

ERNST ELENHANS (1815-1849): LOST IDEAS
ABOUT SOCIAL-LIBERAL STATE BUILDING
AND AN INTERNATIONAL STATE SYSTEM
IN THE REVOLUTION OF 1848-1849

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ABSTRACT

The essay deals with the revolutionary Ernst Elsenhans, who was shot in 1849 at the age of just 33. He was a participant in the Baden revolution until the capitulation of the Rastatt fortress. His political ideas were responsible for the death sentence imposed on him by the Prussian victors. As a moderate early socialist and supporter of a just international state system, he wrote articles as a journalist and developed ideas that are timelessly topical.

Keywords: 1848, Revolution, Baden, Liberal, Socialism.

On July 26, 1953, the attempted capture of the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba by Cuban revolutionaries failed. The surviving attackers hid in the outskirts of Santiago, where dictator Fulgencio Batista's military searched for them and brutally murdered those guerrillas who could be captured. On August 1, 1953, a patrol was able to arrest the leader of the revolt, Fidel Castro. A lynching of the soldiers was prevented by their leader, Lieutenant Pedro Sarría (1900-1972), who said, "You don't kill ideas".¹ The revolutionaries were tried and sentenced to prison; the rest of the story is known. What would have happened if this black lieutenant

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¹ Cf. SKIERKA 2001: 51f.; CASTRO 2008: 177f.

had had his prisoner Fidel Castro shot? With some certainty, one can venture the theses that revolution would not have occurred in Cuba; Latin America's self-confidence in not being the backyard of the U.S., and thus Latin American identity, would have remained underdeveloped; the anti-imperialist movement in the Third World would have had to do without its most important role model; and finally, the overthrow of the apartheid regimes in Namibia and South Africa, which was significantly brought about by Cuba's military involvement in Angola, would have been delayed. You cannot kill ideas, but you can eliminate the creators and propagators of ideas and thus negatively influence the course of historical processes.

This thesis also applies to the protagonist of this article, whose historical importance, of course, does not approach that of the Cuban revolutionary leader, but whose life and historical role were far from over when he was tried and executed by Prussian military forces in the Baden town of Rastatt on August 7, 1849.

This article deals with a German revolutionary whose name no reader of the *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* has ever heard up to this point: Ernst Elsenhans.² First, therefore, the most important building blocks known so far from his biography will be presented, some sections of which are still in the dark. Afterwards, some of his political ideas will be analysed and finally it will be discussed why these ideas – at least temporarily – got lost.

1. ON THE BIOGRAPHY OF ERNST ELSENHANS

Ernst Elsenhans was born on September 26, 1815 in the Swabian community of Feuerbach, which is today a district of Stuttgart, the capital of Baden-Württemberg. He was around six months younger than the Iron Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. A year earlier, in 1814, his father, the master shoemaker Johannes Elsenhans, had been appointed Schultheiß of Feuerbach, an office that could be described as a mixture of mayor and magistrate. Until his death in 1841 his father was to hold this office for 27 years, which he exercised with great skill and lasting effect; among other things, he improved the infrastructure of Feuerbach, set up a school building and took care of families in need.

² Ernst Elsenhans has so far been treated only marginally in historical research. The reasons for this are certainly the lack of an estate and the fact that no illustration of him has survived. The most extensive mention of him is found in the essay BRAUN 2016; the present essay is based on this predecessor, but sets new accents. In addition to general accounts of the Baden Revolution, Elsenhans is discussed in the following essays: BURKHARDT 1956; BISCHOF 1979; REIB 1995.

