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# Bund der „Euthanasie“-Geschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten e.V.

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## BEZ-Informationen

Detmold, im Dezember 2009

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### Rundbrief Nr. 82

Lieber Mitglieder, liebe Freunde,

in unserem letzten Rundbrief möchten wir Ihnen einen Überblick geben, über das, was in den vergangenen Monaten geschehen ist.

Mir ist schon etwas wehmütig zumute, diesen letzten Rundbrief zu schreiben, in dem ja schon seit 1987 Frau Nowak und Frau Heß über die Aktivitäten des BEZ berichtet haben.

Unser Arbeitsschwerpunkt in den vergangenen Monaten war, den Umständen geschuldet, die Vorbereitung zur Vereinsauflösung. Dazu gehörten nicht nur die Kündigungen bestimmter Verpflichtungen, die wir als Verein eingegangen sind bzw. eingehen mussten, sondern auch, und das mit großer Sorgfalt, die Vorbereitung unseres Aktenbestandes für die Übergabe in das Landesarchiv NRW, Staats- und Personenstandsarchiv Detmold, und unserer Bibliothek für die Übergabe in die Lippische Landesbibliothek.

Bei der Überprüfung des Bibliotheksbestandes mussten wir dann doch feststellen, dass einige Bände sich im Laufe der Jahre „verflüchtigt“ haben. Trotzdem haben wir noch einen Bestand von fast 600 Bänden.

Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Arbeiten haben wir einige Einladungen zu Tagungen und Vorträgen in dieser Phase nicht angenommen. Wo Frau Hamm jedoch in den letzten Wochen noch hingereist ist, war die Enthüllung einer Stele im ehemaligen Stadt Krankenhaus in Offenbach für die Opfer der dort zwangssterilisierten Menschen und für die „Euthanasie“- Opfer aus der Stadt Offenbach. Die Geschichtswerkstatt dort hat in den vergangenen Jahren durch eigene Recherche, Veranstaltungen, Vorträge und Spenden sammeln, dieses Projekt realisieren können. Unsere Ausstellung war übrigens auch in Offenbach zu sehen (Mai 2008) und wir waren mit einem Vortrag beteiligt. Die schlichte, schön gestaltete Stele steht direkt im Eingangsbereich der heutigen städtischen Kliniken,

also nicht irgendwo draußen im Gebüsch, wie es häufiger an anderen Orten der Fall ist. Jeder, der den Eingangsbereich der Klinik durchschreitet, wird an die Opfer der „Zwangssterilisation“ und „Euthanasie“ erinnert.

Unsere Ausstellung kommt jetzt gerade aus Bottrop zurück, wo sie in der Evangelischen Martinskirche zu sehen war und geht dann noch auf ihre letzte Reise nach Seeheim-Jugenheim, in der Nähe von Darmstadt, wo sie ab 25. Januar bis zum 8. Februar 2010 zu sehen sein wird. Von dort geht sie, das fällt uns schon schwer, ins Archiv. Es wird ihre letzte Reise sein. Aber ein schwacher Trost bleibt. Sie ist auf unserer neuen Internetseite zu sehen und auch dort herunterzuladen. Unsere Seite [www.ag-bez.de](http://www.ag-bez.de) ist zwar noch nicht über Google zu erreichen, aber man kann sie schon so besuchen. Sie wächst weiter, auch über die Jahreswende hinaus. Und wir sind froh, dass die technische Umsetzung in guten Händen ist.

Im Jahr 2008 hatten wir – unterstützend – einige Interviews gemacht, weil eine Journalistin zum Thema Zwangssterilisation, „Euthanasie“ und Anerkennung der Verfolgten in der Gesellschaft berichten wollte. Ihren fertigen Artikel hat sie in Deutschland mehreren großen Tageszeitungen und auch Wochenzeitungen angeboten. Keiner der Redakteure hatte Interesse an dem Thema. Umso mehr freuen wir uns, dass der Beitrag von Frau Loll nun in der TIMES in London, wenn auch gekürzt, erscheinen konnte. Wir haben ihn auf die Rückseite des Rundbriefes gedruckt und bitten zu entschuldigen, dass er nur in der Originalsprache dort zu lesen ist.

