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Trade unions and the Federal Environment Agency – instigators of an asbestos ban in Germany

Gerd Albracht¹

A lethal hazard has been ignored for decades

Approaches to the killer dust in recent decades should be regarded as a prime example of a fatal oversight and a general failure on the part of senior company managers in the asbestos industry and politicians with responsibilities in this field.

Back in the 1920s, US doctors discovered that asbestos could cause the scarring of the lung tissue, otherwise known as asbestosis. The first cases of occupational diseases in asbestos workers were described in Hoffman's comprehensive Monograph (Hoffman 1918). However, not company managers or politicians, but instead insurance companies reacted to this development. The Prudential Insurance Company in the United States refused, as early as 1919, to provide life insurance to asbestos workers (Albracht 1991). In Germany, it was not until 1936 that asbestosis was recognised as an occupational disease. In the early 1940s, it was demonstrated that working with asbestos increased the risk of lung cancer. Finally, in the 1960s, proof of the link between asbestos and the development of mesothelioma of the pleura and peritoneum was demonstrated. Asbestos-related lung cancer and asbestos-related mesothelioma have been recognised as occupational diseases in Germany since 1943 and 1976 respectively.

Despite knowledge of this lethal hazard, asbestos consumption in the 1960 and 1970s doubled in Germany. By 1990, 18 million tonnes of construction materials, comprising around 6% of highly asbestos-containing materials, had been manufactured and used (IG-BSE 1991). No one in a position of responsibility at that time can claim that they were not aware of the health risks. Very early, the English-

¹ Gerd Albracht is a former Head of Section at the Hesse State Ministry for Women, Labour and Social Affairs, and Senior Advisor of the International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI).

and German-speaking trade press had warned of the time bomb that was ticking away in factories and tradesmen's workshops (Selikoff 1976). The former Minister of Social Affairs for the State of Hesse, Armin Clauss, speaking in 1985 at the first Symposium on the Long-term Effects of Asbestos, declared that 'occupational health and safety policy in this field had pretty much been a complete failure well into the 1960s. This criticism is directed in equal measure at companies, social accident insurance associations and state labour inspectorates' (Albracht 1985).

Completely non-binding initial recommendations designed to control the adverse effects of asbestos were issued to companies by the social accident insurance associations in the early 1960s. The first technical guideline concentration value (TRK value) for asbestos was published in 1973. Enhanced efforts by the state labour inspectorate and the social accident insurance associations in the 1970s helped to significantly reduce asbestos levels in companies. However, it was only 40 to 50 years after the discovery of this health hazard that State bodies and the social accident insurance associations started to react in any significant way. By then, trade unions and some researchers had already, at an earlier stage, issued warnings and called for measures to be taken. But, even within the trade unions, there was opposition in the 1970s to tackling asbestos. In 1979, several works councils from the asbestos cement industry successfully lobbied the federal government to prevent a ban on asbestos and the listing of asbestos in the highest hazard class (Pütz 1991). Their main argument was the fear of job losses.

Trade unions and the Federal Environment Agency pulling in the same direction

In particular trade unions and independent researchers at the German Research Foundation (DFG), which had set up an ad hoc working group in the 1970s under the responsibility of Professor Henschler and chaired by Professor Weitowitz, continued to highlight the lethal hazard posed by the manufacture and handling of asbestos (Partikel 1980). At that time, the media were focusing increasingly on the issue of asbestos. In 1976, IG Metall published an in-depth report on the dangers of asbestos and presented the results of a paper presented by Professor Selikoff at the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) Conference in Oslo on the issue of asbestos-related diseases in the United States from 1918-1975. The asbestos industry decided to try to ward off the increasingly fierce attacks on the hazardous substance that is asbestos by financing its own research institute. The aim was to improve its image and 'to avoid an asbestos-related health hazard by coordinating appropriate measures'. At the outset, the companies gave the Asbestos Institute for Occupational Health and Safety and Environmental Protection, which had its head office in Neuss, a budget of DM 2.5 million. Leading occupational health and safety experts and trade unionists refused to support the Institute, even though, in truth, it did want to ensure safer use of asbestos. Developments at the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) and within trade unions in subsequent years contributed to significantly checking the intended industry-friendly impact of the Institute.

