

# Germany: SEP publishing house at Frankfurt Book Fair

## Arbeiterpresse Verlag presents Voronsky's *Art as the Cognition of Life*

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The Arbeiterpresse Verlag, the publishing house that works closely with the German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit), was once again in attendance at this year's Frankfurt Book Fair, held October 8-13. The printing house celebrated its 25th anniversary with a presentation of the first German translation and publication of essays written by the outstanding Russian Marxist Alexander K. Voronsky—*Art as the Cognition of Life*.

Voronsky was the publisher of the most important Russian literary magazine in the twenties, supported Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition in the struggle against Stalinism, and as a consequence was executed by Stalin in 1937 during the Great Terror. The new volume, which will be available for delivery within the next few weeks, met with considerable interest.

The 55th Frankfurt Book Fair, which is the biggest event of its sort in the world, registered around 300,000 visitors and 6,000 exhibitors from 102 countries. The high attendance reflected renewed interest in the printed word. Nevertheless, the quality of new publications was generally disappointing and the range of events conducted in the course of the fair was very heterogeneous.

Meetings at the fair ranged from one featuring German writer Günter Grass, which drew an attendance of 1,200, to the presentation of the world's biggest book—"GOAT-Greatest Of All Time"—a biography of boxing champion Muhammad Ali. Five thousand turned out for a "Russian Disco" led by the voguish Russian novelist Vladimir Kaminer, and large numbers also attended the event organised for the appallingly

untalented German pop singer Dieter Bohlen, who presented yet another slice of his biography.

The Peace Prize of the German Book Sellers Organisation, which is awarded annually in a ceremony at the Frankfurt Paulskirche, was given this year to American author Susan Sontag, described in the text justifying the award as "an intellectual ambassador between the two continents."

Sontag, who in 1999 supported the NATO-led war against Yugoslavia, describing it as a "justified war against radical evil," has spoken out recently on a number of occasions against the Bush administration and the Iraq war. For this reason, the American ambassador in Germany, Daniel Coates, who normally turns up for such awards, absented himself from the meeting in Frankfurt, leading Ms. Sontag to comment that he was "more interested in confirming the ideological position and ominous reaction of the Bush administration than carrying out his normal diplomatic duties."

Anyone expecting the "provocative speech" that Sontag had promised was to be disappointed. In the Paulskirche, Sontag lectured on the gulf between the US and Europe, which she traced back to the roots of America itself, thereby implying that the current foreign policy differences between Germany and the US have their origins in longstanding cultural and historical differences.

The conflict had "deep roots," Sontag said. The writer, who has recently developed the notion of a clash between European and America interests and values, declared that she had not merely invented this

antagonism: “The antagonism—and it consists of an antagonism—is incapable of being resolved in the near future, despite the best intentions of many people on both sides of the Atlantic.” It was necessary, however, to condemn those who sought to exacerbate these differences, she added.

Additional cultural and political meetings, as well as readings, exhibitions, book presentations, concerts, films and discussions, took place at the book fair and at 13 other forums throughout the city of Frankfurt and the state of Hesse.

At a meeting in the Frankfurt Trade Union House, Israeli Knesset deputy Uri Avnery discussed perspectives for a “just peace in the Middle East” with Palestinian professor Sumaya Farhat-Nasser. The meeting room was packed, and there was considerable support for a proposed international campaign against the wall of separation that the Sharon government is building in West Jordan to further isolate the Palestinians.

Every year, a different country is selected to provide a particular high point for the fair, and this year it was Russia’s turn. Next year’s fair will be dedicated to Arab countries.

Under the motto “Russia—New Sides,” hundreds of meetings were organised to provide a glimpse of modern Russian culture. A significant section of the meetings, however, evidently sought to revitalise pre-revolutionary tsarist Russia. On exhibit were many religious icons, wooden dolls (Matroschkas), and mystical relics, as well as displays devoted to the renowned Bernstein Room and to an exchange of letters between the German King Wilhelm II and the Russian Tsar Nicolas II.

The star of the book fair was Tatiana Tolstaya, the great niece of Lev Tolstoy and granddaughter of Count Alexei Tolstoy. She politically supports the so-called “reformers” around former president Boris Yeltsin who plundered the country to get rich quick following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in 1991, which resulted in widespread poverty and devastation for the broad masses of the population. When questioned on this, Tolstaya retorted: “There are efforts being made to reverse the privatisation which was carried out formerly and to deprive the rich of their wealth. Such notions are stupid because they only force people to shift their money abroad.”

The central exhibit in the forum of the book fair dedicated to Russia was sparse and unimaginative. Of greater interest were the books displayed by members of the German Book Trade Federation, which included many volumes dealing with contemporary history and the books published by the Arbeiterpresse Verlag—notably works by Leon Trotsky, as well as a number of the studies of Russian history by the historian Vadim S. Rogovin.



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