Johannes Elsenhans was a capable civil servant and at the same time a socially committed man, in whose household the then famous poet and politician Ludwig Uhland is said to have occasionally been a guest. Ludwig Uhland wrote some of the most popular German poems of the 19th century, such as the ballad *Des Sängers Fluch* ('The Singer's Curse') or the farewell song *Ich hatt' einen Kameraden* ('I had a comrade'), whose setting is still played today at private and state funerals. Many of his verses have become proverbial, for example, *Viel Steine gab's und wenig Brot* ('There were many stones and little bread' from the poem *Schwäbische Kunde* ('Swabian Legend')). Ludwig Uhland campaigned vehemently for a liberal constitution in Württemberg and later served as a member of parliament in Frankfurt's Paulskirche in 1848. He still accompanied the so-called *Rumpffparlament* ('rump parliament') from Frankfurt to Stuttgart until it was dispersed by the military on June 18, 1849. There is a meaningful quote from Ludwig Uhland that was not meant for Ernst Elsenhans, but still seems to have been written for him: *Das ist der Fluch des unglücksel'gen Landes, / wo Freiheit und Gesetz darniederliegt, / daß, die für's Vaterland am reinsten glüh'n, / gebrandmarkt werden als des Lands Verräter.*³ Like any poem, this one loses through translation: "It's the curse of the unfortunate country / where freedom and law lie low / that those who glow for the fatherland most pure, / be branded as the country's traitors".

The status of the parent's home of Ernst Elsenhans was privileged more in ideal than in material manners, because his father had a total of 13 children from two marriages, although he took great care in their education. However, it could not be realized for his son Ernst to study theology, as it was not possible to finance these studies. Instead, he learned surgery and served from 1834 to 1840 as a medic in infantry regiments in Stuttgart.⁴ An attempt to study philosophy at the university of Tübingen from autumn 1840 on failed again due to lack of funding. A letter from his father asking for his son's admission to university has been preserved in the Tübingen University Archives. The letter shows commitment to the professional education of one of his children, but it also shows that Johannes Elsenhans, unlike his son Ernst later, was not a master of the German language.⁵ The failure to study theology was the starting point for Ernst Elsenhans to transform himself into a convinced atheist.

³ The verses are taken from the third stanza of the prologue to Ludwig Uhland's tragedy *Ernst, Herzog von Schwaben*, which premiered in 1818.

⁴ Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, E 297, 447, personnel roster of the 4. Württemberg infantry regiment.

⁵ Universitätsarchiv Tübingen 49/21, 150 Elsenhans, Ernst, letter from Johannes Elsenhans to University bailiff Christian Riecke, dated Dezember 1, 1840.

Elsenhans took up the profession of journalism and also worked as a private tutor. After the failed study attempt in Tübingen in 1840 he moved to Switzerland, where he wrote for several newspapers. He was also employed as a teacher in English and French families, whereby his knowledge of the English language was exceptional for the time, which was still completely dominated by French. His English must have been so good that he also worked as a translator. For example, he translated one of the historical novels by the then popular Scottish writer Walter Scott into German. The novel with the promising title *Anna von Geierstein or the Daughter of the Mist* was published in 1846 by the democratic-republican publisher Heinrich Hoff (1808-1852) in Mannheim. One of the few existing letters from Ernst Elsenhans is directed to the publisher Hoff; it reveals something about his literary activity and his work ethic. Excerpts from this letter, dated April 30, 1846, are published here for the first time; the Mannheim publisher Johann Peter Grohe (1807-1874) had apparently rejected an essay by Elsenhans, which he now offers to Hoff.

Since Mr. Grohe does not want to include the essay on the English army, of which I spoke to you earlier, as he believes, in his journal, I will have it returned to me and send it to you as soon as it is in my hands. If I add the story entitled *Goldkäfer*, 4 sheets of Thiers's 'Revolution' and some other things, I will probably get 10-15 printed sheets, which I will deliver to you. It seems strange to you that I destroyed the works that I had started but not finished, but I ask you, what else could and would one do with them? I at least would never have decided to let them go into the world in this defective form.⁶

The *Goldkäfer* ('Gold Beetle') mentioned is likely to be a story by Edgar Allan Poe first published in 1843. Until now, it has been assumed that the first translation into German took place in 1881. Elsenhans' translation would thus have taken place 35 years earlier, but it cannot be proven so far, since numerous newspapers and magazines from this era have unfortunately not survived. Elsenhans obviously also translated Adolphe Thiers's *History of the French Revolution*, which was only possible with very good knowledge of the French language. The fact that he destroyed works he had begun that did not meet his quality standards speaks for his work ethic. He did not want to deliver trash, although he suffered from the chronic professional disease of journalists of always having too little money.