In 1980, the Swiss industrialist Stephan Schmidheiny, who was the leader of the biggest European asbestos cartel, still generated 90% of his profits from asbestos. Therefore, the report of the Federal Environment Agency on the lethal hazard posed by asbestos, which was published at the end of 1980, hit the nerve centre of the asbestos lobby at Eternit AG in Berlin like a bombshell (UBA 1980).² On 19 January 1981, the Minister for the Environment Gerhart Baum (FDP party) called for restrictions on asbestos use, as well as for 'an outright ban in some areas'. Within a few weeks, Eternit witnessed a two-digit fall in its turnover in the wake of this warning call. The company made over 1,000 staff redundant at the start of the 1980s. It was like an earthquake hitting the company, according to Lehmann, the then CEO of Eternit AG. As a result, Schmidheiny used all his might to thwart the impending asbestos ban, particularly by playing the threat of job losses off against environmental and health considerations and by falsely suggesting that no substitutes were available.

The work of the asbestos lobby paid dividends. Environment Minister Gerhart Baum decided a few months later to postpone a proposed ban on asbestos cement products for a further five to 10 years. Until then, stringent labelling requirements would ensure that people were protected from asbestos-related cancer.

Eternit buys researchers; a vast lobby across the world

Even before its publication, the Federal Environment Agency's report had triggered a great deal of activity within the asbestos lobby under the leadership of Eternit. Angry letters were sent to the competent state authorities and to the trade unions. Eternit, the leading company in the asbestos sector, found an important ally in its attempts to delay policy. This ally was none other than the Berlin-based Federal Health Agency (BGA), which opted not to vote in favour of health protection, but rather to protect the economic interests of the asbestos industry. There ensued a fierce war between experts, involving leading figures from the trade unions, the Federal Environment Agency and a number of independent researchers from the German Research Foundation (DFG), such as Professor Woitowitz, Professor Henschler, Professor Pott and Professor Norpoth. The environmental impact of asbestos is equivalent to smoking 'ten cigarettes a year' was the astounding assertion made by the highest-ranking federal public health administrator in Germany.

How the asbestos industry successfully defended its interests becomes clear when you read the 1989 preliminary report of the Federal Court of Auditors. According to the report, the industry, particularly Eternit, had for years been making significant donations to the department of the Federal Health Agency responsible for analysing the presence of asbestos in drinking water (publication in the journal DER SPIEGEL, 37/1989). The Court of Auditors noted that almost all asbestos research projects carried out by the Federal Health Agency had received funding from Eternit and that there was proof that the asbestos industry had also bought other senior researchers

² The report written by Woitowitz was a bombshell as it came with horrifying results of dust measures on building sites where asbestos cement was used, as documented in the Baustellenstudie-Hessen report commissioned by UBA (UBA Bericht 7/80)

who had been commissioned to carry out such research studies (Federal Court of Auditors 1989).

The asbestos industry, headed by its market leader Eternit, ignored, kept quiet about and played down the lethal hazard posed by asbestos for decades. Its political clout can be ascribed to its international dimension. In order to foster its interests, it had set up a powerful trade body in the 1970s called the Asbestos Information Association (AIA). Asbestos mining companies, manufacturers and the processing industry were all equally represented in the association, which coordinated its interests in over 35 countries. The main goal of the AIA was to secure asbestos production in the future. In 1971, a secret conference bringing together AIA members from almost all European countries had been convened in London. The confidential minutes of the conference (which was attended by Eternit and members of the asbestos association) reveal that the conference was not a knowledge-building exercise, but instead was solely devoted to discussing how the threat of future limitations on asbestos use or outright bans could be prevented, while there was no talk of asbestos worker or public health protection. The Chrysotile Institute in Montreal played a central role in this process. Its core task was the promotion and global defence of the lie that asbestos can be used safely. In light of the hundreds of thousands of asbestos-related deaths across the world, the following statement by George McCammon, the former President of the Institute, sounds positively inhuman: 'Asbestos helps to protect the poor. It would be immoral of us to deny them this protection'.

