



100 Years of Erika Arlt and the Verlorener Transport

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and members of the ‘AG Verlorener Transport’

Today we mark the 81st anniversary of the ‘Verlorener Transport’.

The fact that the memory of this example of what fascism entails is still alive in our region is thanks to Richard Arlt, but above all to Erika Arlt, who would have turned 100 today.

Let us first take a look at her life, which was very closely linked to mining:

1926	30 March 1926: Erika Röther was born in Oberröblingen am See, the second child after her brother Karl-Heinz (1924–1945), who was two years her senior.	
1943	Accounts clerk at Gut Lochau, then (15 April 1943) at Rittergut Niederbeuna	First air raids on Leuna
1945	Death of her beloved brother Karl-Heinz	12 April: US Army occupies the Halle region The Second World War ends on 8 May 18 March 1945: The FDGB is founded in Aachen
1947	Worked in the dispatch/expedition department at the Bruckdorf/Halle briquette factory Member of the FDJ and the SED	
1948	Accounts clerk at Gut Lochau	20 June 1948: Unilateral currency reform in the West 16 January: VVN founded; exhibition ‘The Other Germany’
1950	Stenographer, Ammendorf Elected as a city councillor to Halle City Council Withdrew from the church	15 October: first People’s Chamber and local councils elected
1951	Member of the Democratic Sports Movement	Ban on the VVN in the Federal Republic of Germany; 2 August: police raid on the VVN office in Frankfurt am Main; letter-writing campaign in the GDR
1953	21 February 1953: Erika marries Richard Arlt	In February, the VVN is dissolved in the GDR

		5 March: Death of J. Stalin 17 June: Protest demonstrations in the GDR
1957	Move to Domsdorf; Peter Arlt starts school; resigns from his seat on the town council investigates the lists of the dead from the 'Lost Transport', interviews with contemporary witnesses, mass grave discovered at kilometre 106.7 near Wildgrube	Committee of Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters founded
1975	On 8 May, the Wildgrube Memorial (marking the 30th anniversary of the liberation) was inaugurated	
1984		Committee of Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters dissolved
1986	Documentation on the history of the Committee of Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters compiled	
1987	Documentary 'Never Forget' on the history of the Lost Transport completed	
1989		Border controls between the GDR and the FRG are abolished
1995	Ceremony: 50th anniversary of the liberation of the 'Lost Transport'; unveiling of a memorial wall bearing the names of the 550 victims	
1997	17 June: Award of the Federal Cross of Merit on Ribbon	
1999	23 April: Publication of the booklet 'The Jewish Memorials to the Lost Transport'	
2008	Elbe-Elster District Local History Award	
2011	The second, expanded edition of the booklet 'The Jewish Memorial Sites of the Lost Transport' is published Resigns from the PDS after 54 years	
2014	Contribution to the open-air exhibition on the Jewish cemetery	
2015	23 April: Opening of the open-air exhibition marking the 70th anniversary of the liberation) 12 November: Death of Erika Arlt	

Contrary to the impression conveyed by the defamatory term 'imposed anti-fascism' in the GDR, Erika and Richard Arlt were anti-fascists by conviction and life experience. It was clear to them that anti-fascism cannot be imposed: either you succeed in convincing the people around you that it is better to build a new society together with neighbours, friends and colleagues, rather than relying on military discipline and orders issued by the authorities, or you are doomed to failure.

Through many hours of dedicated research and organisational work – always taking care to involve the citizens of Tröbitz and to convince them of the importance of remembering the 'Lost Transport' – Erika Arlt succeeded in transforming the initial scepticism into pride, Pride in being a resident of Tröbitz, a village that honours the memory of the 'Verlorener Transport', maintains the cemetery, organises commemorative events, warmly welcomes visitors, conducts guided tours and puts on exhibitions. Erika Arlt maintained an extensive network of correspondence with survivors and relatives of the 'Lost Transport'; her correspondence fills many folders – which are themselves now

One day, today will be a thing of the past,
and people will speak of that great era
and the nameless heroes
who made history!

I want people to know
that there were no nameless heroes.
That they were people
who had their names, their faces, their longings
and their hopes,
and that, therefore, the pain
even of the last among them
was no less than the pain of the first,
whose name lives on.

I hope
that they all remain close to you always,
like friends, like relatives,
just as you yourself are.”

Julius Fučík

born 23 February 1903 in Prague, died 8 September 1943 in Berlin-Plötzensee
Julius Fučík was a Czech cultural politician and writer. As a member of the underground Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KPTsch), he fell into the hands of the Hitlerite fascists and was held in Gestapo custody from 1942 onwards. On 8 September 1943, he was executed in Berlin-Plötzensee.

Because it was important to Erika Arlt to foster a popular anti-fascism, she focused not on history books but on the accounts of contemporary witnesses such as Mr W. Gröger, Mr K. Bardehle (on the arrival of the train on 23 April 1945), the recollections of Tröbitz residents (pp. 26–39) and the reception of the survivors into Tröbitz homes, presented as humanitarian aid (pp. 36–49). Whenever she describes the memorial sites, she never fails to mention by name the residents who were involved in their establishment – nor does she forget the names of those who devoted themselves to caring for the terminally ill survivors from the train.

‘Never Forget’ is not a reckoning with the people of Tröbitz, nor even a moral reproach; the book aims to show the region’s residents what they achieved – perhaps without realising it fully. It is entirely forward-looking, even though it primarily recounts events from the past. That is why the author emphasises the friendships between Jewish survivors and those residents of Tröbitz in whose homes they were cared for and looked after. For the same reason, she highlights the events organised by regional organisations at the VVN Memorial and documents the speeches given by prominent figures who came to Tröbitz for the commemorative days, as if to say: ‘Look, without you and your commitment, these people would not have come!’

Against this backdrop, the story of the ‘Lost Transport’ is presented to the reader through numerous original documents – another of Erika Arlt’s achievements, having saved them from destruction – and through numerous photographs which she took and developed herself.

The book, photocopied by Erika Arlt at her own expense and passed from hand to hand, has never been published – primarily, it seems, because its political interpretation and its clearly critical stance towards post-war West Germany, with its Cold War adherents, were no longer in keeping with the times after the so-called ‘Wende’. Too many turncoats and those who profited from the fall of the Berlin Wall would have defamed her through her book as a supporter of a defunct, delegitimised state, which would have been detrimental to her aim of preserving the memory of the victims of the ‘Lost Transport’ – the ‘Never Forget’ principle. Even when the ‘political’ passages had been omitted from the two revised versions (1997 and 2011), Erika Arlt could not bring herself to publish the book.

In her book, the author remains in the background; it is clear that it was a personal concern of hers to inform the general public, just as it was important to her to maintain an extensive correspondence with numerous survivors, which she continued until shortly before her death.

Never Forget – Erika Arlt’s book (2011 version) about the Lost Transport –

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And now, something that Erika Arlt would surely have been especially pleased about:
Andreas Oettel from Hamburg presents his film about Jaap Hillesum, who died on the Lost Train
near Schipkau and was buried there.