

## A German who has traveled far. The man behind Echolot

growing demand for workers also led to massive immigration from other Soviet republics. When Moscow announced in 1987 the construction of yet another major oil shale power plant, Estonian environmentalists found the time ripe for organized protests, which then came to play an important role in the independence movement.

Estonia regained its independence in 1991, but the oil industry remains, and shows no signs of being on the way out. On the contrary: the production of Estonian shale oil in particular, with a long tradition going back to the controversial exports to Nazi Germany, has become extremely remunerative as a result of global high oil prices. Furthermore, the Estonians continue to export electricity from the major oil shale power plants to Russia, Latvia and, since 2006, to Finland.

Holmberg's explanation of why the oil industry remains, however, involves much more than fluctuating oil prices and economic calculations. Also of relevance are matters involving demography and security: closing of the oil shale industry would create enormous social difficulties, particularly for the Russian-speaking population who constitute the main labor force in north-eastern Estonia. That, in turn, would lead to tensions between Estonia and Russia. President Medvedev's reference to the obligation to, as in South Ossetia, protect Russian citizens "wherever they are" could also gain relevance in Estonia in a rather ugly way if mass unemployment and social unrest erupted in the Russian-dominated oil shale regions. In addition, the oil shale has made Estonia one of the few European countries that are actually able to meet their energy needs in a fairly independent way; almost all the energy they use, with the exception of that needed for road transportation, comes from the oil shale. It is an important argument, given the clear connection that exists today between energy and geopolitics. At present, a closure of the oil shale industry thus looks more distant than ever before – despite the obvious damage to the environment that it causes.

per högselius

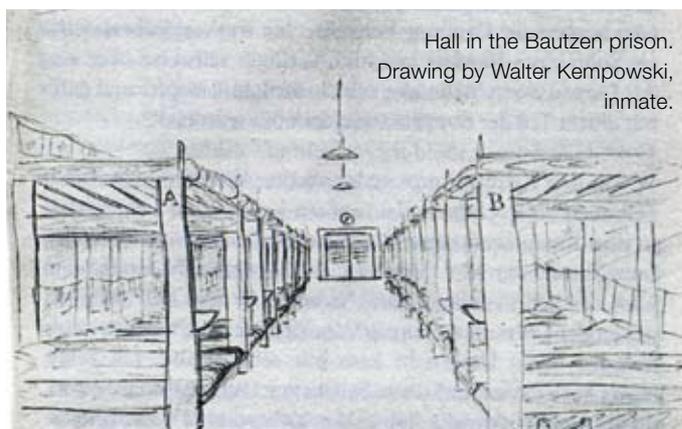
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**R**OSTOCK HAS PRODUCED one of the twentieth century's most original authors. Walter Kempowski (1929-2007) grew up here, and he returned to the town in more ways than one. His family had interests in the shipping industry, endorsed Christian-conservative values and rejected Nazism as an ideology. During the final stage of the Second World War, when the German Reich was disintegrating, Kempowski miraculously avoided being enrolled in the army. During the first post-war years, he drifted around the part of Germany that was under Western occupation. While visiting his home town in 1948, he was apprehended by the East German authorities and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment for espionage. He served eight years of the sentence – in Bautzen, where the Communist prison regime was particularly severe.

This gave him a late start in life. He was thirty years old by the time he graduated from senior high school. He thereafter qualified as an elementary-school teacher, with a radical, "reform-pedagogical" work-method. This remained his profession for a couple of decades, paralleled by an increasing production as an author. Kempowski's initial success as a novelist was nourished by his own family history. The publication of a grand family chronicle, stretching over several volumes, makes him the foremost portrayer of the German bourgeoisie. The chronicle covers more than one hundred and fifty years, up to, and including the final defeat in the modern war, which left the bourgeoisie feeling both defeated and humiliated – was not the war to a large degree the result of their own industrial efforts? Kempowski tried to understand frames of actions and patterns of reactions: his critics spoke of an apologia based on "trivialization" – *Verharmlosung*.

**HE HAD ENOUGH PUBLIC** success to make him throw himself into new projects, spanning many genres: from pedagogical handbooks to radio theater. He appropriated the technique of collage with delight, so that many, contradictory voices might be heard. In literature, this was scarcely innovative: Dos Passos had done the same within the art of novel-writing, as had Walter Benjamin in, for example, his *Passagenwerk*. But Kempowski was more daring, more systematic. Through a process of public collection, he created an archive of tremendous proportions, consisting of diaries, correspondence, unpublished autobiographies and other documents left behind by eye-witnesses to events, epochs and environments. The author's task was to arrange and sort the material, making it into a comprehensible whole.

The material proved very useful; it was more than



Hall in the Bautzen prison.  
Drawing by Walter Kempowski,  
inmate.



Kempowski talking on the telephone with his publisher.

adequate, providing material for research efforts other than Kempowski's own. The great *Echolot*-suite (1993-2005) consists of linked, unannotated witness accounts by both well-known and unknown contemporaries. These describe important series of events taking place during the Second World War: the march on Moscow and the Leningrad siege, the battle at Stalingrad, the Third Reich's final struggles and the mass flight from East Prussia as the Soviet army approached. The project would scarcely have been so successful and have such a singular impact had not the author himself been a habitual, not to say compulsive, note-taker who recorded everything that passed before his eyes. Notepads were his tools of trade; by zapping he could later construct precisely reproduced sequences of micro-time and a current reality, of created contemporality. Fiction and humanistic science met in Kempowski's method. Cross-fertilization took place.

**DICK HEMPEL'S BOOK** is an excellent introduction to a recently concluded life's work. It provides a journalistic overview rather than a literary analysis. Hempel places Kempowski in a socio-intellectual context, where he often found himself playing the role of outsider, *Aussenseiter*. He did not choose this part himself. It was, rather, a leftist literary critique that had difficulties swallowing a view on society that differed from its own. The chapters on the years of youth and imprisonment in a grim North Germany are among the book's best. These are, to a large degree – and entirely in Kempowski's spirit – based on interviews, letters and diaries.

anders björnsson

**Dirk Hempel  
Walter Kempowski  
– Eine bürgerliche  
Biographie**

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**ANDERS BJÖRNSSON**  
Editor-in-chief of BW.  
Visiting professor at  
Gothenburg University  
(School of Public Administration).