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Everything must change, so that the world can remain the same: In memory of the life and work of Elmar Altvater

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Everything Must Change, so that the World Can Remain the Same: In Memory of the Life and Work of Elmar Altvater

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Everything Must Change, so that the World Can Remain the Same: In Memory of the Life and Work of Elmar Altvater*

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Abstract
Elmar Altvater was a renowned political economist and professor at the Otto-Suhr-Institute of Freie Universität Berlin from 1970 until 2006. Until his death in 2018 he was a point of reference for several generations of students, left-wing academics and politicians, trade union activists, representatives of civil society organizations in Germany, across Europe and in Latin America. He became one of the few academics in Germany who based the analysis of contemporary economic and political developments on a critical reading of Marxian approaches to understand the historical cycles of growth, recession and crisis in modern capitalism. The following text attempts to sketch some elements of a remarkable leftist intellectual history of the Federal Republic of Germany through the prism of Elmar Altvater while referring to some of the political initiatives Elmar Altvater was involved in and touching on some of the most important topics he has dealt with: the causes and consequences of the numerous debt crisis; the role of neoliberalism which emerged in the course of crisis of world finance since the late 1970s; the impact of "finanzialization" on social cohesion and politics at national, European and international level and, most importantly, his attempt to analyze the degradation of nature as the "price of progress" – on the basis of an ecologically expanded critique of political economy.

Keywords: Marx, capitalism, critical political economy, debt crisis, globalization, nature

A list of publications, a selection of books and articles and some few videos on talks of Elmar Altvater are available under: http://www.elmaraltvater.net.

* On May 1, 2018, the renowned political economist Elmar Altvater died. At a two-day symposium, which the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation organized in his honor, "The Pivotal Point of Political Economy. Capital against Labor and Nature" in Berlin in December 2018, I attempted, in my opening lecture, to reconstruct the life-world and political backgrounds that led Elmar Altvater to place the critique of political economy at the center of his academic work - and what this meant for his political commitment. Prior to that, in October 2018, a conference on "Alternatives to World Capitalism and the Contribution of Elmar Altvater" had been organized at State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), where I presented a lecture on the special relationship Elmar Altvater had with Latin America. The following text is based on both talks and a much shorter version in German language which appeared in "Blätter für deutsche un international Politik", H. 5/2019:98-111. I thank Margit Mayer, Trevor Evans and Mario Pianta for their careful English editing.

One year before the German army invaded Poland and devastated Europe for a second time - only 20 years after the end of the awful World War I -, Elmar was born on August 24th, 1938 in the mining town of Kamen in Germany's Ruhr Valley, where the iron and steel for the German Wehrmacht's war of conquest came from. No wonder he remembered his childhood as a time of hunger and fear. For immediately after the Wehrmacht's bombing of Rotterdam and Coventry in May 1940, the Allied forces began air raids on the Rhine-Ruhr region. After the invasion of the Soviet Union, the attacks were extended to aerial bombardments - with the clear aim of destroying residential areas and thus the German population's feelings about the war. Fear of night-time air raid alarms, bigoted relatives who, though hailing from catholic Poland, were members of a Protestant sect, and an overburdened mother who raised him and his younger sister through the war years by digging for leftover potatoes on harvested fields (the so-called “potato stubbles”), these were Elmar's most important childhood memories.

The father, whom he got to know only when he was 12, had been a policeman before the war; after his return from Russian captivity in 1950, he became a miner. He had been a Nazi and probably remained one, despite his war experience and long imprisonment - mentally crippled like so many Germans of his generation. After his return, he accorded his so far fatherless children the same authoritarian education he had himself received.

Elmar's school days were no honeymoon either, though learning was easy for him. He attended the modern grammar school in Kamen and he loved classical music. But his desire to learn to play the piano was driven out of him at an early age - by his music teacher, who threw a bunch of keys at his head and shouted, in front of the entire class: "Children of miners do not play the piano!” Elmar never forgot this lesson – just as he never forgot the sudden howling of engines during the nights of bombing. Only as I wrote these notes about his life did it dawn on me that it might have been those childhood memories of bombers that made Elmar react with a flood of insults to every deliberately tuned- up engine, of motorcycles and automobiles, especially to loud airplanes, even if what caused the noise was far away and had no chance to note his rage. That he never found the time and leisure to learn to play a musical instrument later in life is one of the very few regrets he had about his life in retrospect.

During his final high school years, he earned some money as an unskilled worker on the construction of the "Kamener Kreuz", a large highway crossing in the Ruhr area - and he was very proud of that. With that money he bought a moped and an old Leica camera, so he could write about local events as reporter for the "Westfälische Rundschau" and other newspapers. While still at school, he became politically interested in the then more left-wing liberal FDP in North-Rhine Westphalia. But via the "Westfälische Rundschau" he got "into the clique economy" of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD): “This brought me back together with my teachers. That was quite satisfying. As a miner's son I had always been at the bottom of the hierarchy, but suddenly I was being pampered. Suddenly I socialized with the teachers over beer"[1].

Immediately after graduating from high school, Elmar left the Ruhr area and went to Munich University with a grant, where he would study economics and sociology until 1963. He enhanced the meager income by working as a sleeping car conductor. At least since then it must have been clear to him what he would need to fight throughout his life: class conceit in all forms, stupid teachers, and the authoritarian character so widespread among the Germans of his time.

Munich, a More Open World, and Marx

At that time, Munich was the place in the old Federal Republic of Germany where young people went to escape the constrictive worlds of their origin. The Schwabing district boasted a lively theatre and cinema scene, and even the traditional restaurants had a far more liberal atmosphere than the small town in the Ruhr area where Elmar came from.

Since the mid-1960s, major protest movements had emerged against the reintroduction of compulsory military service, against the so-called “emergency laws,” and against the development and use of nuclear bombs. Before a far larger protest movement – the one against the US war in Vietnam – was to become a catalyst for a broad student movement, the German Social Democratic Party had accomplished the feat of driving parts of the academic youth, who were supposed to become their junior staff, into an extra-

[1] Altvater, Elmar (2014): Immer kritisch sein, ist unheimlich anstrengend, Interview in „Süddeutsche Zeitung“ 17th/18th March 2014.

parliamentary opposition. In 1961, the SPD decided to make membership in its university organization, the "Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund" (SDS), the Socialist German Student Association, "incompatible" with membership in the Social Democratic Party. Elmar had been and remained a member of SDS, and thus deprived himself of the ambivalent pleasure of becoming a "social democratic party soldier".

At that time, neither critical economic theorists nor professors who would refer to Marx and a "critique of political economy" existed at West German universities. The list of the few exceptions is very short: in Frankfurt am Main, the returned migrants of the "Frankfurt School", in particular Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, at the Goethe University, and at the Hochschule für Erziehung (University of Education) the pedagogue Heinz-Joachim Heydorn; in Marburg, Wolfgang Abendroth and Werner Hoffmann were the laudable exceptions; in Berlin, it was Ossip Flechtheim. In Munich, where Elmar studied at the beginning of the 1960s, there was the renowned economist Erich Preiser. While he had been a member of both the SA (Sturmabteilung, the paramilitary organization of the National Socialist German Workers Party) and NSDAP during the Nazi period, his knowledge of the subject matter of what was still known as "national economy" was far superior to that of his colleagues - and his (usually overcrowded) lectures did indeed make references to Marx.

