

Conception:

Debojit Thakur (Calcutta),

Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam)

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Tolerance of other countries' fascisms has long been a feature of political life. Do we use the term 'fascism' to understand the far-right authoritarian-populist movements that we have known? And is it viable to maintain the assertion that fascism happens elsewhere? Historically and in contemporary times, *völkisch* nationalists, fascist organisations, and proto-fascist movements have proven more flexible than the left in co-operating across borders, even though far-right ideologies are apparently inward-looking, while left-wing thought is shaped, at least in theory, by a universalist orientation and internationalist concerns. How do we understand this paradox?

# Martina Bitunjac (Potsdam)

Origins, Development, and Legacy of the Ustaša Movement in a Geopolitical Context

The Croatian Ustaša movement was founded in 1930 by Ante Pavelić while he was in exile in Italy. The proto-fascist movement adopted the nationalistic and racist worldviews of Italian fascism and German Nazism, while also orienting itself towards the nationalistic mindset of the nationalist-conservative Croatian Party of Rights, which had been founded by Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik in 1861. When the Ustaša came to power in 1941, the radicalized nationalism they had been propagating was implemented in the independent state of Croatia. My talk deals with the origins, development and legacy of Croatian fascism, a legacy which is present in Croatian society today, though it is perceived as controversial. In addition, I will examine questions of revisionism, myth-building, nationalistic symbolism and rhetoric from a geopolitical perspective.

Martina Bitunjac holds a PhD in Modern History and in the History of Europe from the Humboldt University of Berlin and the Sapienza University of Rome (Cotutelle de thèse). She is a researcher at the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies in Potsdam and is the managing editor of the Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies / Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte. In addition, she is a lecturer at the Department of History at the University of Potsdam. Her academic interests include Holocaust studies, fascist movements in the Balkans, and Jewish history in southeastern Europe. Her most recent publications include: Jüdische Lebenswelten im Osmanischen Reich (2024), Complicated Complicity. European Collaboration with Nazi Germany during World War II (2021, edited with Julius H. Schoeps); Lea Deutsch. Ein Kind des Schauspiels, der Musik und des Tanzes (2019), and Verwicklung. Beteiligung. Unrecht. Frauen und die Ustaša-Bewegung (2023).

# **Sebastiaan Faber** (Oberlin)

"Spiritual Guide of the World". Spain as a Transatlantic Fascist Hub, Then and Now

The Cold War largely succeeded in burying the fact that Francisco Franco came to power thanks to Hitler and Mussolini, who provided him with crucial military aid during the Spanish Civil War (from 1936 to 1939). Cold War social scientists also imposed a convenient distinction between Francoism, on the one hand, and German and Italian fascism, on the other. Yet the Franco regime was not only the recipient of fascist aid; it was also the form that fascism took in Spain, a haven for fascist refugees from around the world, and an ideological center for farright currents in Latin America, directly inspiring regimes like Pinochet's in Chile. This is precisely the kind of role that Spain's current far-right political party, Vox, would like to see the country resuming as part of an ambitious transatlantic network called the *Iberosfera*.

**Sebastiaan Faber**, a Professor of Hispanic Studies at Oberlin College, is the author of, among other books, *Exile and Cultural Hegemony* (2002), *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War* (2008), *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War* (2018), and *Exhuming Franco* (2021). He regularly contributes to Spanish and U.S. media, including *CTXT* and *The Nation*. Born and raised in the Netherlands, he has been at Oberlin since 1999.

# Federico Finchelstein (New York)

## Wannabe Fascists

This talk will explore the past and present of global fascisms and populisms. I will discuss a new political breed, the wannabe fascists. This new kind of populist politician is typically a legally elected leader who, unlike previous populists who were eager to distance themselves from fascism, turns to totalitarian lies, racism, and illegal means to destroy democracy from within.