Wir haben in den vergangenen Monaten nach der Bundestagswahl auf der politischen Ebene die Fraktionsvorsitzenden angeschrieben mit der wiederholten Forderung, parteiübergreifend, nach sechzig Jahren des Bestehens der Bundesrepublik Deutschland die Opfer von Zwangssterilisation und die Angehörigen der „Euthanasie“-Opfer anzuerkennen und sie im Sinne des BEG zu entschädigen. Denn eine Ächtung des GzVeN durch den Bundestag und die dadurch erreichte Rehabilitation der Opfer nach jahrzehntelanger Ausgrenzung und Stigmatisierung, wäre ohne Folgen für sie mehr als unglaubwürdig und nur ein „Lippenbekenntnis“.

Möglich sind diese Aktivitäten, da wir auch weiterhin für die Opfer von Zwangssterilisation und „Euthanasie“ arbeiten werden. Da wir laut Beschlusslage unserer Mitgliederversammlung vom 05. Mai 2009 den Namen BEZ weiterführen dürfen, haben wir eine *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bund der „Euthanasie“-Geschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten* gegründet (mit unserem bekannten Logo, der Uhr), die es uns ermöglicht, auch nach der Vereinsauflösung weiter zu arbeiten.

Unsere neue Anschrift ab 01. Januar 2010:

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bund der „Euthanasie“-Geschädigten  
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Der Verein Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie, der die Telefonate weitervermittelt, ist eine überparteiliche, bundesweit tätige Vereinigung. Seine über 2.000 Mitglieder setzen sich in 25 regionalen Arbeitsgruppen dafür ein, die Erinnerung an die national-sozialistischen Verbrechen wach zu halten. Schwerpunkte ihrer Arbeit sind die Förderung zivilgesellschaftlichen Engagements und politischer Teilhabe sowie die Auseinandersetzung mit politischem Extremismus.

Durch die Gründung der *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bund der „Euthanasie“-Geschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten* ist es uns möglich, auch zukünftig projektbezogen zu arbeiten.

Zum Schluss lassen Sie uns, wie im vergangenen Rundbrief, darauf hinweisen, dass Sie bitte Ihre Daueraufträge für Mitgliedsbeiträge kündigen und die Zahlungen an den BEZ zum Jahresende einstellen, da wir dann keine Spenden mehr annehmen dürfen. Aber Sie erhalten noch im Januar Spendenbescheinigungen für das Jahr 2009.

Wir möchten uns von Ihnen in unserer Funktion als Mitglieder des Vereinsvorstandes verabschieden, was uns schon schwer fällt, und Sie ermutigen, den Kontakt über die angegebene Adresse zu uns zu suchen. Die *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bund der „Euthanasie“-Geschädigten* ist auch weiterhin für Ihre Anliegen da.

Wir wünschen Ihnen eine gute Zeit, auch eine besinnliche Weihnachtszeit, und verbleiben

mit freundlichen Grüßen

*Merge Kops, Margret Hamann, Angelika Batsche*

# No apology for Germany's own Nazi victims

Many casualties of Hitler's sterilisation programme feel ignored today, says Anna Catherin Loll

Making amends for the sins of previous generations is now ubiquitous. Kevin Rudd, the Australian Prime Minister, apologised ten days ago for the abuse of children who were sent to Australia between 1930 and 1967. Tony Blair made an equally profound gesture in 2006, in recognition of Britain's role in the African slave trade, and it is 39 years since Willy Brandt, the Chancellor of West Germany, fell to his knees in Warsaw and declared Germany to be sorry for the Holocaust. Yet, despite all the hand wringing, some victims remain hidden in the shadows.

Hans Heissenberg's pale blue eyes fill with tears when he talks about what happened to him during the Nazi regime. "I was lying on the floor of the Gestapo guard-house in Lemgo, my city in East Westphalia," he says. "The officers kicked me almost to death, just because I did not want to take my hands out my pockets. In my hometown they called me an imbecile. I was never 'moronic'. I was just alone."