Four years before this letter was written, in 1842, Elsenhans had moved to Mannheim, which was the center of the republican movement in Baden, and Baden was the most liberal state in Germany, known as the *Musterländle*,

⁶ Heinrich-Heine-Institut Düsseldorf, autograph collection Engelmann, HHI. 94.5036.123a.

which could be translated as the ‘small model country’. In Mannheim he worked as an English teacher at a private language institute and wrote political articles for the republican *Mannheimer Abendzeitung* (edited by Johann Peter Grohe), which was considered the most politically radical newspaper in Germany. On November 4, 1847 he moved to Heidelberg, where he took over the editing of the newspaper *Die Republik*, for which he contributed several articles, some of which were signed by his name. For two of these articles he was charged with incitement to rebellion and incitement to high treason.

2. THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF ERNST ELSENHANS

On the one hand, these articles were an appeal to the soldiers to disobey orders if they were to be used against their own population. The first incriminated article states:

Will the children of the people who stand under the flag make common cause with the prince and officer or with their brothers among the people? We are sure they are too wise to fail to see their advantage; we are firmly convinced that from now on they will never again obey an order or a suggestion from their superiors that fights against the cause of freedom, against the cause of the people.⁷

On the other hand, there was an article entitled *The Red Republic* of August 1, 1848, in which Elsenhans called on the princes to give in and warned against massive bloodshed, to which the people were ready to win freedom:

We will thank you if you come to an understanding with us in kindness and give us what we have heard for the sake of God and justice. But know that if you stir up a war of kings against the nations, we will kindle a war of the nations against the kings.⁸

For this call for civil disobedience and for the announced willingness to respond to the violence from above as an act of self-defense with counter-violence from below, Ernst Elsenhans was sentenced to eight months in prison by the Higher Court of Justice in Mannheim on October 5, 1848.⁹

⁷ ELSENHANS 1848a.

⁸ ELSENHANS 1848b; both articles are not signed by name but can be clearly assigned to Elsenhans due to the charges against him.

⁹ Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe 234-1696a, Elsenhans Ernst, of Feuerbach convicted for the incitement of high treason.

A few weeks before serving his sentence, Elsenhans was freed from custody by revolutionaries on May 14, 1849.¹⁰ One day earlier, the Grand Duke of Baden, Leopold I, had fled into exile to Koblenz. At the beginning of June, a revolutionary government was formed under the liberal politician Lorenz Brentano, which evaded to southern Baden to escape the approaching troops of the German Confederation and Prussia under the leadership of the *Kartätschenprinz* Wilhelm of Prussia, who later became German Emperor Wilhelm I.

For the eight weeks after his release from prison Ernst Elsenhans experienced the final phase of the Baden revolution.¹¹ Out of gratitude for the regained freedom, Elsenhans reported to the Baden revolutionary government in Karlsruhe a few days after his liberation and was employed as a secretary in the War Ministry. On June 25, 1849, the provisional government retreated south from the advancing Prussian troops, including the Minister of War Maximilian Werner (1815-1875) and Ernst Elsenhans in his entourage, entrenched themselves in the Rastatt Fortress, whose garrison had already sided with the Baden revolution on May 11.¹² War Minister Werner moved further south from the Rastatt fortress, later fleeing into exile in Switzerland and then the United States of America. After an amnesty in Baden in 1862, Werner returned to Germany and practiced law in Offenburg until his death in 1875. Elsenhans, however, remained in Rastatt, which would ultimately cost him his life.

Since 1842, the Central Baden town of Rastatt had been developed into a large fortress that was supposed to withstand a possible invasion by France. It was virtually a walled-in, i.e. fortified, town with a population of around 7,000. The special importance of the Rastatt fortress for the state of Baden is also evident from the fact that it is explicitly mentioned in the second stanza of the *Badnerlied*, the anthem of Baden:

*Zu Karlsruh' ist die Residenz,
in Mannheim die Fabrik.
In Rastatt ist die Festung,
und das ist Badens Glück.*

In Karlsruhe is the residence,
In Mannheim is the factory.
In Rastatt is the fortress,
And that is Baden's fortune.

