ARNOLD BRECHT (1884–1977):  
DEMOCRATIC CIVIL SERVANT AND POLITICAL SCHOLAR 
IN BERLIN AND NEW YORK


The GHI presented one of its most recent publications, a collection of articles on Arnold Brecht edited by Claus-Dieter Krohn and Corinna Unger, at the Landesvertretung Hamburg in Berlin this February. More than 120 guests attended the event, and the Franz Steiner Verlag displayed copies of the Transatlantische Historische Studien it publishes in cooperation with the GHI.

Brecht, a high-ranking civil servant in Weimar’s federal and Prussian administrations, had to leave Germany in 1933 for his defense of democracy against the Nazis. He became a highly acclaimed professor of political science at the New School for Social Research in New York, wrote a prize-winning book on political theory, and advised the U.S. administration on questions concerning Germany during World War II. After the end of the war, he traveled regularly to Germany to participate in its rebuilding and democratization. Having acquired American citizenship, he did not re-migrate to Germany, but he engaged intellectually in the “German cause” by offering advice to West German politicians on both German and European unification.

For a long time after his death, Brecht’s name as well as his intellectual and administrative achievements had been forgotten. Thirty years later, Brecht’s legacy is being revived, thanks, among others, to Federal Minister of Justice Brigitte Zypries. At the Berlin book presentation, Zypries recognized the importance of Brecht’s far-reaching reform projects during the Weimar Republic and honored his intellectual and personal integrity as one of the few democratic civil servants of the Weimar era. Egon Bahr, a central protagonist of the SPD’s Ostpolitik, appreciated Brecht’s engagement to help solve the “German question” by initiating talks with the GDR and embracing détente. He argued that Chancellor Adenauer had missed the opportunity to recruit Brecht as head of the chancellery, a position he would have filled perfectly.

Corinna R. Unger

GHI BULLETIN NO. 40 (SPRING 2007) 177
Hannah Arendt's essay on Bertolt Brecht has often been understood as an indictment of Brecht's postwar accommodation with the Stalinist regime in East Germany, in line with Arendt's supposed commitment to a firm separation between poetry and politics. Offering the first full reconstruction of the transnational history of Arendt's writing on Brecht, this article shows instead that Arendt's essay was a defense of Brecht against the polemics it is often taken to exemplify. Joining poetry to politics by holding both at a distance from philosophy, Arendt assigned poetry the