**Federico Finchelstein** is University in Exile Research Professor and Professor of History at The New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College. He has taught at the History Department of Brown University and he received his PhD at Cornell University. Finchelstein is Director of the Janey Program in Latin American Studies at the New School. He is the author of eight books on fascism, populism, the Dirty War in Argentina, the Holocaust, and Jewish history in Latin America and Europe. His books have been translated into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Hungarian, Korean and Turkish.

# Roger Griffin (Oxford)

# The Relevance and Irrelevance of International Fascism as a Contemporary Phenomenon

In this talk, I address the problem posed by the diffusion of fascism far beyond the confines of Mussolini's movement and regimes in the first half of the 20th century and assess the significance of its afterlife since 1945 as an international threat to democracy and humanistic values a century later. The term "fascism" has undergone an extraordinary proliferation of the concept among scholars, political ideologues, and antifascist activists who have over the last hundred years endowed the term with a multitude of different definitions, interpretations and meanings. I argue that a radical distinction should be drawn between fascism and the many other forms of political extremism that now manifest themselves in movements and regimes, particularly Radical Right-Wing Populism, the scourge of modern liberal democracies. One impact of the deep human trauma of the fascist era in the collective memory and historical imagination is to blind many contemporary socialists, liberals, religious humanists and human idealists to the fact that the main political threat to modern democracy lies not in its fascistization but its illiberalization (sometimes called Orbanization), which is now having such catastrophic human consequences inflicted by the de-liberalization of US and Israeli politics under Trump and Netanyahu. This involution of democracy and retreat from global humanistic ideals is one symptom of a deeper blight of humanity, which I describe as incurvation, a global turning away from other-directed humanistic compassion and idealism in both secular and religious states which can only deepen humankind's impotence to tackle the global threats to the survival of our species.

Roger Griffin is one of the world's foremost experts on the socio-historical and ideological dynamics of fascism, as well as the relationship to modernity of violence stemming from various forms of political or religious fanaticism, and in particular contemporary terrorism. His theories of fascism and of fascism's relationship to religion, ultranationalism, totalitarianism, aesthetics and modernism continue to be widely read and cited. Among his books are The Nature of Fascism (1991), Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler (2007), Terrorist's Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning (2012), and Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies (2018).

# Irina Nastasă-Matei (Bucharest)

Nazi Soft Power in Eastern Europe. The Role of the Humboldt Fellowships in Romanian Far-Right Networks

After 1933, foreign students and researchers in Germany became tools of Nazi propaganda. Those receiving financial support from the Germans, including Humboldt fellowship recipients, were particularly compromised. This study examines the role of Humboldt fellowships in the political and ideological exchange between Nazi Germany and Romania, reconstructing the fellows' profiles and assessing how the fellowship influenced their political and ideological development. During the 1930s, the number of young Romanians studying and conducting research in Nazi Germany rose sharply, supported by increased German funding, including more Humboldt fellowships. This trend reflected both Nazi Germany's interest in cultivating ties with Romania, and Romania's own drift toward far-right radicalization, as students and young people became Nazi sympathizers or members of the Iron Guard. Romanian Humboldt fellows were instrumentalized politically: they engaged in far-right activism, absorbed Nazi ideology in their professional work and writings, and in some cases assumed positions within Romania's bureaucratic or diplomatic apparatus under Ion Antonescu's far-right military dictatorship during World War II.

Irina Nastasă-Matei is a historian and political scientist working on transnational networks of education and science exchange, especially in the context of authoritarian regimes. Her research also engages with German, Jewish, and gender studies. She is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest. Her publications include Education, Politics and Propaganda: Romanian Students in Nazi Germany (in Romanian, 2016), Negotiating In/visibility: Women, Science, Engineering and Medicine in the Twentieth Century (ed. with Amelia Bonea, 2025), and Yiddish Culture in Greater Romania (1918–1940) (2025), with Camelia Crăciun, Valentin Săndulescu, and Francisca Solomon.