Elmar read Marx for the first time between Christmas and New Year 1961 - alone and in bed, because he was "without coal", in two respects: he did not have the "coal" (in the sense of money!) for a trip to his relatives in the Ruhr area, nor was there coal to heat the room he rented from the widow Gerngroß in Munich. So, the three-week reading of the first volume of "Capital" took place primarily in bed. According to his own words he understood little at first - like most people who read Marx without instructions and without discussion with others.[2]

That changed when the Munich SDS group, which had shrunk to barely more than ten people after having been expelled from the SPD, began to read the writings of Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Jean-Paul Sartre, Otto Rühle, Herbert Marcuse and Karl Marx. This took place under the guidance of Ralf Gramke and Fritz Röll, two of the few non-partisan leftists of whom there were only a few in West Germany. For the Left in the old Federal Republic was

[2] Altvater, Elmar (2017): Ohne Kohle im Bett mit Marx, in: Ossietzky. Zweiwochenschrift für Politik/ Kultur/ Wissenschaft, Themenheft 17 "Mein Kapital", Vol.20, Sept 2017: 601-604.

extremely weak - not only because of the persecution of Communists and Social Democrats during the Nazi regime and as a result of the war, but also due to the militant anti-Communism of the Adenauer era in the West and Stalinist rule in the East of Germany. Stalinism in the GDR (the German Democratic Republic) and anti-Communism in the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) were the state ideologies "that united like a socket and a plug in high tension" (according to Elmar in an article in the newspaper "Frankfurter Rundschau" of January 21, 1989). That is why, in the 1960s, young people who were looking for political orientation had to be content with "trickles of a critical tradition". These had been preserved primarily in off-campus study circles formed against the mainstream. Later, various "Clubs" fulfilled the same function – such as "Club Voltaire" in Frankfurt am Main and the "Republican Club" and the "Club Ca Ira" in Berlin.

The few politically unbroken left-wing socialists and communists, who had received their socialization during the Weimar Republic and who - contrary to the spirit of the times - referred to the Marxist tradition even during the Adenauer era, are almost forgotten today. Among them, besides the previously mentioned Ralf Gramke and Fritz Röll in Munich, were Willy Huhn and Georg Jungclas. In private circles Elmar often spoke of them with great respect, admiration and gratitude, and therefore I suspect that some of them were role models for him. Documents about the work of these early teachers are - as far as I can ascertain - not available. An exception among these "homeless German leftists" is Fritz Lamm, an atheist homosexual with Jewish roots, chairman of the "Bund der Naturfreunde" (Association of Friends of Nature), who, after his remigration from Cuba, was engaged in the printers' Union *IG Druck und Papier* in Stuttgart. He became one of the initiators of the Peace movement, the "Easter March Movement", co-founded the "Sozialistische Büro" (Socialist Office) in Offenbach in 1969, and was expelled from the SPD twice in his life for being a left-wing socialist. Once during the Weimar Republic and then again at the beginning of the 1960s, by the "incompatibility decision" regarding the SDS.

Confronting Late Capitalism

Of great importance for the new West German Left and therefore also for Elmar, was Ernest Mandel, as mentor of the student movement, as an interpreter of Marx distinct from Louis

Althusser's structuralist interpretation of the Marxist oeuvre, because of his critical empirical analyses, and above all because of his central work, "Der Spätkapitalismus" (Late Capitalism). In this book, Mandel tried to capture the uneven but (as he put it) "combined" development in the various regions of the world in order to develop a strategy for the "One World". Not least thanks to Mandel, who established contact with the great wide world of Western Marxism, Elmar obtained, like many others, important impulses from the capitalism-critical studies published from within the circle around the US journal "Monthly Review", in particular from the heterodox approaches that Paul M. Sweezy, Paul A. Baran and Harry Magdoff had presented on the significance of the surplus in monopoly capitalism.

Equally important was the critique (all but forgotten today) of the fixation on economic growth in capitalist economies as well as its problems with distribution and demand, which the Austrian economist and socialist Adolf Kozlik had concentrated into a critique of "waste capitalism". Obviously, he was an important economist, since he was able to predict the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system already shortly before his death in 1964!

Finding critical contributions to the political economy of 'real socialism', on the other hand, was far more difficult. But here, too, Elmar and his contemporaries could draw on a few recent approaches: the writings of Friedrich Behrens who in the 1950s in the GDR advocated replacing state-centralized, bureaucratic leadership structures with democratic socialist self-government; the writings of Ota Sik and Jiri Kosta, who proposed similar economic reforms in Czechoslovakia; and the works by Jacek Kuron and Karel Modzelewski, who had attempted a critique of the Polish Communist Party. Particularly influential for Elmar were the writings by the Hungarian philosopher and economist Eugen Vargas, who, using Marx's ideas and concepts, had engaged with the world economic crisis of the 1920s, the connections between the agrarian crisis and industry, and the interrelations between state and economy in the USA[3].

[3] See Altvater, Elmar (1969): Einleitung in Eugen Varga, Die Krise des Kapitalismus und ihre politischen Folgen, Frankfurt/Main/Wien (Europäische Verlagsanstalt/Europa Verlag): IX-XXXIX.

The External Effects of the Planned Economy or: “The Dream of Reason Gives Birth to Monsters"

Elmar dealt with developments in the Soviet Union in his PhD dissertation submitted in 1968 and published a year later[4]; it formed the conclusion of his postgraduate studies in the then so-called "Eastern Sciences", which he had taken up after his first degree. This thesis dealt with the so-called "external effects" of the Soviet-Russian project to set in motion a rapid industrialization of the underdeveloped agrarian country through central planning. Already in this paper, which dealt with environmental problems in the Soviet Union, Elmar - referring to the third volume of Marx's "Capital" - called attention to the fact that what appears as an expression of highest rationality from both the perspective of the individual-private utilization process (mediated via market mechanisms) and the perspective of social planning, may – in terms of its effects on society as a whole - generate social as well as ecological problems.

Besides the technical conditions and bureaucratic decision-making mechanisms, he identifies the "non-calculation of natural resources in the planning of innovation projects" as the main causes of the massive ecological problems in the Soviet Union. Later, Elmar subjected the concept of "external effects", which he discusses in his dissertation with reference to Alfred Marshall and Arthur Cecil Pigou, to an even sharper critique, drawing on works by Ilya Prigogine, Isabelle Stenger and above all Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen. He pointed out that the concept of "external effects" does not account for the character of nature and nature-human relations under capitalism, and that therefore, environmental policy guidelines for "internalizing external effects" are at best naive.

A strange coincidence has ensured that Elmar, in one of the two last texts he worked on shortly before his death, returned to the “external effects” of rational planning in the Soviet Union, which he had first addressed 50 years earlier. This article, which he could not finish, has the title “Market liberalism and state intervention,” and deals with parallel developments in the US, Western Europe and the Soviet Union during the interwar period in the 1930s. A German historian added the missing part on the Soviet Union , certainly not as

[4] Altvater, Elmar (1969): Gesellschaftliche Produktion und ökonomische Rationalität. Externe Effekte und zentrale Planung im Wirtschaftssystem des Sozialismus, Frankfurt/M./Wien (Europäische Verlagsanstalt/ Europa Verlag).

Elmar himself would have done it. It was published in a catalogue accompanying an exhibition in the "Kunsthalle Mannheim" (the art hall of Mannheim, a city in the Southwest of Germany) with the title "Constructing the World. Art and Economy". The focus of Elmar's contribution can be viewed as a kind of "leitmotif" of his writings. This important "leitmotif" is figuratively expressed in a Capriccio by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya titled "The dream of reason gives birth to monsters" and always hung next to Elmar´s desk.

In Elmar´s last written words: "The monsters populate the world, they know no borders, not even spatial ones. In terms of time, the 20th century can be imagined as "short" (as Erich Hobsbawn once wrote); spatially it encompasses the globe and subjects it to the rationality of world domination. The positive side of rationality, which in the 20th century presents itself as enthusiasm for technology and science in many areas of life and work, is cultivated. The monsters are pushed into a zoo, where – as we might cynically note – they are exposed to the rationality of world domination, which turns out be a wall, a chain, a fence and a trench to tame unbridled life"[5].

