years, I received the recommendation from you to do my own research, since nothing had come of all your efforts. That is what I did. It took no longer than May 1963 for me to receive an answer from the Red Cross. Now tell me, please, how am I still to believe that you did everything to obtain news from Moscow?
>
> Comrade Matern, was Kurt Sauerland's life of sacrifice worth so little in the ranks of the German communist party and Comintern? Is it not unspeakably hard to have to die in emigration, in Soviet emigration, and then to be forgotten as well? And have I, as an activist, dedicated solely to youth and party work since the age of fifteen, not deserved to receive more than a formal notice from the Red Cross? I, who had to go through indescribable suffering on account of the arrest of my husband in the Soviet Union but who never once departed from the Marxist-Leninist path, who in 1940, three years after the arrest, arranged to have myself sent to Germany to fight illegally against fascism. And do you believe that before the Twentieth Party Congress it was easy to get by as the wife of a comrade arrested in the Soviet Union?

After this letter, the party's central control committee, which was chaired by Matern decided to rehabilitate Kurt Sauerland. That happened on 24 April 1964, after my stepfather had already died. My mother was not given it in writing, rather a special delegation of three comrades was dispatched to see her. They probably felt it would be possible to calm her down that way. I found the whole thing to be objectionable play-acting. What was the word rehabilitation meant to mean here? More would have needed to be done to achieve that. After all, Münzenberg's reputation was at stake too, he having worked closely with my father.

After the change in system and German unification, my mother did receive another letter from the PDS. She showed it to me. I recorded in my diary how I reacted to it:

"Train journey from Berlin to Bonn on 8 November 1989: Today, my mother showed me the letter written to her by the PDS leadership, in which it informed her of Kurt Sauerland's renewed 'political rehabilitation'. That had been decided on by an 'arbitration panel'. My name was also mentioned. My mother was appalled that I was not at all happy with this letter. I said that such a rehabilitation was worthless if it failed to recount the role of people like Pieck, Florian or Ulbricht. I thought to myself that it was just one big pile of dirty linen. My mother was snarling with rage when I took leave of her. On the way to the train, I found myself thinking for the first time about the word rehabilitation. Rehabilitation does, after all, presuppose that the person rehabilitated is pleased to figure in the party annals once again. Deep inside, I hope that he has long since written it off for good, but that is not something I can say to my mother, since she seems to be a wholehearted member of this PDS. Considered strictly, however, she cannot be interested in a complete disclosure of the history of the party and Comintern, because this Münzenberg undertaking had a much too pro-Soviet leaning. It did much to make Stalin internationally acceptable, until he was drawn into conflicts, when he had answered the call of duty. Just one big pile of dirty linen. Personally, I was angry that I had lost so much of my life through all these things. That cannot be changed any more now. It is as if one has lived life in vain. Circumstances being what they were, I followed my own particular path, but the price was high.

I do, however admire my mother for taking revenge on the comrades on the occasion of Paul Friedländer's funeral when she had his name and that of Kurt Sauerland inscribed on the headstone and underneath them her name and date of birth. It was then my sister's and my job to add the date of death. The grave is in Ilmenau. Every time I go there, my thoughts go out to the three of them. My mother did not ask anyone for permission, but no one protested either that no mortal remains of my father's had been laid to rest there.

In the early 1960s, I had established contacts with the circle of people around Leszek Kołakowski and Bronisław Baczko. They were primarily concerned with working through the history of Marxism. Revisionism was what it was called at the time. What were the sources of Marx's and Engels' thinking? They looked back into Rousseau, Schiller, Hegel, Moses Hess, Stirner, the French utopian socialists and many others. It was as if they were following Goethe's dictum that all ideas and inspirations are the fruit of an intellectual collective. I was fairly actively involved in that revision work in that I attended as many meetings as I possibly could, made presentations of my own and in the end translated some of the work of Kołakowski, Baczko and Stefan Morawski from Polish into German. Unfortunately, this intellectual idyll came to an end in 1968, when the Polish party leadership decided to clean things up entirely and to chase Jews and factious intellectuals out of the country. By chance, I was not in Warsaw at the time. The Polish Ministry of Education had given me a ten-month grant to finish off my dissertation in libraries in East Berlin. When I returned, most of my teachers and also most of my colleagues had already left and gone into exile. It was no longer possible to think of organising interdisciplinary gatherings along the lines of seminars. I found myself thinking back to the dark times. More than one person asked me; are you emigrating or not? These were the same questions as had been asked in Germany in 1933. The only correct reaction then would have been to leave the country.