# Susan Neiman and Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam)

*In Memoriam: Tom Lehrer, 1928–2025* 

Tom Lehrer, mathematician and musician, died this year at the age of 97. His satirical songs were the accompaniment to the Cold War and to the political events of the 1950s and 1960s. He provided a sharp yet good-natured critique of American moral hypocrisy or the self-important posturing of many progressives, of academic plagiarism or of pontifical populism, set to very sing-able music. In doing so, he provided an accompanying soundtrack to the coming-of-age of many of whom we would now call left-liberal intellectuals. It is appropriate to remember him at the conclusion of a conference on fascisms, at which his words could provide a necessary tone of self-irony and humour. Susan Neiman and Benjamin Zachariah remember him through a few of his songs.

Susan Neiman lives in Berlin and is Director of the Einstein Forum. Neiman studied philosophy at Harvard, completing her PhD under John Rawls and Stanley Cavell. She also studied at the Freie Universität Berlin, and was professor of philosophy at Yale and at Tel Aviv University. Her books, translated into many languages, include Slow Fire: Jewish Notes from Berlin (1991), The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant (1994), Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy (2002), Fremde sehen anders (2005), Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists (2008), Why Grow Up? (2014), Widerstand der Vernunft. Ein Manifest in postfaktischen Zeiten (2017), Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil (2019), and Left is not Woke (2023). She has also published over one hundred essays in many newspapers, magazines and journals. She is a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society.

# Luisa Passerini (Florence)

# "Married to the Country". Lines for a Research Project

This conjugal metaphor has been used for Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, but it was originally introduced into the political jargon by Hitler, who repeatedly proclaimed: 'Meine Braut ist Deutschland' (My bride is Germany). Actually, it was Queen Elizabeth I who had stated that she was "married to England", in the mid-XVI century. My paper will take Salazar's propaganda figure as a starting point for a research on the use of female figures in the construction of the image of the dictator in the period 1930s-1970s. The propaganda machines around Salazar, Mussolini and Hitler employed images of women, both real and symbolic, to project images of these leaders that appealed to the respective populations and represented imaginary "mirrors" for a desired country. I will focus on a comparison between the public figures of Mussolini and Salazar, with the intent of shedding light on the apparent tolerance of other people's fascisms. This comparison between Salazar and Mussolini should illuminate the willingness of proto/neo-fascist groups and governments to collaborate internationally; the reciprocal admiration between such right-wing coalitions across continents; the affinities that transcend their apparent narrowness. My position in this paper is dictated by the need for understanding the fascination between fascisms as embodied in their leadership figures.

Luisa Passerini is Professor Emerita at the European University Institute, Florence, and was Principal Investigator of the European Research Council Project "Bodies Across Borders. Oral and Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond" (2013–2018). Using memory in oral, written and visual forms, she studied the subjects of social change, including African liberation movements; the movements of workers, students, and women, and the mobility of migrants to and through Europe. Among her books are Artebiografia (2024), Storie di donne e femministe (new edition 2024), Fascism in Popular Memory (1987; n.e.: Torino operaia e fascismo, 2024), La quarta parte (2023), Performing Memory, co-edited with Dieter Reinisch (2023), Conversations on Visual Memory (2018), Women and Men in Love. European Identities in the Twentieth Century (2012), Memory and Utopia (2007), Europe in Love, Love in Europe (1999), and Autobiography of a Generation. Italy 1968 (1996).

# António Costa Pinto (Lisbon)

# Latin America in the Era of Fascism

During the 1930s, a wave of dictatorships swept over Latin America, each adopting new authoritarian institutions that were created in the political laboratory of the inter-war world, particularly the personalization of leadership, the single or dominant party, and the 'organic-statist' legislatures based on corporatist models. Latin America participated in what has been called the first wave of democratization and in the subsequent 'reverse wave' of the inter-war period. The paper deals with the diffusion of fascism and the radical right in Latin America.