Causes and Consequences of the Debt Crisis and the Degradation of Nature as the "Price of Prosperity"

He first touched his "leitmotif" in his PhD dissertation where he already identified as one important reason for external effects the "priceless benefits of natural resources". Later he would develop the argument further in various writings, especially in those books and articles which refer to the ecological destruction of the Amazon rainforest: in "Sachzwang Weltmarkt", published in 1987 ("The World Market as Practical Constraint") on the linkage between the debt crisis, incomplete industrialization and the impact of ecological constraints. The analysis was continued in "Die Zukunft des Marktes", published in 1991, which was published in English ("The Future of the Market") two years later; and in particular in "Der Preis des Wohlstands"(Price of Wealth), published in Germany in 1992, in Spanish in 1994 under the title "El Precio del Bienestar" and in Portuguese as "O Preco da Riqueza" by editora UNESP. This widely received book dealt with the bankruptcy of

[5] Altvater, Elmar/Schmidt, Ute (2018): Marktliberalismus und Staatsintervention, in: J. Gillen/ U. Lorenz (Hg.), Konstruktion der Welt. Kunst und Ökonomie 1919-1939, Mannheim (Kunsthalle): 274pp.

industrialization in developing countries and the disappointment of the late comers. It was a critique of modernization and dependency theory, which in Elmar's view did not differentiate between "development" and "valorisation," but merged the development of materials, value and capital. Consequently, these theories missed the crucial point, i.e. that the planning of development by the state does not have the necessary scope and resources to influence the conditions of capital utilization – which are determined by the terms of trade, exchange rates and the level of the interest rate.

These publications and many shorter articles which appeared in the same years focused on two topics which Elmar had repeatedly taken up and elaborated in different contexts: *first*, the causes and the consequences of the debt crisis, and *second*, the degradation of nature as the "price of progress". In August 1982, Mexico had stopped servicing its external debt. In November, Brazil followed the Mexican example, and this was followed by nearly all externally indebted countries in Latin America as well as in other parts of the world, all of whom were forced to reschedule their foreign debt obligations several times over the next 10 years until the urgency of the Third World Debt Crisis lessened. But meanwhile the external debt increased from about US$ 700 bn to US$ 1500 bn. While the debt crisis no longer jeopardized the international banking system, its consequences for 'Third World' countries were disastrous: a decline of capital inflows, dollarization, informalization of work, and loss of sovereignty in economic policy.

The role of neoliberalism in this project was complex. On the one hand, it destroyed entire industries and excluded millions of people from the formal economy. On the other hand, it fostered modern export industries, thereby stimulating more intense international competition. For Elmar it was very clear back then that a new regulatory model, which is dominant today, was emerging in the course of crisis of world finances. This model is characterized by financial conditions, which are increasingly uncoupled from real economic development. This argument is developed at length in chapter 4 and 5 of our book "Limits of Globalization," the first edition of which was first published in 1996[6].

From the 1980s until the year of his death, Elmar was engaged in the critique of economic thinking that is only interested in the monetary side of economic processes, while ignoring

[6] Altvater, Elmar/Mahnkopf, Birgit (2007): Grenzen der Globalisierung. Ökonomie, Ökologie und Politik in der Weltgesellschaft, 7th edition, Münster (Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot).

both the use value created by labor as well as the material economy of matter and energy. Again, and again he criticized mainstream economists for being oblivious to the processes of production prior to the functioning of the market and to the ecological effects of such production – the processes of disposing of waste, sewage, exhaust fumes, etc. – on nature and Planet Earth after products have been produced and consumed. Hence, he viewed capitalism as a kind of crazy belief system written into the economic, social and even mental structures of modern life, if everything has a price, which economists can calculate. In an email of February 2016 John Bellamy Foster, one of the well-known representatives of US ecological Marxism, wrote to Elmar: "…it is no accident, I believe, that the revolt against the elimination of nature within Marxian thought has come primarily from amongst those (meaning people like Elmar and himself) trained in Marxian political economy".

The "Destructive Creation" of the Amazon Rainforest

Many of Elmar's books since the late 1980s (including the books we co-authored) revolve around his main insight (based on the readings of Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen's work on thermodynamics and economic development), namely that all economic transactions do not only exhibit a value dimension, but also a material and energetic dimension. Long before a social movement critical of quantitative growth became recognized in Europe (especially in Germany), Elmar drew attention to planetary "limits to growth", which the principle of capital accumulation must systematically deny, ignore and transgress. For Elmar, the reports of Henry Ford's failed major project to grow rubber for his car production in Amazonia[7] was the prime example of a "destructive creation". This concept played with the reversal of the "creative destruction" that, according to Josef Schumpeter, had characterized the economic success of the capitalist mode of production. In Elmar's view, the loss of syntropy associated with the plantation economy in the rainforest and the export of entropy to the US that would turn rubber into tires and eventually into profit was a palpable example of "destructive creation".

[7] See Grandin, Greg (2010): Fordlandia. The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford´s Forgotten Jungle City, London (Icon Books).

Elmar first went to Brazil (or more precisely to Belém in the federal state of Pará) in the early 1980s to investigate the regional effects of the global debt crisis as part of a project sponsored by the German Volkswagen Foundation. This was the beginning of a long-lasting enthusiasm for the complex and at the same time fragile ecosystem of the Amazon rainforest and his passionate occupation with the ecological, social and economic consequences of large-scale extractive projects – such as the aluminum production in Carajás. For many decades he remained closely associated with the Núcleo de Altos Estidos Amazónicos of the Federal University of Pará. But also his friends at the universities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, where he gave numerous lectures, the many events outside of the university milieu, not least those organized by social movements he encountered over the years, kept him very close to Brazil. He loved to speak Brazilian Portuguese, he really liked the country´s music (even though his musical preferences were mainly fixed on Johann Sebastian Bach, Gustav Mahler, Johannes Brahms and Richard Wagner's opera "The Ring"). It was hard for him to refuse an additional caipirinha, and he was enthusiastic about eating feijoadas, a good Churrasco and most of all Pirarucu.

Elmar gave lectures and seminars at many universities and institutions across Europe, in the USA and Canada, in Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan), in Africa (Senegal, Namibia, RSA), in Arabian countries (Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Egypt), but above all in Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, Equator, Cuba). However, it was in Brazil and Mexico that he spent the most time over many decades. From the early 1980s he taught classes at the Universidad Aútonoma Metropolitana in Xochimilco and at the UNAM in Mexico City and attended conferences in Puebla and Oaxaca. In Mexico, thanks to the great support we received from Enrique Dussel Peters, a former student of Elmar's and a wonderful friend over so many years, we conducted field work for our research on the interrelations of informalization of work, money and politics.

The results of this field work in Mexico were published in our second major book, under the title “Globalisierung der Unsicherheit. Arbeit im Schatten, schmutziges Geld und informelle Politik” (Globalization of insecurity. Work in the shadow, dirty money and informal politics”) in 2002; a shortened version of this book came out in Spanish a few years later. Even though this book received almost no attention in Germany, for Elmar and me it was even more

important than our book on “The Limits of Globalization”, which was also published in a revised edition as “Las limitaciones de la Globalización. Economía, ecología y política de la globalizacíon” in México in 2002. In “La Globalización de la Inseguridad. Trabajo en negro, dinero sucio y política informal” we followed the insight that one must examine the forms of social life in production and consumption before discussing that what, since the 1970s, has come to be called “informalization” in the Global South. Hence, we analyzed the growing disorder of the mode of global capital accumulation then present, which has been obfuscated by concepts such as “growth” and “development”. At the time, the Global South already manifested economic and social insecurity as one of the most important aspects of globalization as a thorough-going transformation process, driven by liberalized inter-regional competition and deregulated capital markets. In addition, the deregulation and flexibilization of labor markets together with the privatization of public goods and services were inevitable consequences of the development path chosen by neoliberal political elites.