Since Elsenhans was now without any actual task, he came up with the idea of publishing his own newspaper for the Rastatt Fortress, the *Festungs-*

¹⁰ GLA Karlsruhe 236/8568, report on the liberation of the prisoners in Kißlau, Bruchsal, November 9, 1849.

¹¹ Cf. on the Baden Revolution from the 19th century: HÄUSSER 1851; from a variety of recent studies: FREI and HOCHSTUHL 1997; VON HIPPEL 1998; BADISCHES LANDESMUSEUM KARLSRUHE 1998; ENGEHAUSEN 2010; specifically related to Rastatt: HANK 1999-2001.

¹² Cf. DICK 2022.

Bote (the 'Fortress messenger'), which was published from July 7 to 22, 1849 in a total of fourteen issues.¹³ The *Festungs-Bote* was a 'completely normal' newspaper that contained editorials, announcements, letters to the editor, advertisements, but also poems.

Even the articles by Ernst Elsenhans in the newspaper *Die Republik* contain important programmatic components, such as the mentioned right to refuse to obey orders in the case of illegal orders, which is now a matter of course in the German Bundeswehr. Above all, however, Ernst Elsenhans' political program becomes clear in an article in *Festungs-Bote* No. 10 of July 18, 1849, which bears the title *What Is and What Does Social Democracy Want?* Elsenhans expresses himself in it for the establishment of a republic and a democracy, although for purely practical reasons he prefers representative democracy for larger states, i.e. the representation of the people's interests by deputies elected by all citizens with equal rights. Elsenhans had gained experience with direct democracy during his stay in Switzerland, but he had also found there that assemblies of all adult men (women did not receive the right to vote in Switzerland until 1971) were only feasible in very small cantons. Elsenhans does not believe in freedom as the sole means of salvation against oppression and arbitrariness:

However, we are far from the view that the salvation of the world will come from the republic or democracy, because we see from the history as much as we see from the daily experience that there have been and still are republics that in no way satisfy man's demands for happiness.

That was a dig at the US Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the "pursuit of happiness" enshrined therein as an inalienable human right. For the black population, for example, this right, which was only theoretical anyway, did not apply. Whether it has applied since the abolition of slavery and the abolition of segregation in the 1960s could be debated at length.

A true democracy can only function, in the words of Elsenhans, by "resolving the enormous disparity between the haves and the have-nots". However, the equality that Elsenhans was aiming for, was far removed from stupid egalitarianism. Socialism wanted to put an end to the oppression and the desolate misery of the lower classes

by urging the continuous improvement of the moral, intellectual and physical existence of the most numerous and poorest classes, and by achieving instead of the rule of capital the rule of work, or at least their equality. According to the socialists, the distribution of goods should be made dependent on work and

¹³ The *Festungs-Bote* can easily be accessed from the holdings of the Munich Digitization Center: <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10002690?page=16,17>.

thereby achieve the greatest possible equality among people; every industrious, orderly and skillful man should be given the opportunity to acquire as much property as is necessary for a reasonable enjoyment of life.

In his article, Elsenhans mentions the two French early socialist theorists Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Charles Fourier (1772-1837) by name, from which one can possibly conclude that he had not read yet the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, published in March 1848. However, Elsenhans was not an orthodox socialist but a moderate social democrat, not to use the word 'liberal' social democrat.