The goal of lobbyists in Germany was to create an asbestos-friendly climate among the ministers and authorities responsible for such issues as well as within the research community and to prevent the spread of critical opinions (Albracht 1991). One such initiative was the establishment in 1972 of an independent scientific advisory committee for the asbestos industry, which was chaired by Valentin, an industry-friendly occupational health doctor from Erlangen University. The confidential minutes of a 1972 meeting of the AIA thus logically read as follows: 'We can safely assume that the (working) group of doctors specialising in asbestosis will not enter into conflict with the five international authorities and that, from now on, no emotional, self-centred, exaggerated and unrealistic approaches in the field of health and environmental hazards will emanate from this group' (Albracht and Schwerdtfeger 1991, p. 406).

The 1979 activity report of the AIA shows how the asbestos lobby managed to disseminate its propaganda on the safe use of asbestos: 'Since then both asbestos associations, along with their presidents and their occupational health and safety and environmental experts, have worked almost non-stop to convince the competent ministries, labour inspectorates and social accident insurance associations that bans or specific substitution requirements are not necessary in the light of epidemiological data available in Germany, providing that the technical guideline concentrations are observed, and that they would be damaging to our economy and would threaten the survival of the asbestos industry' (Albracht and Schwerdtfeger 1991, p. 26). The report goes on to vaunt the fact that they had managed to limit the packaging and labelling requirements in the draft of the chemicals legislation of that time to the raw material asbestos and warded off attempts to introduce hazard symbols. Particular emphasis is

placed on the fact that the industry managed, at that time, to prevent asbestos from being listed in risk category I (very hazardous) of the Hazardous Materials Regulation, and asbestos-containing products from having to be labelled as being carcinogenic. In 1980, the AIA said of the EU: 'The EU's legislative process is very realistic and protracted ... EC officials are pragmatic... and I'm sure that Industry will be able to live with the outcome' (AIA 1980). This influence was a key reason why the EU clung on for too long to the idea of safe asbestos use and that it was only in 2005 that a general asbestos ban came into force in the EU, despite opposition from EU countries that were mining asbestos at that time, such as Greece and Italy.

Trade unions lead the way with calls for the phasing out of asbestos

However, the trade unions countered the aggressive lobbying by the asbestos industry with calls for an asbestos ban and by forging close ties between the trade unions IG Chemie, IGM, IG Bau-Steine-Erden, ÖTV, the DGB, the ETUC, international trade union organisations, the German Länder and the Federal Environment Agency.

At that time, over 25,000 workers from the chemicals, paper and ceramics sectors were involved in asbestos production and, according to the estimates of the DGB (German Confederation of Trade Unions), up to 1 million workers were exposed either permanently or occasionally to asbestos dust. The hazards posed by asbestos and the scandals surrounding Pentachlorophenol or dioxins led to the Executive Committee of IG Chemie deciding, in 1977, to set up a new Working Environment Department staffed with experts in the field. Asbestos thus became a key issue within IG Chemie and a scientific/technical network of people with political responsibilities and independent experts from all relevant fields was thus created. This provided a forum for presenting independent scientific work to decision-makers and trade union representatives at all levels and enabled them to develop a strategy for an asbestos ban. Up until then, at almost all levels within the trade unions – especially the secretaries of the industrial working groups – people had to plough their way through the supposedly latest results of scientific studies, which were almost always produced by researchers who were not independent and who were usually in the pay of industry.

A breakthrough in the development of a clear anti-asbestos strategy came in 1981 at a conference organised by IG Chemie, which brought together the works councils from the asbestos-producing and -processing companies, as well as the trade unions IGM, ÖTV, IG Bau-Steine-Erden and others. Up until then, the chairmen of the works councils at Eternit, Fulgurit, Wannit and other companies had felt more like 'messengers' of their companies than officers responsible for protecting worker health and safety. They were often strong advocates of 'safe asbestos use'. However, the guiding principle of the conference was: All of us, whether those who produce asbestos, or the 100,000 workers who handle asbestos on a daily basis in their companies or workshops, need to be protected from the number one cause of cancer in the workplace.

