

The baader-meinhof gang



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Baader-Meinhof or the Red Army Faction (RAF) was a prominent militant outfit of the ' German Autumn. ' A terror era that lasted for nearly three decades was marked by the rise and fall of several terrorist organizations. One of the most dreaded of these was the Baader-Meinhof Gang. Originally formed as a revolutionary organization that would put an end to German fascist era, the gang went off-track with its goals and resorted to unlawful activities.

At their peak, they had perpetrated numerous acts of terror including bank robbery, kidnapping and murder. They had become so infamous that the German Government labeled them as a terrorist organization. The origin of the Baader-Meinhof can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when West Germany reeled under a series of terrorist bombings by radical leftists in Augsburg, Hamburg, Karlsruhe, Munich and at American installations in Frankfurt and Heidelberg, and bank robberies and Molotov cocktail attacks on public offices (Christenson 20).

Two groups claimed responsibility for the attacks and one of these groups was the June 2nd Movement, which along with the other group was later known as the Baader-Meinhof gang (Christenson 20). A couple of the people involved in these activities were Andreas Baader, the man responsible for the formation of the gang, and his girlfriend Gundrun Ensslin. A prominent journalist who worked for the Konkret - Ulrike Meinhof - had interviewed the two people and justified their deeds, and later joined the gang after helping Baader escape from a jail (Christenson 20).

The formal establishment of the RAF or Baader-Meinhof gang was done on 5 June 1970, but the gang's terrorist acts caught serious attention only since

1974 (Fulbrook 229). The gang, comprising mostly of people who were middle class and well-educated, was formed with the frustration that had crept in to their minds after witnessing their families die in the 1940s (Fulbrook 229). This was one of the primary reasons given by the gang, which felt that the government's true, oppressive face has to be brought before the public.

As a result, they started attacks on property and also engaged in bank robberies to fund their activities (Fulbrook 229). However, the real threat had begun when they had started to commit murders of popular people like the banker Jurgen Ponto; General State Prosecutor Buback, who they accused of causing the deaths of terrorists - Holger Meins, Siegfried Hauser and Ulrike Meinhof; and employers' leader Hanns Martin Schleyer (a high-ranked official in SS) (Fulbrook 229). The most prominent of their involvements was in the Munich Olympics Massacre of 1972 (Reeve 37).

The Organization The Baader-Meinhof Gang was formed out of the New Left and Extra Parliamentary Opposition student movements that had huge support from the German students in the 1950s and the 1960s, especially against the U. S. war in Vietnam (Tucker 95). With the passage of time, further student demonstrations took place and on June 2, a university student called Benno Ohnesorg was shot dead by the police, adding fuel to the fire burning in the students' hearts (Tucker 96). Andreas Baader encouraged student activists to overthrow the German Government as it was a part of the corrupt International system and was dominated by the United States (Tucker 96). The real terrorist group was formed after a left-wing lawyer named Horst Mahler suggested the creation of a German urban

Guerilla Movement, like the Tupamaros in Uruguay, and engagement in greaterviolencethan arson (Tucker 96). Mahler, along with Baader and Ensslin were the leaders of this small terrorist group. When Baader was arrested after the group was formed in 1970, Ensslin asked Meinhof for help and the journalist helped him escape (Tucker 96).

Terror Activities

The terrorist gang started its first few attacks on symbols that represented the capitalist system and in 1968, after Baader led left-wing student group Kommune I was released for arson activity, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and two other colleagues placed bombs in two department stores in Frankfurt am Main (Tucker 96). Andreas and his girlfriend, Ensslin, were arrested for the act, but were later released in 1969 (Tucker 96). In the period 1970-1977, the gang targeted a number of government top-ranked officials for assassination.

They were successful in this goal when they assassinated prominent individuals like Jurgen Ponto, Prosecutor Buback and Hanns-Martin Schelyer (Fulbrook 229). Schleyer's body was dumped inside the boot of a car after a hijack attempt by the gang was stopped by Federal Border Police in Mogadishu (Fulbrook 229). The hijack had been planned to force the government to release the gang's top leaders Baader, Raspin and Ensslin. When Holger Meins, one of the people arrested in 1972, died of a hunger strike, the group killed Judge Gunter Von Drenkkman in response (Christenson 21). When police arrested many supporters of leftist terrorist organizations in connection with this incident, the June 2nd group kidnapped West Berlin mayoral candidate Peter Lorenz and demanded the release of

five convicted people, and in March, another group bombed the Paris office of West German publisher Axel Springer demanding the release and pardon of Baarden-Meinhof group's members (Christenson 21).

In another incident in April 1975, six guerillas killed three people and took 12 hostages in the West German Embassy in Stockholm demanding the release of the gang and when the government refused, they killed two diplomats and set the embassy on fire (Christenson 21). Main People in the Group Andreas Baader The most prominent name in the Baader-Meinhof gang is Andreas Baader and the group was named after him. Baader was attracted to the leftist-student movement and he was one of the people responsible for the bombing of a Frankfurt department store in 1968. He was a criminal even before his involvement in the Baader-Meinhof gang.

He was arrested for the department store bombing, but was released. He was arrested a second time in 1970, when Ulrike Meinhof helped him escape through the library outside his prison. After the escape, he had spent some time in Jordan in a militant training camp. After he returned to Germany, he was involved in many bank robberies and bombing activities from 1970-1972. In June 1972, Baader and other members Jan-Carl Raspe, Essaywriters 5 Holger Meins and Gudrun Ensslin were arrested and they were tried till 1977. Baader had committed suicide in October 1977 inside the prison cell. Ulrike Meinhof

Ulrike Meinhof was not a part of the group from the beginning. She was a sympathizing journalist who helped Baader escape from jail. Along with Baader and other prominent people, she became a part of the Baader-Meinhof gang. On May 9, 1976, Ulrike Meinhof was found hanging from the

ceiling of her prison cell in Stuttgart-Stammheim. Gudrun Ensslin Although the group was partly named after Ulrike, the gang's main female leader was Ensslin, who was also the girlfriend of Baader. She had participated in many student protests in the 1960s. Ensslin had assisted Baader in many terror activities.

She was also found dead with Baader and Raspe in the prison cell in 1977. Horst Mahler Horst Mahler was also one of the founding members of the Baader-Meinhof gang. He was formerly a left-wing militant. He was later kicked out of the gang. Jan-Carl Raspe Jan-Carl Raspe was one of the early members of the gang. He was arrested along with Baader and the rest. He was also found dead in the prison with others in 1977. The Diffusion of the Group Although the government believed that the Baader-Meinhof gang stopped functioning after the death of its main leaders, the group continued to function till 1998.

The media company Reuters had received a message in 1998 that formally announced that the gang had been dissolved. It was the end of the ' German Autumn. '

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