Now I had made the move to Poland because the fundamental changes following 1956 had given rise to hope in me that something new might come into being here, something that would be neither bolshevist nor capitalist. But a deep-seated reason will probably also have been that I felt drawn to being somewhere between Berlin and Moscow, between two wrong-doers in the history of the twentieth century, to be amidst a people that had been through the worst from both sides. And in point of fact an essential impetus for the decline of the Eastern empire did originate here. And without Poland turning away from the Soviet imperium German unity would not have come about. Back in 1988, I had addressed a conference on Central Europe in West Berlin and had said that, if Poland were to gain its sovereignty, Germany would be reunited, since Russia would not be able to tolerate a divided, i.e. weak, one-third German state to the west of Poland. Poland would then simply become too strong a state. Of course, none of those present wanted to believe me.

In the 1980s, after Jaruzelski had declared martial law on 13 December 1981, when I was subjected to all sorts of harassment and had to feel afraid that I was going to be put into prison, I used often to think of my father. Not even in my dreams, however, did it ever occur to me he would be the pretext for accusations levelled against me once again. Jaruzelski's wife, who was employed in the German faculty of Warsaw University, spread it about that I had had a dubious past, that I was the son of a traitor. It was as if the Stalin period had returned. Mrs Jaruzelska had picked up this opinion from those closest to her, the circles of the nomenclature, who had probably never come to terms with their own past. They were rightly forced to resign, but accounts were never settled with them. The dead never experienced the satisfaction which Benjamin spoke about in his correspondence with Horkheimer.

I include that correspondence, only slightly abridged.

In his essay on Eduard Fuchs, Benjamin had written that the work of the past was never finished by historical materialists. It was an assertion with which Horkheimer had felt unable to agree:

> Since then, I have long been thinking about the question of whether the work of the past is complete. Your formulation can certainly stand as is. I have but one personal reservation: that I think this a relationship only to be perceived dialectically. The pronouncement of incompleteness is idealistic if it does not incorporate completeness as well. Past injustice is done and finished. Those who have been beaten to death really are dead. Ultimately you are making a theological statement. If one takes incompleteness absolutely seriously, then one must believe in the Last Judgment. My thinking is too contaminated with materialism for that. Perhaps there is a distinction between positive and negative incompleteness, so that the injustice, the terror, the pain of the past are irreparable. The justice in practice, pleasures and

> works behave differently in relation to time, since their positive character is largely negated through transitoriness. This is indeed true for individual life, for which death validates its unhappiness, but not its happiness. Good and bad do not relate to time in the same way. Thus discursive logic is inadequate for these categories too (Benjamin 1972ff, 2/3,1332ff).

Benjamin sent an immediate answer to this letter:

> I find your excursus on the completeness or openness of the work of the past very significant. I think I understand it thoroughly and, if I am not mistaken, your idea corresponds to a theme than has often concerned me. To me, an important question has always been how to understand the odd figure of speech: to lose a war or a court case. The war or the trial are not the entry into a dispute but rather the decision concerning it. Finally, I explained it to myself thus: the events involved for a person who has lost a war or a court case are truly concluded and thus for that person any avenue of praxis has been lost. This is not the case for the counterpart, who is the winner. Victory bears its fruit in a way much different from the manner in which consequences follow defeat. That leads to the exact opposite of Ibsen's phrase: "Happiness is born of loss. Only what is lost is eternal" (Benjamin 1972ff, 2/3,1338).

An indirect reply is to be found in the manuscript for the Arcades Project, which cites the passage from Horkheimer's letter quoted above and adds the following commentary:

> The corrective to this line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance. What science has "determined", remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology; but in remembrance we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally atheological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts (Benjamin 1972ff, 5/1, 589).

Benjamin seems to be in agreement with the charge that a consistent materialist ought not to speak about incompleteness. The slaughtered have been slaughtered once and for all; nobody is going to bring them back from their graves. It is thus consistent to renounce any *necromancy,* which is how Marx wanted it. In order to escape from being pinned down to thinking in this way, Benjamin declares history to be not just a science but also a particular form of remembrance. As such, it is by no means restricted to dealing only with what is complete, but also with the continuing impact of the past, in particular suffering, in other words also with the fact that particular people were slaughtered, were murdered. The present cannot simply gloss over that. It must retain its clandestine connection to the past, which is expecting a form of redemption to come from us, to use Benjamin's metaphorical language.

In my father's case, the conclusion to be drawn from this is that he is not only waiting for rehabilitation, but resurrection – resurrection in the sense of the course of his life being presented as it really was, however misguided that may have been. In the end, he would like justice to be done to him. That is when, for me in particular, the undead person will turn to being truly dead.

REFERENCES

BENJAMIN, Walter. 1972ff. *Gesammelte Schriften* (2/3, 5/1). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.