The then chairman of IG Chemie, Karl Hauenschild, declared on 12 February 1981 that improved occupational health would not be achieved by appealing to the moral conscience of industry, but instead could only be done through legal measures, collective bargaining agreements and their daily implementation in the workplace. His key message was that, for trade unions too, jobs that expose workers to the risk of cancer are not worth fighting for! (Hauenschild 1981). He called for the fight against asbestos to be stepped up and for asbestos to be replaced with non-hazardous products (IG Chemie 1981). A number of angry trade unionists from IG Chemie handed in their membership cards. A headline in DIE ZEIT at that time read: This is the first time that, when faced with a choice between jobs and environmental protection, a trade union has clearly opted for the environment and health protection. Eternit subsequently attempted to drive a wedge between the sectoral experts and the executive committees of the trade unions. Liesel Winkelsträter, the executive committee member responsible for asbestos, and Albracht, the head of IG Chemie's environment department, were invited on a study visit to Canada by Eternit. Its goal was to show them the excellent health protection levels guaranteed in asbestos mining and to exchange views with the Canadian Chrysotile Institute on recent findings relating to the harmlessness of chrysotile asbestos. The visit would end with a trip to see the extraordinary natural beauty of Alaska. All paid for by Eternit of course: flight, food and accommodation. IG Chemie responded very clearly that it alone would decide which sources the trade union got its information from and would pay for any resulting trips itself. No further immoral offers of this kind were made.

Around the same time, the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) adopted its 17-point programme to fight asbestos cancer, thus establishing a cross-industry trade union policy in favour of a full asbestos ban. Its main demand was for asbestos to be listed in Group I (highly hazardous, carcinogenic substances) of the then Hazardous Substances Regulation and for the limit concentration value to be reduced to a tenth of its value at that time. Other demands included a phased ban and compulsory asbestos substitution.

An important event in terms of implementation of the common trade union position on a phased asbestos ban was a meeting on 23 July 1981 in Munich between the Federal Executive Committees of DGB, IG Chemie and IG Bau-Steine-Erden, the Asbestos Cement Trade Association (Wirtschaftsverband Asbestzement e.V), members of the Board of Directors of Eternit AG, the Employers' Association for the Chemical Industry (Arbeitsring Chemie), the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) and the Bavarian Social Accident Insurance Association on the issue of asbestos substitution and the transition to asbestos-free materials. The trade union representatives accused the asbestos cement industry of failing in the past to promote asbestos substitution sufficiently enthusiastically or intensely despite the growing number of asbestos victims. At the meeting, they defended their joint position on a comprehensive, phased asbestos ban (DGB 1981). Their calls for an asbestos ban at that time were putting the federal government under pressure, as Gerhart Baum (FDP), then Interior Minister and responsible for environmental protection, had changed his initial stance and called the environment agency to heel. Herbert Ehrenberg (SPD), the minister in charge of occupational health and safety,

regarded employment to be more important than worker's health. He had received a letter from Eternit's works council warning of thousands of job losses. The minister responded as follows: 'I am of the opinion that a general ban on asbestos is not feasible due to the threats to jobs that this would entail'.

The federal government's stance gave a fresh boost to the asbestos lobby and, particularly, to its market leader and it proceeded to inundate trade union executive committees and trade union officials at all regional and local levels week after week with the results of new studies by researchers and institutes working for or close to industry. Their aim was to ensure that the call for a ban made by trade unions, especially by IG Chemie, did not come to fruition or was watered down. All the claims, postulates, statements, theses and slogans used by the asbestos industry and their so-called researchers to play down the issue, were systematically collected together by IG Chemie in order to clarify the 'generally accepted scientific findings relating to asbestos from the fields of occupational medicine and toxicology' (Woitowitz 1983). The Executive Committee called on the Federal Minister and the Committee for Hazardous Substances to take a clear stance on this issue. The questions were so broad-ranging that a working group chaired by Professor Woitowitz worked intensively to answer all the questions. After adoption by the Committee, all subsequent letters received were answered by the chairman on the basis of these findings and the whole organisation, including all the administrative units, was notified of them. The results could be seen after a couple of weeks: the warning letters from the asbestos industry stopped arriving and, for the trade unions and the works councils, this meant there was no turning back from the phasing out of asbestos.