The End of the “Economic Miracle” and “Marx at the OSI”

After completing his PhD dissertation and taking up teaching and research activities at the University of Nuremberg-Erlangen, Elmar initially relegated the problems of the rationally executed destruction of nature and questions around the relationship between humans and nature in Marx's theory to the back burner. From the beginning of the 1970s until the 1990s, he concerned himself more with other questions, such as how the peculiarity of the post-war period might be characterized in the categories of a critical political economy as an epoch of capitalist development; why after the end of the then so-called "reconstruction period" of capitalism, economic and currency crises as well as class conflicts could reemerge in many Western European countries; and what role the state played in the processes of social reproduction.

For all these debates, the analysis of the "economic miracle" by the Hungarian economist Franz Janossy played a major role during the 1970s. For Janossy had drawn attention to the importance of skill structures as a limit to growth - and in so doing he had provided a political-economic explanation for the sorry state of the economics and politics of education that were widely discussed in West Germany as an "educational catastrophe". The OECD´s

advances in planning the development of “manpower” for economic growth provided the technocratic response to this catastrophe.

The student movement's response to the appropriation of qualification in educational planning for reproducing the structures of modern capitalism was a short-lived flourishing of a “Critique of the Political Economy of the Education Sector”. Given this context, it is understandable why a book published by Elmar and Freerk Huisken in 1971 with the unwieldy title "Materialien zur Kritik des Ausbildungssektors” (“Materials on the Political Economy of the Education Sector") sold 20,000 copies – unimaginable from today's vantage point. The student movement had linked the role of scholarship and education to a fundamental critique of technocratic university reform, and thus prepared the ground for a strong plea for renewing and democratizing all structures of higher education.

Elmar's critique of the deteriorating conditions in the institutions of higher education, combined with his by now considerable knowledge of Marx and his other contributions to a critical political economy, eventually led to his appointment as full professor at the (at that time very prestigious) Department of Political Science, the “Otto-Suhr-Institute” of the Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin), which has since come to be known under the acronym “the OSI”. After only a two-year period as a lecturer at the University Erlangen-Nurnberg, Elmar started his professorship in 1970, at age 32 and without the German higher doctorate, or habilitation. Both features were highly unusual, not to say impossible, at German universities at the time, and he by no means represented what most of his colleagues understood to be political science. Elmar remained quite proud throughout his life for having entered the FU Berlin thanks to the pressure from students who wanted to have “Marx at the OSI”. Judging from the booklet full of comments and appreciation, which students, graduates, co-workers and staff presented to him on his last regular seminar in 2004, it seems that he did not disappoint the expectations of his students.

As soon as he started his Berlin career, he entered the public debate with several books: the one on the “Weltwährungskrise” (“World currency crisis”) already published in 1969, which received broad attention and was quickly translated into Japanese and Swedish. Also, the two volume Handbook on “Inflation, Akkumulation und Krise” (“Inflation, Accumulation and Crisis”) from 1976, which he edited and introduced together with Volker Brandes and Jochen

Reiche and to which he contributed several chapters, was widely debated at the time. Another book he co-authored with his OSI-colleagues and good friends Jürgen Hoffmann and Willy Semmler captured even more attention; it was published in 1979 and had the title "Vom Wirtschaftswunder zur Wirtschaftskrise" ("From the economic miracle to the economic crisis"). Together with numerous journal articles which came out in the 1970s, this book helped establish Elmar´s reputation as a proponent of a new critical political economy.

Elmar was a teacher out of deep conviction, not in the sense of an instructor, but rather as a reader who wants to share his reading experiences with others and who wants to trigger and engage in controversial discussions. He always expected his students and junior academics to rummage through the abundance of materials, on their own or in groups, as he had been accustomed to doing, and then to courageously defend their own interpretations and conclusions. Many good M.A. theses, PhD dissertations and habilitation theses have been created in this way, among them many written by women.

Even when Elmar, as a result of cancer surgery in the early summer of 2016, had lost his voice forever and could communicate only with enormous difficulty through a valve in his throat, he supervised one habilitation and two PhD theses by women. He was quite proud that, despite his severe disability, he was still able to help stage in December 2017 the successful PhD defense by Beate Andrees, one of his former students, who had become chairperson of the Department on Fundamental Principles and Rights, an important position in the ILO – even without a doctorate.

Confronting the "Neoliberal Counterrevolution"

Elmar became one of the few academics In Germany (even across Europe), who based the analysis of contemporary economic and political developments on a critical reading of Marxian approaches to understand the historical cycles of growth, recession and crisis in modern capitalism. Many of his texts have been translated into other languages, into Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Danish, Swedish, French and Japanese, but interestingly only in later years also into English.

Obviously, his analysis of the world market and global dependencies were way ahead of his time. The student movement of the 1960s had based its critique of capitalism mainly on moral terms. It criticized capitalism (with Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, but also relying on André Gorz) as an entirely irrational system, characterized by bureaucracy, manipulation and repression, and blamed the system for unnecessary domination, overall alienation and (as Andre Gorz already did) on its wasteful use of resources. The non-dogmatic left in West Germany (actually mainly in West-Berlin and Marburg, but far less so in Frankfurt/Main) and Elmar in particular aimed to analyze the driving forces of what later (by the French regulation school) has been labeled the "Fordist period" of capital accumulation, the so-called "Golden Age of Capitalism" (between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s). However, this discussion started at a time, when the "Glorious Thirties", as the French call this period, were already over, at least in Western Europe. The countries in the Global South, at this time still called "Developing" or "Third World" countries, had just started to implement the "Fordist model" in a process of catch-up industrialization. The economic crisis of the 1970s had brought an abrupt end to "Keynesian state interventionism" and initiated the triumph of neoliberalism, first in Chile under Pinochet, then in the US under Ronald Regan and in the UK under Margret Thatcher, followed by France under Raymond Barre. With a bit of delay the Federal Republic of Germany in 1981 also witnessed the beginning of a "neoliberal counterrevolution" (as Milton Friedmann described the project of the "Chicago Boys" rather self-confidently and unapologetically): with strict austerity programs – cuts in social spending, in grants for students and in unemployment benefits. These ideas were, of course, also deployed to justify the many measures imposed by the German hegemon (together with the IMF and the European Central Bank) on other European countries a few decades later – in the wake of the financial and debt crisis since 2007/8.

Elmar analyzed the neoliberal attack on the "leveling egalitarianism" of "organized capitalism" in the post-war period, including its populist traits, in a far-sighted article published 1981 in the journal "PROKLA". There he wrote: "The basic structure of neoliberalism is not a theoretical-practical discourse aiming at an ideological synthesis of society – precisely this distinguishes it from Keynesianism. It produces conflicts, rebellions… But by simultaneously 'disorganizing' 'organized capitalism', it also sets in motion a process

of disorganizing and dis-integrating the subaltern strata and classes as organized power and then, in conflicts and potential rebellions, it is initially only a matter of poorly organized, invidualized movements that can be politically isolated”[8] .