Ernst Elsenhans also made forward-looking statements on the issue of foreign policy. In the very last issue of the *Festungs-Bote* he describes how the main changes in human history were brought about by wars, in both a positive and negative sense:

Through war, Europeans have subjugated the New World; war established the North American Free State; and it is war that is building new states in South America at this moment, so that in future a European state system will be replaced by a world state system.¹⁴

As a keen observer of the times, Elsenhans was aware of the collapse of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires in South and Central America in the first half of the 19th century (with the exception of Cuba, which became a U.S. dependency until 1959, and Puerto Rico, which remains a U.S. colony to this day). In the future state of Ernst Elsenhans, however, there should be no more wars if possible, "since no wars of conquest are waged, but the existing armed forces are only used to defend the country against external enemies". Elsenhans did not invent the term "world state system", but he used it in a completely different way than his coevals. Normally, the historians and publicists of the 19th century used this term as the expansion of Europe across the world, i.e. the division of the world among European colonial powers. That the independence of the colonies was the prerequisite for a world state system was a completely new approach.

In his 1809 published *History of the European state system* the German historian Arnold Heeren had typically defined:

A greater and more glorious future will supplant the limited European state-system, through the spread of culture across its continents and the flourishing of European plantings across the ocean, by a freer and larger, powerfully aspiring world-state system.¹⁵

¹⁴ ELSENHANS 1849.

¹⁵ Cf. HEEREN 1809: 18; the quotation is taken from HRON 1898: 3; in the original, the quotation is completely the same in meaning and largely the same in wording.

And at the end of the 19th century, the Viennese publicist Karl Hron wrote in his study on *German National Politics* about Arnold Heeren, whom he calls the “prophet of the world state system”:

Almost a century has passed before they became the truth. They were far ahead of their time, because the conditions for a compelling drive to create such a “world state system” were not yet available at that time.¹⁶

Karl Hron was unaware that in the middle of the 19th century the global system of states had been defined in a completely different way, modern, liberal and demilitarized, because these ideas had been lost, so to speak, more than lost, they had been murdered. Immediately after the surrender of Rastatt Fortress to Prussian troops on July 23, 1849, Ernst Elsenhans was arrested. The revolutionary fighters were imprisoned in the Rastatt casemates under humiliating and inhumane conditions.¹⁷ During the interrogations by the Prussians after the surrender of the Rastatt fortress, Ernst Elsenhans confessed to the authorship of numerous articles in the *Festungs-Bote*. However, he refused to name the authors of the anonymously published articles, thus presumably saving several men from long prison or even death sentences.¹⁸

3. THE MURDER OF ERNST ELENHANS

Elsenhans was accused of high treason before a court martial. Actually, a civil court would have been responsible for him, since Elsenhans had not been a soldier and actually not a Prussian one either, since he had Württemberg citizenship. A uniform German citizenship has existed only since the *Verordnung über die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit* (“Ordinance on German Citizenship”) of February 5, 1934; before that, anyone who held citizenship of one of its federal states (Prussia, Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, etc.) was considered a citizen of the German Reich. But the Prussian victors did not bother with such trifles as citizenship. Only on the evening of August 5 a lawyer from Karlsruhe was assigned to him, who of course could not prepare for the trial, which began at 9 a. m. on August 6

¹⁶ Cf. HRON 1898: 3-5.

¹⁷ Cf. the anonymously published memoirs of the Rastatt revolutionary Wilhelm Dietz: DIETZ 1997 [1850].

¹⁸ Cf. the testimony of Ernst Elsenhans before the Prussian military council on July 30, 1849: GLA Karlsruhe, 234/1696c, “[I] refuse, however, as I do in general, once and for all, to name the authors of the articles that are not from me”.

in the ancestral hall of Rastatt Castle. A Prussian officer was also present during the conversation between lawyer and client. The court-martial, which was held on Baden soil, included seven soldiers of different ranks, all of whom were Prussians. The death sentence, which was announced after a few hours and which, in typical Prussian-German manner, not only sentenced Elsenhans to death by shooting, but also to “reimbursement of the examination costs”, was certain from the outset.¹⁹