After his mother died, Hans's father gave him to the local orphanage from where, aged 14, he was sent to hospital. "The head of the department told me that I was to be sterilised — to not make babies." The teenager did not understand. "Children? I do not want children," he said. "I just want to marry one day."

It was in 1934 that the Nazis brought into force the "law for the prevention of genetic ill procreation". For Hitler, the sterilisation of "genetically ill" people was a "humane

deed" for mankind. "The passing pain of one century can and will release thousands of years from suffering," he wrote in *Mein Kampf*. This "passing pain" was inflicted on about 400,000 people. The exact number is difficult to ascertain because many victims did not survive their ordeal.

Men and women were classified as genetically ill if they suffered from "hereditary mental retardation", "schizophrenia", "manic-depressive insanity", but also if they were deaf or blind. People who were heavily disabled and some who were alcoholics could suffer compulsory sterilisation, with or without anaesthetic. To achieve this the Nazis established "genetic health tribunals" to arbitrate. Many victims were healthy, but had had the ill-luck to belong to a marginalised social class.

In Germany today those victims of Nazi eugenics are still fighting against being labelled "lebensunwert" — unworthy to live. Incredibly, the eugenic Nazi law still exists. The German Parliament suspended the "law for the prevention of genetic ill procreation" in 2007, but this did not eliminate it, only put it out of force. To some this may appear only a juristic formality, but Germany's failure to abolish it has left the victims feeling isolated.

"The politicians say that the law never existed in postwar Germany — that's why they could not eliminate it," says Margret Hamm, CEO and deputy chairman of the association for the victims of "euthanasia" and forced sterilisation (BEZ). "However that is not the case. They just don't want to compensate our victims properly. They are second-class victims in our country."

Around 12,000 victims are estimated to be living still. The BEZ represents about 1,000 of them and continues to seek recognition and compensation for them. Any victim acknowledged by the state receives €120 (£108) a month for the physical pain and mental anguish he or she endures.

"My mother, Irma Nilles, was a beautiful woman", Erich Gloeckner says, pulling out a black-and-white photograph. It shows a

dark-haired woman in a lace dress, wearing a pearl necklace. "She was from a wealthy family in Luxembourg. Her misfortune was to fall in love with the Prussian playboy Hans Gloeckner and to marry him," Erich says. "He spent more time with other women than her — using the money she bought to the marriage. In 1934 they separated, Irma moved with me and my brother to the Saarland. A year later, when she was away, two detectives picked us up."

Erich and his brother were sent to a children's home, then to other families to work. They never saw their mother again. To get a divorce, their father declared Irma to be "schizophrenic", something Gloeckner denies. "She was not stupid, she was not crazy. They destroyed her."

A health report from 1937, nearly two years after her committal to an asylum, states that "the patient is very nervous. She did not recover from the removal of the ovaries. She suffers from screaming fits and hallucinations." Her life ended in the "healing institution" at Hadamar in Hesse on July 3, 1941.

The former Franciscan convent, one of six central facilities for murdering patients established in Germany between 1939 and 1941, still looms forbiddingly over the town. The systematic annihilation took place in the white-painted house next to it. A small staircase leads down into the cellar to the 14sq m death chamber. With its black and white tiles it looks like a shower, but the holes in the wall for the gas pipes are still visible. A peephole used by the doctor who performed the act of murder is now covered over. In the room behind was an autopsy table for medical investigations, while a short distance away to the right are the ovens used to burn the bodies.

Ten thousand people were gassed there in 1941, and between 1942 to 1945 another 4,400 were killed either by "hunger-diet", injections of venom, or toxic drugs.

Valentin Frank's older brother Hans was among them. Mentally disabled after suffering head injuries when a nanny dropped him as a baby, Hans's appearance appalled Germans indoctrinated by Nazi eugenicist policies, and Valentin recalls the cruel comments people in Dortmund made about him. "However," he says, "we did not anticipate anything bad when the vicar proposed sending Hans to an asylum in July 1941."

The family were told that the carers were looking for "someone who liked flowers and animals", but they began suspecting something was amiss when Hans was constantly relocated, a tactic used to conceal the whereabouts of patients.