The Special Relationship with the Italian Left

Among the many political initiatives that Elmar was involved in, the founding of the "Sozialistische Büro” (Socialist Office) in 1969 was quite important; Elmar frequently published in its journals "Links", "express" (and later in "Widersprüche"). This project was designed by Fritz Lamm, Günther Pabst, Klaus Vack, Oskar Negt, Wolf-Dieter Narr, Willy Hoss and many others as an attempt to advance a socialist movement "from below", which at the time meant first and foremost through left-wing works council and trade union organizing. The incentive to examine the end of the Keynesian consensus and the rise of a "neoliberal counterrevolution" was due not least to the close relationship between left-wing intellectuals and the non-traditional labor movement that had been underway in many European countries since the late 1960s.

In the mid-1970s, it was obvious that such an attempt would have much to learn from Italy. Gisela Wentzel, a member of the "Socialist Cell of Junior Faculty" at the OSI who was familiar with the country, its language and political organizations, established the first contact with the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano) and groups of the New Italian Left – “Lotta Continua”, “Potere Operaio” and the newspaper "Il Manifesto". At the beginning of 1977, German and Italian leftists discussed the perspectives of Eurocommunism in a center run by the wonderful Swiss bookseller Theo Pinkus in Salecina. Theo Pinkus was one of those unorthodox left-wing spirits from the non-academic milieu, to whom the 1968 generation owed so many impulses, and whose study library Elmar always kept in touch with.

For the German Left at that time, and certainly for Elmar, the "Bel paese", Italy, the "beautiful land", was far more than just a projection screen for political dreams - which, like Eurocommunism, were to vanish forever with the death of Enrico Berlinguer in 1984 at the latest. What attracted many of the German Left in the 1970s was the special appeal of “the

[8] Altvater, Elmar (1981): Der gar nicht diskrete Charme der neoliberalen Konterrevolution, in: *PROKLA* 44:5-23.

old Italy”, whose gradual perishing, as Pier Paolo Pasolini has shown, was inevitable. However, traces of this Italian culture could still be found: In the architectural witnesses of the ancient culture of the Mediterranean (not yet flooded by millions of tourists); in the then still lively cities (where poor people could still afford to live); obviously, in the enchanting landscapes and in the fantastic cuisine. At that time, traces of the once so rich Italian folk culture still existed, in which the Germans were able to participate, enchanted – the countless district festivals and the annual Festa de l´Unità (organised by PCI to support its large national daily newspaper). There, German leftists learned to sing folk songs - a practice they frowned upon at home because the Nazis had based their propaganda on it.

Elmar and many other colleagues, comrades and friends would not only spend their holidays in Italy, they also networked and created many political and academic connections, especially around magazines, newspapers and other publication projects - such as the volumes of "Storia del Marxismo", which were published by the Einaudi publishing house in the early 1980s. Relations with "Il Manifesto" were particularly close and sustained. Elmar wrote repeatedly for this newspaper and was frequently interviewed by its journalists - on issues around German unification, developments in the SPD and the Greens, and, in the last ten years of his life, of course, on the impact of European austerity policy enforced on the southern European member states (particularly on Greece) on behalf of the German government.

In 1989/90, for a brief historical moment, the hopes of the German and Italian Left had become reversed: while the Germans had once looked hopefully to Eurocommunism, after the fall of the Berlin Wall many Italians expected the Germans – East and West - to profit from the end of “system competition” and to open up a renewal of socialism. As is well known, nothing came of this.

At this point, an anecdote from Elmar's life may be permitted, as it casts a revealing light on the relationship between German and Italian leftists during the "Wendezeit" (the “time of change”). We had celebrated New Year's Eve 1989/90 in the house of the Austrian Consul General Gabriele Matzner; her husband Egon Matzner was at that time the director of a Research Unit at the Science Center for Social Research (the WZB Berlin), where I worked. As always, many journalists were invited to Matzner's, among them a larger group from "Il

Manifesto". We had eaten well, drunk a lot, tried to dance the Viennese waltz, and had fiercely discussed the new perspectives that were now emerging in united Germany. But then the Italian comrades wanted to go to the Brandenburg Gate to celebrate the first year of reunification in the right place. Elmar and I were not very enthusiastic about this idea, because it is a long way from Berlin-Zehlendorf to the city center. Nevertheless, we made it to the Brandenburg Gate before midnight. The 17th of June Street, leading to the Brandenburg Gate, was already full of broken bottles, there was no music, no fireworks, only a lot of drunken people. Nevertheless, the Italians continued to be animated and confident - very similar to the attitude of Luciana Castellina, with whom we had spoken a few weeks earlier. But now the hopes of the German and Italian left were reversed: once the Germans had looked hopefully at Eurocommunism; after the fall of the Berlin Wall the Italians expected that the Germans would finally establish a "socialism with a human face" on the territory of the former GDR.

A little later, in 1991 there was another meeting of German and Italian leftists, including Rossana Rossanda, Luciana Castellina and, among the Germans, our friend Hermann Scheer of the SPD, who at that time was already the most important political voice - far beyond the German borders - for a decisive shift of energy policy towards solar and renewable energy. But at this meeting in Ariccia, near Rome, everything was different. Representatives of the citizens' movements from Central and Eastern Europe were also invited. The aim was to discuss joint left-wing projects in the newly emerging Europe. To the astonishment and horror of the Germans and Italians, however, the civil rights activists from the Eastern European countries made it clear that they saw the “Fall of the Iron Curtain” first and foremost as the end of Soviet foreign rule - and as the regaining of state sovereignty and national identity. Robert Mroziewicz from the Polish magazine “Kritika” proudly proclaimed that for them nationalism was "progress" and synonymous with “liberation” from the last imperialist power in Europe, the Soviet Union. On behalf of the Germans and Italians gathered together and in her own countenance, Rossana Rossanda coolly and concisely pointed out that the Left had no use for the concept of nationalism. We Germans remained silent, which prompted the German daily "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" to publish a venomous article.

Why is this encounter worth mentioning? Well, Elmar was right in many of his intellectual judgments and political assessments. But on the question of nationalism in Europe, which is reappearing in every corner today, he was as blind as all the Left, in Germany and, as it seems today, also in Italy. He simply could not imagine that after the experiences of the "short 20th century" (Eric Hobsbawn) in Europe, the old ghosts could once again return.

Some of Elmar's personal relations to Italy continued until his death, above all his 50 year-long friendship and collaboration with Luciana Castellina. For Elmar, Italy had for decades been a very important reference point and therefore, the political and cultural developments in this country saddened him tremendously. For the Italian friends he "became a very important link", as Luciana Castellina wrote in a message on the occasion of the symposium organized in his honor in December 2018 in Berlin: "Always, when we got confused about what is happening in the German left (the left, as we know, is always difficult, everywhere, to understand!) we were asking Elmar for advice. He has been our German guide".

The Search for Shared Research and Politics

For decades Elmar was involved in the work of the International Lelio Basso Foundation, for which he also served as vice president for some time. The foundation was created to continue the work of the Russell Tribunal on US war crimes in Vietnam and organised the International Peoples' Tribunal to address violations of fundamental rights, with many sessions devoted to Latin-America in the 1970s. These tribunals are prepared on the basis of legal expertise, ordinary indictments, defense documents, and the hearing of experts, and they lead to a judicial verdict. Elmar always took his work for the Basso Foundation very seriously; he travelled to many of the tribunals, to India and above all to Latin America; he held summer courses for the Foundation in Naples and carefully worked through the (often hundreds of pages of) material in order to prepare himself for a tribunal. And he always did his work for the Foundation in close cooperation and friendship with Gianni Tognoni, François Rigaeux, Luciana Castellina and especially with Linda Bimbi and the other women from her Franciscan congregation , who shared with Elmar their attachment to Brazil – and who did all the organizational work for the Foundation.