The response from the Federal Labour Minister highlighted the hesitant attitude of the federal government of that time. He announced the following: 'At a meeting of cabinet heads at the Federal Chancellor's Office, the representatives of all the Ministers, with the exception of the representative of the Federal Interior Ministry and the President of the Federal Environment Agency, voted against an asbestos ban or stringent restrictions on industrial applications of asbestos' (Woitowitz 1983).

Cornerstones of the subsequent ban on asbestos

The joint position of the DGB, IG Chemie, IGM, ÖTV and IG Bau-Steine-Erden in favour of a phased asbestos ban, the swift compilation of a 10-volume catalogue of asbestos substitutes, which was presented to the Committee for Hazardous Substances by Albracht in his capacity as chairman of the Asbestos Substitutes Committee and published by the Federal Environment Agency, as well as the banks' threat to stop loans to Eternit, hung over the company and the asbestos cement industry like a Damocles' sword.³ In early 1982, the asbestos cement industry, which accounted for

³ In order to prepare the 10-volume catalogue of asbestos substitutes, Albracht G., together with Hoffmann, E. (chairman of the asbestos working group), held a large number of hearings with representatives from trade unions, public authorities, social accident insurance associations > p. 84

around 80% of asbestos consumption at that time, declared that it would voluntarily agree to reduce asbestos consumption on a step-by-step basis. The innovation programme, which was feted as a successful example of the principle of cooperation in the field of environmental policy, was not merely a willingness to self-regulate, but instead a reaction to the trade unions' asbestos phase-out policy and the Environment Agency's report, as well as to criticism of asbestos in the media. For too long Eternit had maintained its strategy of preventing an asbestos ban. This was also emphasised in a confidential study that Eternit's Board commissioned Hayek Engineering AG from Zurich to carry out in June 1981 (Hayek Engineering 1981). The study basically came to the conclusion that the research and development budget of 1.1% of turnover in 1980 (DM 6.1 million) was wholly insufficient and that Eternit had counted on preventing the ban for too long, without ever putting forward alternatives. The study made it very clear to the Board that it should prepare for a ban on asbestos. It is therefore no wonder that, around that time, following intervention by IG Chemie, which Schmidheiny acted upon, the then chairman of the Board of Eternit in Berlin was forced to resign because he wanted to continue to supply asbestos-containing materials to the Eastern Bloc, while at the same time supplying Western Europe with asbestos-free materials.

The trade unions' clear stance in favour of the phasing out of asbestos and the active support of thousands of works councils, which were committed to improving occupational health and safety and called for the use of asbestos substitutes, helped to build up significant pressure, which eventually led Eternit to move to asbestos-free materials for all its products in Germany earlier than planned.⁴ A good example of this commitment is the fight waged by the members of the works council at Bremer Vulkan. Asbestos had been a key issue since 1974 thanks to IGM. As early as 1968, the local labour inspectorate had informed the company's management about the dangers posed by asbestos. The works council went through the whole shipyard (ship building yard, maintenance and repair workshops, etc.) with a fine toothcomb, overseeing procedures and products to check whether they contained asbestos or not. The asbestos issue was discussed in working groups, in the company's newspaper, *Echolot*, and at meetings of employees and shop stewards and possible solutions were developed. Despite the shipyard crisis, in 1983 the workers had refused to overhaul the asbestos-riddled *United States*. 'We'd rather sign on than die!' they said. The chairman of the works council was dismissed, but, with the help of IGM, he eventually won his court case against the company.

and industries that process asbestos, asbestos-containing materials or substitute substances. The catalogue, which took account of the deliberations of the sub-group on use restrictions/substitutes, was adopted by the Committee for Hazardous Substances in December 1984 and was published within the framework of the Batelle research project entitled "Survey of commercially available substitutes for asbestos and asbestos-containing materials", which was run by Poeschel, E. and Kohlinga, A. and sponsored by the Federal Environment Agency. In 1985, for the information of all employers, the Federation of Social Accident Associations for the Industrial Sector (Hauptverband der gewerblichen Berufsgenossenschaften e.V.) published the catalogue of asbestos substitutes in its scientific journal.

