

Remembrance of Adolf Heilberg (14.01.1858 - 17.12.1936)

A Forgotten Pioneer and Activist of the German Peace Society

By Guido Grünewald

Adolf Heilberg was a member of the board of the Silesian Bar Association and the German Bar Association, which awarded him honorary membership in 1928. He was an influential liberal local politician in Wroclaw for many years, received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Law of the University of Wroclaw in 1911 and the honorary title of "Privy Justice Council" (Geheimer Justizrat) from the Prussian state in 1913. Nevertheless, the name Adolf Heilberg is almost forgotten. It was above all the National Socialists who erased the memory of him nearly permanently. Heilberg was hated by them in four ways: as a Jew, an active pacifist, a democratic politician and an outstanding lawyer who stood and fought for the rule of law.

The retired civil engineer and historian Roland B. Müller, who researches the history of Wroclaw, has revived the memory of this outstanding man. On his initiative and with the support of Heilberg's great-granddaughter Helen Breslau (Toronto), a commemorative plaque was unveiled on 30 May 2019 at the wall of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Breslau. At the commemora-

ing which outlines and appreciates Adolf Heilberg's work in and for the German Peace Society (Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft = DFG). Some research work in old pacifist periodicals was necessary for this, because apart from the name, I also knew only a little about the pacifist Adolf Heilberg, and the relevant publications also contain only sparse information.

Heilberg was "a genius of work", as his lawyer colleague and friend Georg Tarnowski wrote in an obituary in 1936. Despite increasing anti-Semitism, he enjoyed a high reputation in Breslau, held honorary social posts and, as a member of the city council, influenced the development of the city from 1888 to 1933. From 1892 to 1917 he chaired the subsequent rather left-liberal Liberal People's Party (Freisinnige Volkspartei) in Wroclaw and Silesia. When the party was founded in November 1918, he became a member of the German Democratic Party (Deutsche Demokratische Partei = DDP), to which he belonged until 1933 even after its transformation into the German State Party (Deutsche Staatspartei) in September 1930. Notwithstanding his openly antimonarchist and pacifist attitude, Heilberg was appointed head of the city council for the first time in 1915 and re-elected until 1922, even since the SPD had formed the largest parliamentary group in 1919. As a founding member of the People's Council (Volksrat), the Wroclaw variant of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte), he played a major role in the non-violent transition from monarchy to republic. Heilberg's 70th and 75th birthdays in January 1928 and 1933 respectively were extensively honored by the city and his lawyer colleagues.

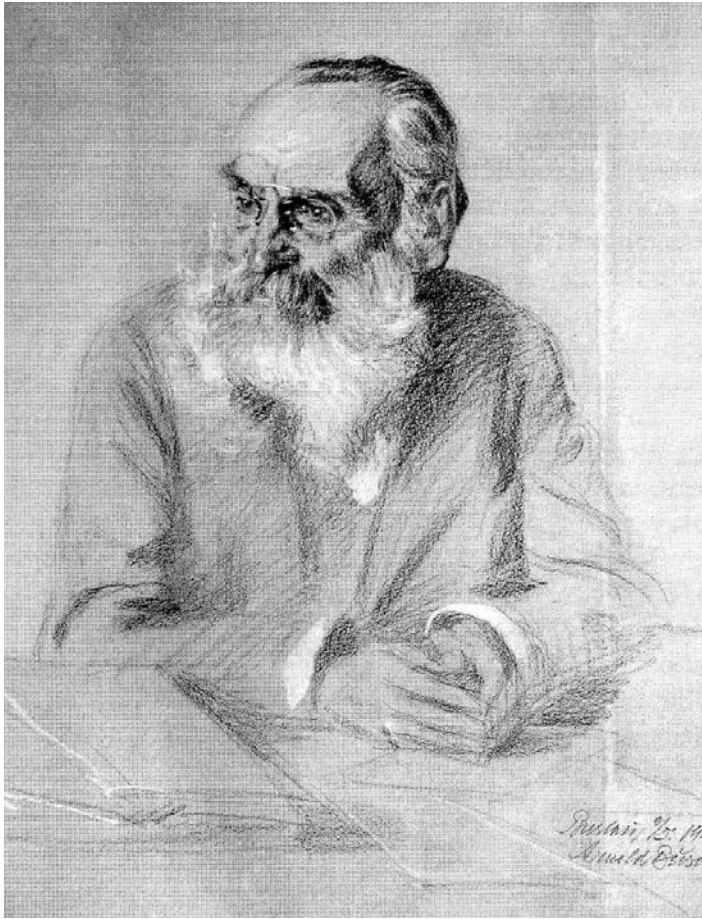
Heilberg's bread and butter profession, a well-functioning law firm with a focus on mining law and civil law, would have been enough to fill a person with a normal work force. In 1913 he brought the 21st conference of the German Bar Association to Breslau. His Munich colleague Max Friedlaender wrote in his memoirs: "Heilberg was already then the most famous lawyer of Breslau, probably of Silesia: a man with a prophet's head, long hair and a broad full beard, of a gigantic manpower... He was one of the clearest heads I have ever met, always able to find the right thought and also the right mediating word in difficult situations. "(Lebenserinnerungen p. 59) This judgement was essentially shared by many colleagues, including many who from March 1933 quickly distanced themselves from Jewish lawyers.



commemorative plaque unveiled in Wroclaw on 30 May

tion ceremony organised by the Wroclaw City Museum and the Lawyers' History Forum (Forum Anwalts-geschichte), the numerous facets of Heilberg's life and work were shown and appreciated in speeches and greetings.