What fascinated Elmar about Lelio Basso – an Italian socialist, renowned expert on the writings of Rosa Luxemburg and European leftists of the first hour - was that he had understood the legacy of Rosa Luxemburg as an obligation to develop a socialist alternative that (according to Lelio Basso) would have to be "social, socializing and socialist," and which could only emerge as "the result of a long and never-ending collective process of research, political action and reflection"[9].

The great importance that the "ricerca collectiva", the joint search for scientific and political knowledge, played in Elmar's life, can be illustrated by his lifelong engagements in many journal projects. Journal projects were of central importance for his generation, not as an opportunity to acquire academic merits, but to mediate between scholarship, politics, and social movements. During the 1960s and until the 1980s political discussions in Germany and elsewhere in Europe were primarily organized by and around journals.

It would be worthwhile to recall a publication project which is nearly forgotten: "Socialism in the World", a "Journal of Marxist and Socialist Thought", which accompanied the meetings of critical leftists, both affiliated with and at arm's length distance to political parties, from all over the world at the party school of the Yugoslav Communist Party in Cavtat since 1977. Elmar always remembered the meetings in Cavtat as a great intellectual enrichment; he had a long friendship with Milos Nikolic, the journal's long-time editor. Anyone who goes through the list of those who wrote in "Socialism in the World" until the end of the 1980s will be surprised how large and colorful the world of Marxist and socialist thought was at that time. Even the last issue of the magazine, which was published in English and French, contains two milestones of left-wing theoretical history: First, "Marxism and the Theology of Liberation" by Enrique Dussel, the renowned liberation theologian from Latin America, with whom Elmar met on many visits to Mexico - and whose son Enrique Dussel Peters has over the years become an important interlocutor and good friend for us. The last issue of "Socialism in the World", published in 1989, also contains the famous essay "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism - a Theoretical Introduction" by James O´Connor, who, like Joel Kovel and Elmar, was concerned with an ecological extension of the critique of political economy. All three passed away between November 2017 and May 2018.

[9] See Altvater, Elmar (1995): Für Lelio Basso oder: der politische Sinn der kollektiven ´ricerca`, Roma, Lelio Basso Foundation, 16.12.195.

While in the 1960s in Germany the monthly “Neue Kritik” (“New Critique”) and “Das Argument” were the most relevant journals, in later years “Das Argument” and “Sozialistische Politik” (Socialist Politics) and “Leviathan” played very important roles in the left debate and Elmar’s life as well. But he also published in the Journal “links” (“left”) of the "Sozialistische Büro", the social-democratic monthly “Frankfurter Hefte/Neue Gesellschaft,” in various journals of the German trade unions and on a quite regular base also in “Socialist Register”. In the early 1970s “Sozialistische Politik” or: “SoPo” was a journal published on behalf of a committee of the elected student representatives at the Institute of Political Science of the Freie University Berlin, the OSI, and many members of the teaching staff at the OSI as well as important representatives of the non-partisan socialist left, such as Johannes Agnoli, Ossip Flechtheim and of course Elmar wrote for it – as they did, at the same time, for the journal “Leviathan”. When in a surprise coup in 1971 a minority in the SoPo editorial group attempted to attach the journal to the West German Communist Party, Elmar motivated 25 editors and authors to leave and found a new journal. This new quarterly was named “PROKLA”, an acronym for “Probleme des Klassenkampfs” (Problems of the Class Struggles), and it became one of the most important platforms for critical leftist debates in the “short summer of academic Marxism”. In the 1970s it had a circulation of 10,000 copies - a number reached today only by the “Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik”, where Elmar published many, including some of his last texts. But nowhere has he published more articles than in PROKLA, often jointly with others. This quarterly still exists today as “PROKLA. Journal for Critical Social Sciences” and thanks to its editorial collective, all Elmar's articles published in the journal are now available in an electronic version on the journal´s website.

At the time when PROKLA was founded, very few intellectuals thought of aligning their social activities primarily with the principle of competition; the pursuit of individual performance had not yet clouded their minds. Thus, throughout the 1970s, the journal published many collectively authored essays. The joint work of the editorial board went far beyond just procuring, writing and editing. It was an integral part of a lifestyle. In his obituary to the early deceased Christel Neusüß, who at the time had been an essential pillar of the editorial work, Elmar´s companion and, like himself, an extremely intelligent and politically committed political economist, Elmar wrote that collective work in the journal “means not only joint discussion, separate reading, sometimes frustrating combination of individually written parts

into a united whole, but also: spending days together, going on walks, and cooking together". I met Elmar for the first time personally in the mid-1980s when I joined the editorial board of the journal as managing editor. The first product of our close cooperation, which was to last more than 30 years, was an anthology I edited on behalf of the editorial board of PROKLA, which came out in 1988 under the title "Der gewendete Kapitalismus. Kritische Beiträge zur Theorie der Regulation („Turned-over Capitalism. Critical Contributions to the theory of regulation"). In addition to the two of us, three other editors of the journal, Kurt Hübner, Heiner Ganßmann and Thomas Hurtienne, also contributed articles. This book project was preceded by intensive debates while cooking and over excellent food and drink, continued the good tradition of collective editorial work.

However, in the mid-1980s the circulation of the journal had already begun to decline sharply. We received fewer articles emerging out of a political discussion context, but more and more that would be written for professional reasons. But editorials remained the "collective heart" of the magazine project for quite some time; they were the subject of long debates, because they were intended to reveal, across individual issues and topics, a consistent "line" or (intellectual-political) perspective. Elmar was realistic enough to recognize that, since the end of the 1980s at the latest, individual professional needs demanded their right alongside political interests. Yet he still wanted to insist that it should not be the political and intellectual quality of its various articles that determined the significance of a leftist journal, but instead its ability to maintain its place in the public debates - by intervening in national and international discussions, by creating collaborations with other journal projects, political centers and movements. At this threshold many journal projects that Elmar was involved with gave up their (critical) spirit[10], precisely because the "weapon of critique" had become dull and useless - as Elmar wrote when the journal "links" ran its last issue. Also the journal PROKLA, which he first initiated, then promoted with commitment and conviction over decades, he later could only support, and finally after 40 years he abandoned it , with a heavy heart - precisely because he could no longer recognize that a collective was embarking on a joint search for a political project.

[10] In German, to give up one's spirit means to conk out, to breathe one's last breath. So the sentence conveys both, that the journals would abandon their projects and/or that they would lose their critical edge.

But whenever the opportunity for a collective work would arise, Elmar much preferred it to lonely research and individual authorship. He valued the debate over first drafts of a manuscript at least as much as the presentation of a halfway persuasive product to a wider public. Therefore, there are many books and essays that he has co-authored. To list only a few from the early days: Freerk Huisken, Volker Brandes, Jochen Reiche, Jürgen Hoffmann, Willi Semmler, Otto Kallscheuer, Kurt Hübner, Michael Stanger, Ulrich Albrecht, Ekkehart Krippendorff, Raul Rojas, Jochen Lorenzen. Even in the 1990s he was still ready for collective projects – with Achim Brunnengräber, Markus Haake, Heike Walk, Frigga Haug, Oskar Negt, Rolf Hecke, Michael Heinrich, Petra Scharper-Rinkel und Raul Zelik, to mention only the partners in collective book projects and not the many people with whom he wrote joint articles.