⁴ See also. http://www.labourcom.uni-bremen.de/ak-alternative_fertigung/rundbrf/rundbrf/rund012/so14-asbesto12.html

Each year the ban is postponed and thousands more people fall victim to asbestos

In Germany, the share of asbestos-related diseases in 1980 stood at only 1.5%, whereas by 2000 this figure had risen to almost 20%. The death toll is also alarming: in 1980, 65 workers died as a result of an asbestos-related occupational disease; by 2004, this figure had risen to 1,130, making asbestos by far the most frequent cause of death among occupational diseases. Currently, in Germany, more workers die as a result of asbestos than as a result of work-related accidents. Since 1978, the social accident insurance associations have recorded over 27,000 asbestos-related deaths. Experts from the German Statutory Accident Insurance Association (DGUV) estimate that there are around 190,000 people suffering from asbestos-related diseases (Breuer 2005). According to the latest figures provided by the statistics unit of the DGUV, 1,292 people died from asbestos-related diseases in 2010, and this figure is based on recognised cases only.

In addition to the many asbestos-related deaths, the suffering of relatives and the health traumas experienced by many asbestos sufferers, the social and economic repercussions are also huge. As early as 1991, Albracht estimated that the economic cost to Germany of the compensated cases of asbestos-related occupational diseases (4,974 cases from 1950-1989) amounted to DM 7.5 million, without counting the asbestos removal costs. The amount of benefits paid out by the DGUV since 2003 as a result of asbestos-related occupational diseases amounts to over €300 million per year. Since 2010, the DGUV has incurred overall asbestos-related costs of over €10 billion in the form of long-term compensation and rehabilitation payments. The economic researcher Werner Schulz estimates that, based on the calculations made at the Environment Agency, the bottom line of a cost-benefit analysis of asbestos use would show a negative figure.

A fairly up-to-date overview of information relating to cancer in Germany can be found in Butz's publication on work-related cancer for the period 1978 – 2010 (Butz 2012). Of the 40,555 cases of work-related cancer (1978-2010), 30,271, according to the publication, were due to asbestos (74.64%). As regards Recognised occupational disease number 4104 (abbreviation BK4104 that stands for lung cancers, including laryngeal carcinoma), Butz gives the following interpretation: 'As regards BK 4104, the increase in the incidence of this BK is marked by the introduction of the fibre-years model in 1993'. The modified rule led to a significant increase in the number of recognised cases. Since Professor Tannapfel took over in 2006, a new analysis approach has been introduced and we have seen a renewed downward trend to the detriment of asbestos victims. In 2010, of the 3,765 cases recorded, only 721 were recognised and 643 compensated (BauA 2010). In other words, recognition is refused in 80% of cases!

Independent researchers, trade unions, media and politicians have criticised the approach taken by the Mesothelioma Register, which is part of the Bergmannsheil teaching hospital at the Ruhr-University Bochum. It is, however, given significant funding by the German legal accident insurance (DGUV). In 1984, H. Otto, Dortmund, set a figure of 1,000 asbestos bodies for defining minimal asbestosis. Even