Plagued by uncertainty, Hans's mother Paula took the train to Hadamar, to find her son. "In the train a woman dressed all in black sat opposite my mother," Valentin recalls. "This woman had received a certifi-



MARK BECKMANN/AGENTUR FOCUS

Those chosen for an injection knew a horrible thing was about to happen

cate from the asylum in Hadamar saying that her seven-year-old daughter had died there from an inflamed appendix. "But you know", the woman said, "my daughter had already had her appendix removed."

Arriving in Hadamar the two women smelt a strange sweet odour. As they got to the top of the hill, Paula Frank's companion screamed. She pointed at a high fence, behind which her daughter — whose death certificate she had received with an urn containing ashes — was playing. People came from the asylum and dragged the woman in. Paula was told to leave the area. She never again saw the woman, or her son Hans, but that same month the Frank family received an urn with ashes in it, one of 40 from Hadamar that were interred at the same time in Dortmund.

These killings formed part of the programme "Aktion T4", so-named because of the Berlin headquarters in Tiergartenstrasse 4 where the extermination was organised. The killings were halted after protests from Protestant and Roman Catholic churchmen and other people — but unsanctioned killings still continued.

The historian Rolf Surmann says that Konrad Adenauer, Germany's first chancellor after the war, made it clear in a statement that the suffering of the people was his most important concern. "There was no word about those who had been persecuted by the Nazis," Surman adds. "You could not compensate all victims: it was claimed there were just too many and Germany was too poor."

After years of legal wrangling, a sort of "victim hierarchy" emerged, one in which only those deemed to have suffered from "Nazi-typical injustice" were compensated — those persecuted because of their race, their political conviction or because of their religion or philosophy. Surmann, who has examined court cases of the 1950s and 1960s, asserts that among those whom lawyers called for expert advice were men with a history as "racist hygienists" during the Third Reich. "Some," he says, "were even calling for forced sterilisation after 1945." He points out that far from being a fascist aberration, it was a concept supported by prominent figures across the world, among them Winston Churchill.

In Britain, sterilisation programmes were never legalised, though doctors in favour of eugenics carried out these operations on the mentally ill; most countries abandoned sterilisation programmes after the Second World War, but the practice continued in the US until the 1960s, and still takes place in Peru and Mexico. There have been complaints about Slovakia and the Czech Republic as recently as last year.

"It is totally inappropriate how we Germans deal with it," says Andreas Scheulen, a lawyer from Nuremberg. He has written a book on the ostracism of the victims and the favourable treatment of some of the perpetrators. "It was an excuse to say that we do not have enough money to compensate the victims, yet there was enough money to keep the posts and pensions of the wrongdoers from the Nazi time," he says. Many of the former Nazis claimed to believe in democracy to cling to positions after the fall of Hitler. The Federal High Court of Justice acted against the orders of the Federal

Constitutional Court at that time to ensure the financial coverage of state functionaries, Scheulen says. "The Nazis put many of them into office, so the postwar court system was as open to hear the claims of former officers, as it was closed to hear the claims of the victims. It is shameful that we Germans don't assume the responsibility for the suffering our parents and grandparents caused those people."

So why is there no political will to do anything about it? Volker Beck, a Green Party MP, says that people in Germany have "listened too many times to the compensation debates" and have tired of them.

Hans-Walter Schmulh, a history professor at the University of Bielefeld, though, believes the lack of interest is because "deep down our society still has a strong prejudice against disabled people," he says. "Before 1914, people who treated the weak and the disabled badly were excluded from society. The cruelties of the First World War produced a break in the way of thinking and it endures today. Everyone says that we should support and integrate the old and disabled. However, the psychological current runs in a different direction."

For people such as Hans Heissenberg, the end of the war and the Nazi regime did not mean an end to his privations. In the spring of 1946, on the day he was to marry a farmgirl called Erika, with whom he had fallen in love, the director of the hospital where he had been sterilised prevented the marriage. Hans says: "He took the marriage announcement out of the administrative office saying, 'How can he marry? He is a cretin! My bride was waiting in the church.'"