António Costa Pinto has a doctorate from the European University Institute, Florence (1992). He has been a visiting professor at Stanford University (1993), Georgetown University (2004), a senior associate member at St Antony's College, Oxford (1995), and a senior visiting fellow at Princeton University (1996), at the University of California, Berkeley (2000 and 2010), and at New York University (2017). He is a past president of the Portuguese Political Science Association. His research interests include authoritarianism, democratization and transitional justice in new democracies, the European Union, political elites, the quality of democracy, and the comparative study of political change. Among his many books are The Blue Shirts: Portuguese Fascism in Inter-war Europe (2000), Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe (2017), and Latin American Dictatorships in the Era of Fascism: The Corporatist Wave (2020).

# **Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe** (Berlin)

Transnational Fascism in Western Ukraine. From Bandera to Putin

Fascism played an important role in Ukraine, although the standard narratives of Ukrainian history do not mention fascism at all or introduce it only briefly. This common approach to Ukrainian history is based on the assumption that the Ukrainian nationalists were not fascists but freedom fighters and liberators, and that the Ukrainians suffered so much from the Nazis and the Soviets that the history of the Ukrainian perpetrators does not need to be integrated into the history of Ukraine. One result of this understanding of Ukrainian history are the monuments to Stepan Bandera, Yurii Shukhevych, and the soldiers of the Waffen-SS Division Galizien which have been erected in Western Ukraine since the early 1990s and before then by the Ukrainian diaspora in countries such as Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and the USA. The cult of Stepan Bandera in post-Soviet Ukraine was used as an excuse by the Russian president Vladimir Putin to attack this country, although more than 80 percent of the Ukrainians condemned the worship of Bandera, Shukhevych, and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, prior to his attack on Ukraine. In my presentation, I show that fascism is an important part of the history of Ukraine and that it is decisive to study this transnational phenomenon in Ukraine as well as in other countries in East Central and South-Eastern Europe in order to rethink the history of violence and to democratize the memory of World War II and the period between the early 1920s and late 1940s.

Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe is an Alfred Landecker Lecturer at the Freie Universität Berlin. He specialises in the history of the Holocaust, fascism, nationalism, and antisemitism. He is the author of Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult (2014) and of Polnische Bürgermeister und der Holocaust. Besatzung, Verwaltung und Kollaboration (2024). He is co-editor, with Arnd Bauerkämper, of Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe 1918 to 1945 (2017).

# **Jason Stanley** (Toronto)

## Racism and Fascism Redux

Fascism has deep roots in US history. In this talk, I will address how this current moment relates to the American past, and in what ways it resembles structures more familiar to Europe.

Jason Stanley is a philosopher, whose work ranges over philosophy of language, epistemology, linguistics, cognitive science, and social and political philosophy. He is the Bissell-Heyd Chair in American Studies in the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy at the University of Toronto, and also has an appointment in the Department of Philosophy. In addition, he is a Distinguished Professor at the Kyiv School of Economics. Before coming to the University of Toronto in 2025, he held positions as a Professor of Philosophy at Yale University (from 2013 to 2025), Rutgers University (from 2004 to 2013), the University of Michigan (from 2000 to 2004), and Cornell University (from 1995 to 2000). Among his many books are Erasing History: How Fascists Rewrite the Past to Control the Future (2024), How Fascism Works: The Politics of Them and Us (2018), and How Propaganda Works (2015).

# **Debojit Thakur** (Calcutta / Trier)

Fascists before Fascism.

A History of Hindu Nationalism and Its War on History

In spite of a great deal of evidence that suggests the contrary, writing on fascism as a phenomenon, and the conversations surrounding it, whether historical or contemporaneous, continue to situate themselves within Europe. But what appear to be the epistemological boundaries of Europe are in fact only its geo-political domains. Perhaps the discussions so far have been the consequence of overly reductive comparative frameworks—ones marked less by a genuine postmortem of ideas and the contexts that birthed them than by a hyperfocus on entanglements and similarities. Ironically, another contributing factor may also be the ever-increasing tendency to emphasize regional specificities that has characterised historical research from and about the Global South and the consequent arguments against any effort to compare political ideas from outside that framework even when they are evidently similar. To better understand fascism(s)—both in history and in our own times—we must look elsewhere and consider, at the very least, the plausibility of this political idea's concurrent roots. In this paper I shall examine one of these concurrent roots, in the Indian Subcontinent from the 1830s to the present time.