The death sentence was carried out the night after the verdict. Ernst Elsenhans was the first of 19 people sentenced to death in Rastatt to be executed, he was the only civilian among his fellow sufferers, he was the only one who did not harm anyone else. In the interrogation protocol, Elsenhans says: “I took no part in the fighting because I don’t understand anything about military matters”.²⁰ After 3:00 a.m. on the night of August 7, 1849 Ernst Elsenhans was driven in a carriage to a ditch in front of a fortress building. Before the execution squad of twelve Prussian soldiers started their bloody work Elsenhans gave away his glasses and tied a black ribbon over his eyes. His last sentence was: “It is hard to die for the expressing of your convictions!”.²¹ Of the twelve shooters, eight aimed for the body and four for the head. A total of eight bullets hit Ernst Elsenhans, who was still alive. He was finally killed by bayonet stabs. But that’s not all. The fact that Elsenhans was to be buried without a coffin in a dug pit was not enough for the Prussian fortress commander Major Friedrich von Weltzien who was present. He ordered the gravediggers to undress Ernst Elsenhans’ body, so that he was thrown naked into the pit. As a reward, the gravediggers received the blood-smearred clothes and some coins from the city commander. By the way, the Prussian fortress commander, Major von Weltzien, was made an honorary citizen of the city of Rastatt in 1852, and he still is today. The award certificate states:

After the surrender of the fortress in 1849, Major von Weltzien, during his three months in office as city commander, earned the love of the local citizens to a high degree through his philanthropic behavior.²²

¹⁹ Cf. the court sentence against Ernst Elsenhans: GLA Karlsruhe, 234 1696c; already on July 27, 1849, a Prussian major had said to Elsenhans: “You wrote the dirty newspaper, too bad we didn’t bring the rope right away”. Cf. DIETZ 1997 [1850]: 63.

²⁰ GLA Karlsruhe 234 1696c, quotation from the transcript of Ernst Elsenhans’ interrogation of July 30, 1849.

²¹ This last sentence is handed down by: FICKLER 1853: 181.

²² NEININGER 1952: 47.

4. THE LOST IDEAS OF ERNST ELSENHANS

Many of Ernst Elsenhans' contemporaries found the murder of the journalist appalling and found it difficult to explain. The Baden revolutionary leader Gustav Struve judged that the accusation against Elsenhans of having been the intellectual leader of the resistance in Rastatt had been exaggerated beyond measure:

Elsenhans must have had a giant mind if he had been able to mentally lead the garrison in the midst of a besieged fortress through his 'Fortress Messenger.' Ernst Elsenhans was a harmless and peaceful man. He died on August 7 in Rastatt at 4 o'clock in the morning with the courage of a clear consciousness as a victim of the hatred which the Prussian tyranny devotes to any free, intellectual activity [...].²³

What would have become of Ernst Elsenhans if he had not been murdered at the age of only 33, if he had been pardoned? He was still a young man, certainly not an original theoretician, but a good organizer and a brilliant journalist. Perhaps an outstanding committed writer, perhaps a social democratic member of the Reichstag alongside August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht? Born in 1826, Wilhelm, the father of Karl Liebknecht, had taken an active part in the revolution of 1848-1849, first in Paris, from where he wanted to join the uprising of the radical democrat Friedrich Hecker (1811-1881) in Baden in March 1848, but was prevented from doing so by illness. In September 1848 he participated in the attempted uprising of Gustav Struve (1805-1870), the so-called Struve Putsch in southern Baden, was arrested and released after seven months of pretrial detention in May 1849. He joined the Baden People's Army and acted as adjutant to Gustav Struve. After the suppression of the Baden Revolution, he evaded imminent arrest by fleeing into exile. Together with August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht was one of the founding fathers of German Social Democracy; he was a member of the SPD party leadership and the Reichstag until his death in 1900.²⁴

But perhaps Ernst Elsenhans would have joined the 80,000 or so Badenens who left the state of Baden during or after the revolution of 1848-1849 and went into exile, not a few of them to the United States. Perhaps he would have become a celebrated statesman like Carl Schurz. Schurz, who was born in 1829 in Liblar, in the Prussian Rhine Province, was imprisoned together with Elsenhans in the fortress of Rastatt.²⁵ Two days before their

²³ STRUVE 1849: 285.