Also, my own experience of more than 30 years of joint publishing activities was consistently pleasant. Of course, reading and writing separately and then "negotiating" what was sustainable and what had to be deleted was time-consuming, but never wearing. Five to seven revisions were normal for individual book chapters. But in this way, it was also possible to ensure that each other's critical feedback would be sufficiently considered while one's own intentions could be "saved". Our cooperation became more difficult when our respective organization of time became more imbalanced. When Elmar, after reaching retirement age, was able to reduce the burdensome obligations that a university career inevitably entails, he could concentrate entirely on writing and subsequent discussions with changing audiences. Meanwhile I continued to teach for many more years and with growing commitments in four international Master courses. For me, the increasingly scarce time resources were still enough for joint essays, but not for books.

So Elmar wrote four of his last five very influential books on his own and much faster – there were far fewer objections from my side to deal with: His radical critique of capitalism “Das Ende des Kapitalismus wie wir ihn kennen” (“The End of Capitalism as We Know it”), published in 2005, in Portuguese in 2010 and in Spanish 2011. His evaluation of the financial crisis of 2008, “Der große Krach” (“The Big Crash”) was published in 2010. His small books on “Marx neu entdecken” (“Rediscovering Marx”) and “Engels neu entdecken” (Rediscovering Engels”) were published in 2012 and in 2015; the book on Marx was translated into Spanish as “Redescubrir a Marx” by the office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in México in 2017.

Fortunately, he found Raul Zelik to be a very likeable and competent co-author, and they co-authored, in 2009, “Die Vermessung der Utopie” (“Surveying utopia”), which was a great pleasure for Elmar.

A Political Intellectual Who Never Surrendered

A central motivation for Elmar was to link politics and economics, at the local and national level, as well as at the European and the international level, to the “real economy” of matter and energy, that is to conditions of all life on Earth - in all his academic writings and in his numerous political interventions; for his teaching; in his appearances on radio and television; in the many, sometimes very long interviews that he gave. and the countless lectures, panels and discussion rounds that he stemmed, either in front of or together with people from the most diverse circles – trade unions as well as bank representatives, at social movement events as well as church-sponsored affairs, or public debates with representatives of political parties from a broad spectrum.

At the same time, it was a matter of course for him to practically involve himself in politics and to always start anew, after a failure or slackening of political initiatives. His political commitment began with the leftist student organization SDS in Munich and the “Socialist Office” based in Offenbach, but became strongest during the period following the so-called "Wende" – the “change” after the fall of the Berlin Wall - of 1989/90. Even though he had never imagined a reunification of the two Germanys within the framework of a democratic, progressive, emancipatory discourse, when the Wall fell, he immediately inserted himself into countless debates and activities, in order to help steer the new development into democratic, progressive and emancipatory waters - without recourse to national ideologies.

Probably the most important project of this interim phase for him and for us was the plan to establish a "Kritische Gewerkschaftsakademie” (Critical Trade Union Academy"). This was based on an idea initially put forth by Martin Kempe, then editor of the left-wing daily “Die Tageszeitung” (“TAZ”), Helmut Schauer of the metal workers union IG Metall, Bodo Zeuner, an OSI colleague and old friend, and Elmar. In no time many critical intellectuals and trade unionists from East and West Germany jumped on board. For months we discussed how a permanent space for exchange might be created, where all social, political, cultural problems

of the "new Germany" could be discussed, a place where representatives of trade unions and other progressive social forces, journalists and interested individuals could come together to jointly deal with the foreseeable problems with solidarity. Racism, right-wing radicalism, the social question in combination with democratic culture were on the agenda, as well as the European poverty levels and the question of a trans-border regional policy - and finally an aggressive redistribution of working time in order to counter the foreseeable deindustrialization of East Germany. Later, the foreseeable disastrous effects of a European Currency Union on trade unions and the role of collective bargaining have motivated Elmar and myself to write a book on the challenges of collective bargaining after the fall of the wall and after Maastricht (which appeared in 1993 under the title “Gewerkschaften vor der europäischen Herausforderung”, “Trade Unions Facing the European Challenge”). But this book was ignored by most of the scientific community and heavily criticized by some intellectuals close to the German trade unions – because in the book we have argued that without a social and a political union a currency union would place all the resulting pressure on wages, workers and the unions and thus would lead to a disaster. At this time, nobody wanted to listen to these sorts of warning.

But also the important project of a “Critical Trade Union Academy” never got a chance: we had an interesting conference in the wonderful “Bauhaus” building of the East German Trade Union Federation, at the Müggelsee in East-Berlin in December 1992, where the envisioned association was supposed to be created. But the board of the German Trade Union Confederation (the DGB) refused the financial support via its Hans Böckler Foundation, which it had promised before, and thus this intelligently conceived project was dead. A missed chance, another shattered hope.

Of those, there were to be more in the years to come. But Elmar, as he himself put it in an interview, was “tough” and was hardly ever completely discouraged. Not even by the disappointments he was to experience from the Green Party later. Elmar was one of the founding members of the “Alternative List for Democracy and Environment Protection” (“AL”), which, after merging with an alliance of East German opposition groups and the West German Greens (“Bündnis 90/Die GRÜNEN”), morphed in 1993, after German unification, into the “Green Party”. In the early days of the German Greens, things were very controversial and sometimes rather chaotic. Clashes between "Fundis", who stood for an

ecologically motivated fundamental opposition to the established political system, and the so-called "Realos", i.e. “Realpolitiker” (who stood for pragmatic "realpolitik") were quite sharp, always time-consuming, and often led to strange compromises. Even though Elmar loved to engage in controversies, a turning point in party politics was reached in 1999 that he could no longer support. While the GREENS held the foreign ministry (with the “Realo” Joschka Fischer as minister) in a coalition government with the Social Democrats, the party decided to send German ground troops – for the first time since World War II – into the Kosovo war, selling their support for the illegal NATO bombardments in Yugoslavia as "protection of human rights and freedom". Elmar did not immediately want to leave the party he had helped found, but he stopped paying his membership fee. Finally, when in 2001 the Green parliamentary group in the German Bundestag decided in favor of a war against Afghanistan - under the label of the "fight against terrorism" and in "unconditional solidarity" with the USA – for Elmar the Greens had crossed the line of what he could tolerate and left the party. Among the letters he received from people, who thanked him for his decision and the reasons he had presented to the public, was one by Wolfgang and Lisa Abendroth's daughter, Elisabeth Abendroth, where she let Elmar know that her 85-year-old mother, after 50 years of party membership, had resigned from the SPD for the very same reason as he had resigned from the Greens.

Not only in many articles, but also in some very fierce discussions with previously good friends, Elmar tried to make clear that the Afghan war, now going on for almost 18 years, must be understood as the beginning of a new era - for Europe and for the world. This was also the central message of our book, “Konkurrenz für das Empire. Die Zukunft der europäischen Union in der globalisierten Welt“ (Competition for Empire. The Future of the European Union in a Globalized World”) published in 2007. Like many, we long held on to the nice vision of a “peaceful Europe", debated it in the context of the civil society movements of "attac Germany" and "attac Austria" at many events - and especially during the summer academies held at the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Research in Stadtschlaining in Burgenland, Austria, under the leadership of Gerald Mader, an Austrian Social Democrat of the Kreisky era. The two of us enthusiastically participated in Gerald Mader's multi-year research project on "Europe as a power of peace". But even this inspiring project, in which many researchers and peace activists from South-Eastern Europe

participated, and which resulted in six big books, was not able to prevent the building of walls on the EU's south-eastern borders to block the path of refugees and migrants to the wealthy core of Europe.

Elmar kept maintaining personal relations with individual members of the Green Party and friendly relations with many Social Democrats. But he was quite relieved when in 2007 the founding of the party "Die LINKE" (The LEFT) again offered the opportunity to help shape a political project, if only from the margins - because he never did feel comfortable without a party.