**Debojit Thakur** has a BA in economics from Presidency College, Calcutta, and two MAs in history, from Presidency University, Calcutta, and from the Central European University, Budapest. He was active in rehabilitation work in pogrom-affected areas in Delhi in 2020, and as a first responder during the COVID pandemic, eventually building infrastructure for food security, primary health care and educational networks for at-risk children. He was a research associate for a project on a comparative history of Hindu nationalism and of Zionism, and a researcher for the Georg Eckert Institut / Leibniz Institute for Educational Media in Braunschweig. Currently completing a PhD at Trier University on the economic thought of Hindu nationalists in India. He was the 2024 Einstein Fellow.

# Richard Wolin (New York)

Neofascist "Männerphantasien". Toxic Masculinity and the Search for a 'Red Caesar'

To judge by current trends in the white nationalist 'manosphere', toxic masculinity, as apotheosized by Ernst Jünger's *War as Inner Experience* and Ernst von Salomon's *The Outlaws*, is back in fashion. Its leading champion is Costin Vlad Alamariu, aka 'Bronze Age Pervert', a Romanian-American with a PP in political philosophy from Yale. Among incels and 'neo-reactionaries' (Curtis Yarvin, a self-described 'techno-fascist' and leading champion of 'dark enlightenment' was one of Alamariu's early champions) Alamariu skyrocketed to notoriety, in 2018, with *Bronze Age Mindset*: a self-published, grammatically-challenged paean to the bloodlust and inhumanity of pre-Socratic *Heldentum*, as filtered through the lens of Nietzsche's *Wille zur Macht*, especially, the concluding passages on *Züchtung* and the entitlements of *Herrenrassen*. His 2022 sequel to *Bronze Age Mindset* was a Nietzsche-inspired treatise on *Selective Breeding and the Birth of Philosophy*.

Alamariu's obsession with hygiene recalls National Socialism's views on *Erb- und Rassenpflege*. His visceral misogyny is merely the flip-side of his glorification of hyper-masculinity. Alamariu's denigration of feminism recalls Talk Radio agitator Rush Limbaugh's tirades against 'feminazis'. His unabashed misogyny distinctly anticipated the Trump administration's pronatalist fantasies: \$5000 'baby bonuses' and required menstrual cycle classes for women. As a popular white supremacist mantra boasts, 'It's all about the birthrates!' Tucker Carlson's documentary film exploration of manliness-in-crisis, 'The End of Men' (2022), demonstrates that Alamariu's discourse of cisgender *ressentiment* has "penetrated" the citadels of mainstream American conservatism. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that Vice President JD Vance is one of Alamariu's followers on X, formerly known as Twitter.

**Richard Wolin** is Distinguished Professor of History, Political Science, and Comparative Literature at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. His articles and reviews have appeared in *The New Republic, The Nation*, and *Dissent*. Among his many books are *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (2004), and most recently *Heidegger in Ruins: Between Philosophy and Ideology* (2023).

# Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam)

# Fascist Repertoires, Fascist Vocabularies

This paper proposes an approach that treats fascism as a family of ideas, with common—though often disavowed—roots, intellectual underpinnings, styles and organisations of movements, shared world-views and ideas in communication. The family shares much common ground in terms of romantic irrationalism, the concept of the intrinsic inequality of human beings of different types, or the transcendental nature of violence. A fascist repertoire of ideas does not make its appearance all at once, or together. As fascist movements develop across the world, lesser movements take on the forms of their more successful cousins, in what I call a 'voluntary Gleichschaltung' or 'synchronisation'. Two further sets of distinctions are important: First, that of fascism in search of state power, at the stage of ideological proselytization and the building of a movement, and of fascism in possession of state power, at which point it is important not to confuse state capacity with fascism. The second set of distinctions concerns fascisms in their 'core' period, between the two world wars up to the end of the second of them, at which point their central tenets were in the process of being created and stabilised and had not yet been widely discredited; and fascisms after their core period, which made them 'neo'-fascisms. Finally, fascist vocabularies are a part of a more or less self-conscious set of usages now, which do not easily conform to older left-right divides, in a postleft and neo-right age.