²⁴ SCHRÖDER 2013.

²⁵ SCHURZ 2015: 229-250.

surrender, Schurz was able to escape from the fortress through a sewage pipe and made his way across the nearby Rhine to Alsace, which at the time belonged to France. He emigrated to the United States via several exile stations, served as Minister of the Interior from 1877 to 1881, and was the first German elected to the Senate in Washington. Schurz died in 1906 at the age of 77. If Ernst Elsenhans had reached the age of Wilhelm Liebknecht, he would have died in 1890 and lived to see the end of the Socialist Law, with which the Iron Chancellor had tried to suppress Social Democracy. If he had lived to be as old as Bismarck, who was born in the same year 1815, he would almost have lived to see the turn of the century.

The potential fate of Ernst Elsenhans in the event of a pardon must of course remain open, because historians should not look into a crystal ball. It is, however, a legitimate speculation when one looks at the lives of his fellow revolutionaries, some of whom managed to escape into exile and some of whom returned home after the amnesty for the revolutionaries in Baden in 1862. But the case of Ernst Elsenhans shows clearly that liberal ideas are much more dangerous for dictatorial rulers than any military uprising or any revolution.

5. ERNST ELSENHANS IN THE GERMAN CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE

After the revolution of 1848-1849, a period of reaction set in. A positive remembrance of the revolutionaries and the martyrs in Rastatt and Baden was impossible, since Baden had become fatally dependent on Prussia. On the 25th anniversary in 1874, at least the graves of the murdered were provided with tin plates and names of the dead. The erection of a memorial stone was prohibited. In 1899, on the 50th anniversary, a memorial stone could be erected, but its text was censored. The inscription mentioned only the names, the profession and the respective date of death, the first on the list being "Esenhans Ernst Literat von Feuerbach". At the beginning of the Weimar Republic, an additional plaque was then added with the following text: "To the victims of unreason and arbitrariness/To the fighters for freedom and justice/To the dead the living/Dedicated in 1899 by Social Democrats and Democrats from Germany and America".²⁶

It is not easy to remember Elsenhans because the source situation is extremely precarious. There is no surviving legacy and no drawing or portrait of him. A contemporary described Elsenhans as follows: "a young man with a broad chest and a beautiful, pale face, whose high forehead

²⁶ KRAEMER 1974: 143-148.

and very short-cropped blond hair gave him an important impression [...]”. In our visual age, it is almost impossible to remember a person whose face and appearance remain completely obscured. In 1964, the renowned German writer Stefan Heym (1913-2001) published a novel about the Baden Revolution under the title *Lenz oder die Freiheit*. His title character, Andreas Lenz, bears the traits of Ernst Elsenhans and Carl Schurz. On the one hand he publishes the *Festungs-Bote*, on the other he manages to escape to the USA. In 1986 the novel was filmed for television; the four parts comprise six hours of broadcasting time. Renowned actors played the leading roles, including Peter Simonischek, Christoph Waltz and Ulrich Tukur. If Stefan Heym had named his title character Ernst Elsenhans, the revolutionary would be much more firmly anchored in the culture of remembrance.

It was, and still is, primarily the Social Democratic Party that commemorates the suppression of the revolution in Rastatt, while the Liberals have largely retreated from such commemoration. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the intrigue of an SPD city councilor against his party colleague as mayor prevented the naming of a school in Rastatt after Ernst Elsenhans.²⁷ Street names in Rastatt and Stuttgart-Feuerbach commemorate him (or the family). No stamp, no prize for courageous journalists – only on private initiative three commemorative events in Rastatt, Stuttgart and Heidelberg were organized in 2015 on the 200th birthday of Ernst Elsenhans. By liquidating the creators of ideas, one not only robs them of thirty, forty or fifty years of life, as in the case of Ernst Elsenhans, one also robs them of an appropriate memory. To counteract this *damnatio memoriae*, which was intended by the Prussian occupiers in 1849, is a noble task of historical science.

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²⁷ Cf. on this shameful intrigue in Rastatt: BRAUN 2016: 205-209.

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