

Friedrich Pollock

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# Friedrich Pollock

*The Éminence Grise of the Frankfurt School*

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*Translated by*

Lars Fischer



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# Contents

	Preface to the English Edition	VII
	Acknowledgements	VIII
	Prelude	IX
	List of Figures	XI
	Introduction	1
1	Origins	5
2	A Friend for Life	14
3	Failed Revolution	26
4	'Scientific' Marxism	41
5	The Quest	69
6	Dusk	82
7	Practical Relief Work	97
8	Émigré	117
9	A New Order?	133
10	Dinner at the White House	161
11	Return?	178
12	New Old Germany	198
13	Automation	210
14	On Old Age	222
	Epilogue	236

<b>Chronology</b>	239
<b>Archives</b>	241
<b>References</b>	244
<b>Illustrations</b>	263
<b>Index</b>	274

## Preface to the English Edition

The publication of this revised English edition of my Pollock biography seems particularly appropriate in light of the Frankfurt School's own transatlantic history. In the last half century, US academics have produced crucial works on the history of Critical Theory. That the relevant Anglophone and German-language literature all too often lead independent lives is not least down to issues of translation. It is all the more gratifying to see my book come out in English just as I myself relocate from Bavaria to California. I should like to thank the many friends, colleagues and institutions who have made this possible.

In the first instance, I am grateful to the editors of the Historical Materialism Book Series, notably Sebastian Budgen and Loren Balhorn, for agreeing to publish my book, Danny Hayward for assistance and Simon Mussell for his copyediting. At Brill, Athina Dimitriou, Jennifer Obdam and Jason Prevost have been enormously helpful throughout. I am grateful to Nora Mercurio and Elena Cascio of the Suhrkamp Verlag for their unwavering support in facilitating this English-language edition. I am also indebted to Martin Jay for acting as an independent reader. Not least, I thank Lars Fischer who, by rendering not only an excellent translation but also making numerous helpful suggestions, has gone far beyond the call of duty.

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Munich/Berkeley

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I thank John Abromeit, Nicola Emery, Jan Gerber, Sander Gilman, Jürgen Habermas, Dirk Heißeher, Hans Dieter Huber, Doris Maja Krüger, Johannes Platz, Gregor-Sönke Schneider, Bernd Serger, Andrea Sinn and Jörg Später for a variety of helpful pointers. Alex Gruber, Hartmut Lenhard, Janina Lenhard, Niklaas Machunsky and Elisabeth Uebelmann were kind enough to read parts of the manuscript at different stages, and I am enormously grateful for their valuable comments.

# Prelude

The large, heavy wooden table in the middle of the dining room is laid out for seventeen. It is just before eight on the evening of Friday, 5 February 1943. The location is central D.C. It is freezing outside, but the room is well heated. The flickering of the candles is reflected in the sparkling wine glasses, the napkins, artfully turned into standing fans, now lie, folded casually, next to the plates. Staff are serving the various courses – oysters, roast ham with pineapple, various vegetables as side dishes, salad and cheese – and the aroma of good food lies in the air. One of the guests has clearly made an effort to dress for the occasion. He is wearing a three-piece suit and a bow tie. Through his black-rimmed spectacles his gaze rests on the woman sitting opposite whom he seems to be quietly lecturing. He reinforces his words with hand gestures designed to demonstrate his confidence. Even so, he does not seem to be entirely at ease. Looking at him amicably with her blue eyes, his interlocutor is listening attentively and occasionally nods in agreement. She is wearing a loosely fitting but high-necked dress and pearls. Occasionally, the resolute woman, who is nearing sixty, looks to the right where her husband is absent-mindedly eating his meal. Her husband is the 32nd President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was his wife Eleanor who invited the guests now attending the plush dinner party. Her nephew and the Roosevelts' daughter-in-law, Ruth Josephine, are also in attendance.<sup>1</sup>

The group includes four naturalised German guests who seem oddly out of place. They have come to present their plans for post-war European reconstruction. Also in attendance is Vice President Henry A. Wallace, who subsequently noted that two of the guests, 'Lowe and Polak', were Jews. It is unclear how or why he knew this. He acknowledged, however, that both were excellent economic statisticians.<sup>2</sup> 'Polak' was in fact called Pollock, but the names can admittedly be difficult to distinguish in American pronunciation.

For Pollock, the man in the three-piece suit and bow tie, this evening in February 1943 marked the zenith of his endeavours.<sup>3</sup> His friend Max Horkheimer

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1 Franklin D. Roosevelt Day by Day, 5 February 1943, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/daylog/february-5th-1943/>. My account draws on the information Pollock provided in a letter to Max and Maidon Horkheimer two days later (Fondo Friedrich Pollock, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2.1.1., 2) and on photographs from similar events.

2 Morton (ed.) 1973.

3 Eleanor Roosevelt's telegram to Pollock of 2 February 1943 implies that he wore a business suit, Fondo Friedrich Pollock, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2.1.1., doc. 1.

congratulated him on this extraordinary ‘opportunity to listen in on conversations of historical importance.’<sup>4</sup> Pollock was certainly pleased. The now decades-long quest for a better place had taken him from tranquil Freiburg (Breisgau) through half of Europe all the way to the White House. He now had an opportunity to present his ideas and plans to the most powerful man on earth – even if, as yet, only his wife was actually paying attention. He explained at great length that only the creation of a ‘true democracy’ in Germany would secure peace in the long term. He appreciated that some in the State Department and the armed forces would rather establish a military administration, yet this would offer only a short-term solution. In the long run, there was a risk that Europe would turn ‘either Communist or fascist’ once the occupation forces withdrew.

The First Lady listened attentively but the President was evidently irked by Pollock’s preachiness. Back home, Trude Lash, one of Eleanor Roosevelt’s closest associates and, like Pollock, a native of Freiburg, told her husband that

The Germans were not as clear and good as last time. The White House, the Vice President *and* the President proved too much. Their manner was too professorial and in the end the President asked them to prepare school books – thus treating them as school masters which distressed Pollock especially.<sup>5</sup>

As it turns out, she need not have been all that concerned: Pollock was invited back.

So how did Friedrich Pollock of all people come to be invited to dinner at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW? What kind of life had led him from an apartment located above a small shop for women’s apparel in central Freiburg to the heart of twentieth-century political power?

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4 Max Horkheimer to Friedrich Pollock, 10 February 1943, in Horkheimer 1996a, pp. 420–5, p. 421.

5 Lash 1982, p. 428.

# List of Figures

- 1 Groundplan of the Casas Horkheimer and Pollock in Montagnola 263
- 2 Pollock's Birthplace in Freiburg 263
- 3 Pollock's Gravestone on the Jewish Cemetery in Bern 264
- 4 Lucille Weil 265
- 5 Logo of the NordPol suitcase factory 265
- 6 Pollock's drawing of Adolph Lowe 266
- 7 Self-portrait, 1920 267
- 8 The Pollock Family, 1898 267
- 9 The Pollock Family, 1902 268
- 10 The Pollock Mansion 268
- 11 Max Horkheimer and Friedrich Pollock as Soldiers 269
- 12 Friedrich Pollock, 1929 270
- 13 Max Horkheimer and Friedrich Pollock, 1928 270
- 14 Friedrich Pollock, early 1930s 271
- 15 Friedrich Pollock, early 1940s 271
- 16 Andrée and Friedrich Pollock, 1939 272
- 17 Group Photo of the First Marxist Work Week, 1923 272
- 18 Dée Pollock looks at the NYC skyline 273
- 19 Carlota Pollock, 1948 273