Benjamin Zachariah is a member of the Einstein Forum research staff. He completed his undergraduate degree in history, philosophy, and literature from Presidency College, Calcutta, and his PhD in history from Trinity College, Cambridge. His research interests include the politics of historical knowledge, historical theory and historiography, global fascism, transnational revolutionary networks, nationalisms, and memory. Zachariah is the author of Nehru (2004), Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History, c. 1930–1950 (2005, 2012), Nation Games (2011, 2016, 2020), After the Last Post: The Lives of Indian Historiography in India (2019; 2023), and The Postcolonial Volk (2025). He is co-editor of The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–1939 (2015), What's Left of Marxism: Historiography and the Possibility of Thinking with Marxian Themes and Concepts (2020, 2022), and History from Below Between Democratisation and Populism (2025).

#### **ACCOMPANYING EXHIBITION**

# Against the Normalisation of Fascism. Works by John Heartfield from the 1930s

John Heartfield (1891–1968), pioneer of photomontage techniques and committed communist artist, was an important part of the attempted propaganda fightback against the Nazis from 1933 to 1938, from exile in Czechoslovakia, mostly from the pages of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*. This exhibition provides, through his work, a narrative of what W.H. Auden called 'a low, dishonest decade'.

# Gegen die Normalisierung des Faschismus. Arbeiten von John Heartfield in den 1930er Jahren

John Heartfield (1891–1968), Pionier der Fotomontagetechnik und engagierter kommunistischer Künstler, war von 1933 bis 1938 aus dem Exil in der Tschechoslowakei heraus ein wichtiger Teil des versuchten Propagandawiderstands gegen die Nazis, vor allem auf den Seiten der *Arbeiter-Illustrierten Zeitung*. Diese Ausstellung vermittelt anhand seiner Werke eine Erzählung dessen, was W. H. Auden als "ein niedriges, unehrliches Jahrzehnt" bezeichnete.

# **Program**

# **Thursday, October 9**

## 11:00

Susan Neiman and Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam) Welcome Address and Introduction

## 11:15

Roger Griffin (Oxford)

The Relevance and Irrelevance of International
Fascism as a Contemporary Phenomenon

## 12:15

Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam)
Fascist Repertoires, Fascist Vocabularies

## 14:30

Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (Berlin)
Transnational Fascism in Western Ukraine.
From Bandera to Putin

### 15:30

Jason Stanley (Toronto)
Racism and Fascism Redux

### 16:45

Martina Bitunjac (Potsdam) Origins, Development, and Legacy of the Ustaša Movement in a Geopolitical Context

## 17:45

Luisa Passerini (Florence) "Married to the Country". Lines for a Research Project

## 19:00

A walk through the John Heartfield exhibition with Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam)

## Friday, October 10

## 10:00

Irina Nastasă-Matei (Bucharest) Nazi Soft Power in Eastern Europe. The Role of the Humboldt Fellowships in Romanian Far-Right Networks

## 11:00

Sebastiaan Faber (Oberlin)
"Spiritual Guide of the World".
Spain as a Transatlantic Fascist Hub,
Then and Now

## 14:00

Richard Wolin (New York)

Neofascist "Männerphantasien".

Toxic Maskulinity

and the Search for a 'Red Caesar'

## 15:00

Federico Finchelstein (New York)

Wannabe Fascists

## 16:30

António Costa Pinto (Lisbon)
Latin America in the Era of Fascism

## 17:30

Debojit Thakur (Calcutta/Trier)
Fascists before Fascism.
A History of Hindu Nationalism
and Its War on History

## 18:45

Susan Neiman and Benjamin Zachariah (Potsdam) In Memoriam: Tom Lehrer, 1928–2025