

Ruth C. Cohn - Poet

A very small anthology

Ruth Cohn was in her heart a **poet**. At an early age, her father **tried to** talk her out of **this, saying**: you can't live on poetry.

Her first poem is in this collection from 1990*.



The title *Zu wissen dass wir zählen*, is the first line of the poem on the back cover:

To know that we count
with our lives
with our loving
against the cold
For me, for you, for our world

Cohn 's interest in language and her sensitivity to social relations are evident in her first poem, written in Berlin dialect: *Erzählung einer jungen Arbeitslosen, The Tale of an unemployed Youth.*

She wrote this poem in 1930, 'aus dem Gedächtnis', as she remembered it. She had thought of it during the time she was at grammar school and working as a volunteer at the 'Central for private care' in Berlin. The poverty and powerlessness of the poorest of the poor made her especially sensitive to the looming political situation - realizing that it could come to an eruption of violence. Cohn explains: 'The stretched arm of the Hitler salute was seen by some as salvation, by others as a threat. The Führer promised prosperity for Aryan followers and hatred and death for opponents, communists and non-Aryans (read Jews), Gypsies and other 'Untermenschen'. She feared that a section of the population would be seduced. Having read *Mein Kampf*, Cohn understood that as a Jew there was no place for her in this

Germany. She fled to Switzerland shortly after the National Socialist seizure of power, in late March 1933.

In the book, *Living learning. A Reader in Theme-Centred Interaction* (Mary Anne Kuebel, ed. and C. Thomas Abraham, co-ed., pp. 104, 105) Ruth Cohn writes:

‘Berlin 1930. I wrote the following poem [in Berlin dialect]:

Once I also thought: ‘You can’t take it anymore’ and set out from home and ran like a crazy far, far away to anywhere in order to buy a rope or something like that.

Because what are we to live on now that father lost his job
And nobody gives the likes of us nothing and five kids won’t get full from one slice of bread.

Being tired from so much running I sit down on a bench and wanted to take off again –
That man sitting next to me who has been reading says simply, ‘Aye, that’s nice!’

He gave me that book then, too, and there was so much in it about a completely different and better life than I am used to. Then the old man left, I remained sitting. All at once it was dark and I was cold – after all, I was hungry for some food and just I thought:

‘Even if I ‘m now in a bad way, perhaps there’ll be better times. And then what a pity it’d be, if I were already dead when it finally happened –’ So I went back home to Mother – she was really worried about me and only said : ‘Eat, as long as there something there’ -

And so everything’s getting along, what with hocking and borrowing – I’m up to my neck in the dirty stuff. So I scrub and mend my rags. And that piece of rope will not running away.

I understand why people in adversity cry out for a leader. I understand why there has to be robbery and wars: injustice is to blame! There should neither be young girls who cannot go dancing because of sixty cents, nor poor, old fathers, who have to cry wretchedly about it.’

*Ruth C. Cohn *zu wissen dass wir zählen. Gedichte, Poems, mit Scherenschnitten von Annemarie Maag. Zytglogge Verlag Bern. ISBN 3-7296-0355-8. To know that we count. Poems. With Silhouettes by Annemarie Maag.*

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