when the register was transferred to Bochum, this principle, which had never been scientifically substantiated, continued to be routinely used as the basis for several tens of thousands of expert opinions produced by social accident insurance associations. In the meantime, the use of the mesothelioma register to check that a disease can be qualified as a BK, along with the application of the 'asbestos body' exclusion criteria, has become the standard used by social accident insurance associations, even when the diagnosis has been confirmed and a technical assessment has established that the occupational pre-conditions for recognition of an asbestosis or an asbestos-related lung cancer have been met. Non-recognition of a minimal asbestosis is a frequent reason given for refusing to recognise a BK4103 'asbestosis' and, especially, for refusing to recognise a BK 4104 'asbestos-related lung cancer'. In Germany, each year, 800 to 1,000 cases of asbestos-related lung cancer are refused recognition as occupational diseases even though they meet the recognition criteria of generally accepted medical standards (Woitowitz in Eurogip 2006). Woitowitz reaches this conclusion on the basis of a sufficiently reliable assessment of the data. He works on the premise that, broadly speaking in the field of occupational medicine, the ratio of mesothelioma cases to cases of asbestos-related lung cancer in society is roughly 1:2, as was demonstrated by McDonald in 1981. Recognition rates in France and the United States are in line with this ratio. However, recognition rates in Germany show a disparity. From the point of view of asbestos victims and their families, the assessment and recognition/non-recognition procedure for this occupational disease is, in many cases, perceived as tortuously long and demeaning and often ends in disappointment (ARD 2005).⁵

Learning from the asbestos tragedy – reducing the risk of cancer in the workplace

The gruesome failures of asbestos management and the human tragedies, as well as the long-term effects of asbestos, must also lead us to take a critical view of the over one hundred other carcinogenic substances. Even very hazardous carcinogenic substances, such as benzol, thousands of which are produced and processed each year, have not been appropriately assessed in Germany. This is despite the fact that, back in 1981, the German Research Foundation published its work-related cancer study in order to tackle the problem of work-related cancer using new scientific methods based on an innovative analysis for estimating cancer mortality risk among workers. The authors came to the conclusion that 'some 25% of all tumours developed by workers can be ascribed to work-related influences' (Horbach et al. 1981). The many asbestos deaths, including in Germany, and the suffering of thousands of asbestos victims are a wake-up call for timely, scientifically sound studies of carcinogens to be conducted and for swift measures, such as restrictions on use or bans, to be taken.

⁵ Recently, the ZDF-channel also broadcasted a documentary film dedicated to the injustice that asbestos victims are confronted with. <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/beitrag/video/1876034/Planet-e.Asbest---Fluch-der-Todesfaser#/beitrag/video/1876034/Planet-e.Asbest---Fluch-der-Todesfaser>

By creating the illusion of safe asbestos use, Eternit and the asbestos industry were able to conceal the real extent of the disaster and the suffering for decades. Eternit used the island-like situation of Berlin before the fall of the Wall to obtain subsidies and loans worth millions from federal and regional governments and garner political goodwill. Asbestos sufferers were often paid off in order to circumvent the recognition procedure for occupational diseases. Even the scandal at the company Rex in Baden-Württemberg, where, by the early 1980s, over 100 asbestos-related deaths had occurred, did nothing to change many people's attitudes to the issue. Quite the opposite in fact: the risks were exported to South Korea and asbestos continued to be produced and often under poorer working and health and safety conditions. Criminal liability provisions were not established, the burden of the consequences was shifted to society or to the statutory insurance system of the social accident insurance associations. On Eternit AG's homepage, not a word about its asbestos past is to be seen. 'Chemically clean' is the phrase they use to reflect the priority given by them to environmental and health protection, as well as the sustainable nature of their products and their social responsibility. Not a word about their past mistakes in relation to asbestos use. Credibility has a very different face! The politicians responsible for this issue and the competent authorities, as well as the companies and trade unions, must do their very utmost to ensure that those involved in asbestos removal now and in the future do not become the second wave of asbestos victims. Asbestos removal programmes, based on a public land register and with polluters contributing to the costs, are urgently needed. The discrepancy between the number of reported cases of asbestos-related occupational diseases and the number of compensated cases must not grow any further. The burden of proof should no longer be placed on the very often terminally ill workers.

'The soft phasing-out of asbestos is taking too long, is causing too much damage to health and too much suffering among those affected and is costing too much money. This soft transition must be replaced by an emergency brake, in other words a global ban on asbestos production and use' (Minister of State Heide Pfarr in Albracht, 1991).

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