

From Marx to Mole

Sunday, 4 pm A talk in German language

Part (2) of the ongoing discussion series „What is (in)dependent publishing today?“

DRUCKEN HEFTEN LADEN *at Friends*

with Books 2016:

Christian Berkes (*botopress*)

Jörg Franzbecker, Heimo Lattner

(*Berliner Hefte*)

Achim Lengerer (*Scriptings*)

Yves Mettler (*die Zeitschrift*)

Janine Sack

(*A Book Edition*)

Simon Worthington (*Mute*)
druckenheftenladen.tumblr.com

English Summary: Invited by Drucken Heften Laden (DHL) – a group of small Berlin-based publishers and producers – the historian Uwe Sonnenberg talks about his most recent book “Von Marx zum Maulwurf” (From Marx to Mole), Wallstein, 2016.

Combining intense archival work with a close reading of the everyday practices and contents of publishing in the 1970s, Sonnenberg maps out a chronological narrative of leftist book production and distribution in West Germany at that time. A brief detour via the 19th century history of politically centralized socialist and communist bookselling leads him to a specific form of activist publishing [Bewegungsbuchhandel] that became vital for a new politicized generation, for a new left.

This intellectual and counter culture movement was trying to re-establish ties to dissident-Marxist and psychoanalytic debates. But in the aftermath of World War II the relevant texts were not available anymore; mostly for ideological reasons. Sonnenberg reminds us that people actually combed through archives, libraries, second-hand bookshops, and dusty attics to find originals to print from – often as illegal pirate prints [Raubdrucke].

In the 1960s these left initiatives and small publishing projects still worked together with already established leftist publishing houses to break free from restorative ideas that determined the cultural development of Germany at that time. Soon the established publishing houses had to put some energy into keeping up with the small initiatives on a highly dynamic “market for Marx”.

In the early 1970s a growing number of (radical) bookshops, publishers, and authors gathered. Believing there would be “no revolution without theory”, they formed a union of left publishing [Verband des linken Buchhandels] to offer what was needed. This union is Sonnenberg’s major point of departure to research strategies of cooperation, distribution, and self-marketing within the heterogeneous and highly contested field of left publishing.

In his lecture Sonnenberg outlines the broader picture around this union. He shows how left publishing became an indispensable infrastructure for critical thought, how it managed to bring together different political and social groups, and how it re-issued texts that would become classics of today’s social sciences. With the subsequent discussion we hope to transfer some of the historical insights to the questions around independent publishing today.

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