Unfortunately I had to cancel my participation due to health reasons, but I have sent a message of greet-



pen drawing of A. Heilberg made by the painter Arnold Busch (with the kind permission of Helen Breslauer, great-granddaughter of A. Heilberg)

Heilberg probably joined the DFG in the spring of 1893, after Alfred Hermann Fried had received press reports about his first pacifist lectures in Breslau and the surrounding area. The call of October 1893, with which the long founding phase of the DFG (foundation day is 09.11.1892) was finally concluded, names Heilberg as a member of the board and one of three addresses for applicants.

Heilberg was a member of the main board until 1919, when he retired for a long time after the tragic death of his wife. Heilberg was one of the few active board members: He published the brochure "The Education for Peace, a Task for the German Teaching Staff" (Die Erziehung zum Frieden, eine Aufgabe für die deutsche Lehrerschaft) on the occasion of the conference of the German Teachers' Assembly in Breslau in 1898 and held public lectures on "Diplomacy and World Peace" (Diplomatie und Weltfrieden) or "International Life and International Tension in Their Opposition" (Internationales Leben und internationale Spannung in ihrem Gegensatz) at the III. (Wiesbaden 1910) and the V. German Pacifist Congress (Berlin 1912). On local level he founded the Breslau Group in January 1894, where he remained chairman with brief interruptions during the 1920s till 1930.

Heilberg was an active chairman; he himself organised and gave numerous lectures, including at the Humboldt Association for Popular Education (Humboldtverein für Volksbildung), and initiated the founding of further DFG groups in Silesia by giving lectures in other places. In 1897, the Breslau Group had 240 members and, after a period of atrophy, apparently surpassed this number once again in the mid-1920s.

The motives for Heilberg's pacifist commitment were both ethical ("The immorality and inhumanity of war, but also the restriction of free will and the right of personality," he wrote in his memoirs) and rational ("destruction of all human, economic, moral values" by war). For Heilberg it was clear that the peace movement had to be internationally active and that its primary goal was to strengthen both international organizations as well as intergovernmental and inter-state ties. In 1907 he was elected to the Council of the International Peace Bureau (IPB), of which he was a member until 1929 (then an honorary member). Since 1906 (Milan) Heilberg took part in numerous World Peace Congresses (for the last time 1928 in Warsaw) organized by the IPB; he stood up for a more efficient congress work and for a reorganization of the IPB which considerably lost strength after 1914.

The goal of international pacifism - as Heilberg stated in 1915 in the midst of the First World War - was "the elimination of war as the means of settling disputes between civilized peoples". He saw a particular evil in the secret diplomacy practised before the war. In his main lecture at the joint conference of the DFG and the Central Office for International Law (Zentralstelle Völkerrecht) in December 1917 at Erfurt, Heilberg stated an "inner spiritual connection between the concepts of peace and freedom", which justified the demand for democratisation in the German Empire. However, this should not be about "absolute egalitarianism, equality", but about "equal rights". For the peace movement, however, the effort to eliminate the war must be in the foreground.

This was one of the reasons why Heilberg fought against the "new course" in the DFG, which was driven largely by the front generation of the regional branch in the Rhine/Ruhr area (Westdeutscher Landesverband). The Westdeutsche Landesverband gradually took the lead in the peace society from the mid-1920s onwards; its activists regarded the "internal pacification" of Germany as the prerequisite for a peaceful foreign policy. Together with other pacifists from the German Democratic Party, Heilberg maintained that the expansion and consolidation of the League of Nations and the strengthening of international legal institutions were priority pacifist tasks. He rejected the DFG's commitment to conscientious objection because, al-



Image: Jakub Choroński, Wrocław City Museum

group picture at the unveiling ceremony at the Old Jewish Cemetery. In front Helen Breslauer and Roland B. Müller (3rd and 5th from left)

though he regarded compulsory military service as a cultural step backwards, he was of the opinion that every citizen had to obey existing laws - even against his conscience - if chaos and anarchy were not to result. After the Westdeutsche Landesverband took over the DFG Executive Board in 1929, Heilberg withdrew disappointed from supraregional pacifist work, but remained a member of the Peace Society.

Adolf Heilberg died in December 1936, expelled from Breslau and relieved of all offices, in Berlin in a collision with a cyclist. He was a truly great man of a noble ethos, who up to the end of his life adhered to the maxims "freedom, justice, love and goodness" both for the cohabitation of human beings and of peoples.

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