Some friends from the old days, who live in Berlin's trendy neighborhoods, may have snickered at him - for his local engagement in the marginal district of Berlin, Spandau, where industry has left a long time ago, leaving behind many old people, many working poor, and above all, recently arrived migrants from all over the world. An Elmar who gave lectures and seminars at universities and prestigious institutions all over Europe, North America, in Arab and Asian countries, in Africa and above all in Latin America: how could such a person choose to live in Spandau for more than 30 years, and how could he even want to establish a "Socialist Education Academy", at age 75? Yes, that, too, was one of his political projects -- another project that failed, as so many others. There were many reasons why this project did not get off the ground, but a lack of Elmar's commitment or that of the Spandau chapter of the LEFT Party, who were involved in it, were not among them. The explanation is obvious: Elmar always saw himself as a political intellectual in the sense of Antonio Gramsci. His critique of the prevailing economic and political theories was motivated by his ambition to understand social power relations *in order to try to overcome them* in a radically democratic social and ecological sense. In his opinion, it is the critique of real political relations that provokes the critique of the categories, in which the world is interpreted.

And the real political conditions in the poor neighborhoods of Berlin-Spandau are no less in need of change than anywhere else - for example in Vietnam. This is where his last trip abroad took him, in spring of 2016, to a seminar organized by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's office in Hanoi, to discuss the prospects of a socio-ecological transformation in Asia and Europe with representatives of numerous civil society organizations from Southeast Asia. His very last public lecture, before he lost his voice forever, after laryngeal surgery, he

delivered in Berlin to the Seniors' Association of his party. There is a nice photo of it. But Elmar, understandably, looked at this picture with very mixed feelings.

Another "Great Transformation", Still Not in Sight

Two topics were of lifelong importance to Elmar. Since the future of our societies and possibly even that of human civilization depends on their progressive treatment, both urgently call for a convincing solution. The first topic is money as "a common good," as Marx saw it. Elmar already dealt with this topic in the early 1970s, when the world currency, the US dollar, was detached from the gold anchor, leaving the exchange rate to the market, or more precisely, to the major international banks and funds. When, soon thereafter, financial markets were liberalized, and hence private actors have been enabled to exert their influence on prices and returns, this resulted in a sweeping loss of economic sovereignty, an intensification of international competition, and the development of the regulatory model of "financialization" dominant today. Its hallmark is that securities generated "out of nothing" make it possible to declare a claim on the real national product and thus generate debts that these securities must service. This creates countless debtors, or, like the German phase has it: debtors are "like sand at the seaside."

At the same time, Elmar always stressed that the players on the global financial markets can disconnect themselves from the dynamics of the real, productive economy only in relative terms and only for a certain point in time. When a financial bubble bursts - and since the 1980s the world has experienced a veritable firework of bursting financial bubbles -, it inevitably becomes apparent how close the link is between the returns that can be realized on financial markets, and the fact that hard work is being done somewhere in the world - and this always in exchange, but more often in dissonance, with nature. Since the 1970s, however, this work occurs less and less in the form of employment relations protected by a welfare-state, even in countries, where in the "Golden Age of Capitalism" employment relations had been formalized and standardized and trade unions rights had been strengthened. It is obvious, that the growing disorder of the present mode of global capital accumulation is closely linked to the shrinking role of the state as a broker between capital and labor in the era of neoliberal capitalism. This development has contributed to the

dynamics of escalating disparity and progressive inequality around the world. In a world of ´oligarchic globalization´, where only the economically strong nations and the wealthy 20 percent, but in particular the richest 1 percent, can have realistic positive expectations, liberal welfare policies of progressive inclusion are no longer on the political agenda. This was the central message of one of the last articles Elmar and me have written together[11].

However, Elmar has always viewed financial crises and rising inequality in times of rising wealth, as an integral part of a much broader crisis in which contemporary capitalist society finds itself. Therefore, he understood the widespread shorthand diagnosis of a "mutiple crisis" as an expression of intellectual snugness or even worse: as a refusal to engage in the conceptual effort of a critique of political economy. For him, nature as the foundation of value-generating production and the irreversible consequences of capitalism on nature have always been a key element of financial and economic crises. In his view, therefore, attempts to address an economic crisis with the search for greater growth are necessarily doomed to fail, either in the short or in the long term.

His second main thematic interest was the attempt to elaborate the critique of political economy – by drawing on debates in the natural sciences, anthropology, and social sciences - just as Marx had planned it at the end of his life. Following Marx, he saw the "pivotal point" of theoretical analysis and the irresolvable contradictions of really existing modern capitalism in the dual character of labor as human ability and commodity, in the simultaneity of the production of use value and exchange value, of natural form and value form, of concrete and abstract labor.[12] And he had hoped that he might, in a process of "ricerca collettiva" in the sense of Lelio Basso, together with others, trace the transformation process which capitalism had undergone in the course of the 20th and 21st century. Even if there were differences in theoretical approaches to an ecologically expanded critique of political economy between Elmar, James O´Connor, Joel Kovel, and John Bellamy Foster, these theorists were probably the ones whom Elmar felt had correctly understood his work; he was not able to take note of Kohei Saito's study on the ecology of Karl Marx because of his

[11] See Altvater, Elmar/Mahnkopf, Birgit (2017), Der begrenzte Planet und die Globalisierung des einen Prozent, in: Blätter für deutsche und international Politik, 5/2017: 63-74.

[12] See as his very last publication on this subject: Altvater, Elmar/Mahnkopf, Birgit (2018): The Capitalocene: Permanent capitalist counter-revolution, in: Socialist Register 2019, A World Turned Upside Down?, London (Merlin Press): 79-99.

illness. In any case, he could do little with superficial critiques of consumption and lifestyle of contemporary capitalism, even though he appreciated the motives of the activists in the "post-growth" movements - like all social movements - from a political point of view. He deeply regretted, however, that many other critical intellectuals, who were as familiar as he was, and perhaps more so, with the critique of political economy, did not make its ecological expansion an important goal of their research.

For Elmar it was always clear that capitalism as we know it has no future. For it is based on a profoundly hostile principle: the subordination, appropriation and, eventually, destruction of the two sources of all life, nature and humans. Elmar and I have often talked about the three possible futures that we can imagine for capitalism or could hope for: the transition to a "green capitalism", i.e. within the system; another "Great Transformation" in the sense of Karl Polanyi, but as a social and ecological transformation; or a long period of violent confrontations, revolts and wars that no one really wants, but which is increasingly likely. To the end of his life he remained convinced that a “green capitalism” will not save the day and that a "great social-ecological transformation" was still possible.

He loved to quote the same authors repeatedly with the linguistic images that were important to him. This included the Kantian image of the planet as a ball on which all humans are inevitably dependent on each other, for better or for worse. He understood this image as an invitation to preserve and defend what has been achieved (in the truly not glorious history of our species) in the wealthy industrial societies, such as: acceptable social systems, freedom of expression, cultural diversity, trade union rights for workers, or less repressive educational practices than the ones he himself had enjoyed in his childhood. Of course, he understood that many of these achievements were based on social exclusion, the oppression of women, racist subjugation and imperial exploitation, as well as a dramatically accelerating destruction of both ecological and social systems. Therefore, another aphorism, which can be found in many of his texts, as if to balance the implicit optimism of Kant's linguistic image, was probably even more important for him: the motto from Guiseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's "Gattopardo": "For things to remain the same, everything must change". He never allowed himself, though, to take a second, more sober look at this beautiful novel, because at its end it is not change that triumphs, but futility.

But unlike the protagonist of the "Leopard", the Prince of Salina, Elmar would have never said that he lived only two or three - of the almost 80 - years of his life. For almost 60 years he tried to change the world; now it is up to others to make it so that it may survive.

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