Hans never saw her again and has never married. "I could not even think of it," he says and begins to cry. He sits on his small bed in a nursing home in Lemgo contemplating his life. "I am glad it is over," he whispers, "but I cannot forget. I cannot forget."

Others can. The widespread indifference, Margaret Hamm says, even extends to the more established support groups for victims of Nazi cruelty.

"Other victims have suffered a lot, but some of us Germans suffered too," says Paul Eggert, 78, who still gets abdominal pain from his sterilisation as a child. "No one wants to see that because we cannot be categorised. Or if we are, then it is just in a bad way — we are called 'disabled' or 'ill', even if that is not true." Eggert was the second youngest of 13 children from a poor family. In school he had to beg for food and the Nazis considered him "asocial" and "cretinous". After being sterilised, he was sent to a concentration camp for children. Every evening the medical team entered the dining hall, and the physician would point at the children that were to come to him next morning to receive the "diphtheria injection"; he'd choose five to six children.

Some of them Eggert saw again when he had to bring the washing to the laundry. Once, at the age of 12, he lifted the blankets to see why the carriages were so heavy. He saw the the corpses of the children.

Later on "grey buses" would arrive at his asylum. They drove to Hadamar. "The little ones who had been chosen for an injection knew that something horrible was going to happen. They would cling to us older ones, screaming: 'Please help us! Don't leave us alone! Had I tried to do something, I would not be here now.'"

What does he think about the recognition of his victim group in Germany today? He shrugs. "No one wants to think about us. Much too unpleasant."

The BEZ say that time is running out to recognise people such as Paul Eggert, Valentin Frank and Erich Gloeckner. For some, it is too late. Two weeks after he was interviewed, Hans Heissenberg died.

## Green and confused Office offenders

Q You recently said that we should use energy-efficient light bulbs at home, but what about the huge office blocks that leave their lights on? Why is the householder the target of the eco-lobbyists and not the commercial sector?

A You're right, of course. While some companies have caught the habit of energy saving, it is remarkable how many want to boast of their profligacy by lighting up buildings like Christmas trees 24 hours a day. Perhaps they think that burning the midnight oil — even when the only people in the building are the watchman and cleaners — is a mark of success. It is a sign of corporate stupidity.

The UK is far behind many countries when it comes to saving on lighting energy: the reason Berlin or Frankfurt are darker cities than London or Birmingham is not because the Germans stop work earlier or enjoy dim places: it's just that they're far more sensible about how they use their energy.

Lighting accounts for about 20 per cent of energy in the average office. Turning off the lights at night — or reducing their glow to a minimum — saves energy and lowers bills. But take a good look around: the actual working area of an office usually represents well under half the total floor space. And even in the working areas, not everyone is present all the time.

One calculation by the office designers bdp (bdp.com) is that around 70 sq m of UK office space is lit up unnecessarily, at a cost of £300 million a year. If that energy wasn't used for needless lighting, offices could prevent about 1.8 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> going into the atmosphere and make a big contribution to emissions reduction targets.

The Carbon Trust (carbontrust.co.uk), which gives interest-free loans to companies intent on energy savings, has information on how to cut back on lighting. Using energy-efficient bulbs is important but other simple adjustments can result in substantial savings: fitting motion or occupancy detectors to turn lights off and on in infrequently used spaces and cleaning light fittings regularly can make a considerable impact. Carrying out a carbon audit is a good starting point too.

In daylight hours more should be done about maximising natural light: it is criminal that offices are still being built with little or no regard to using the Sun to help to brighten them up. Equipment that can regulate lighting, dependent on the degree of natural light, is available.

Besides lighting, there's the energy that often goes on the wasteful use of air conditioning, the sheaves of waste paper and the computers left on round the clock. A single computer and monitor left on 24 hours a day can run up an energy bill of £45 a year: switch it off out of hours or put it on standby and the bill could be reduced to £10 a year — little adjustments can make a big difference.

Kieran Cooke

Send your eco-dilemmas to greenandconfused@thetimes.co.uk

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From top clockwise: Erich Gloeckner with a picture of his mother, Valentin Frank, the late Hans Heissenberg and Paul Eggert