

OBITUARY

Klaus Tenfelde (1944–2011)

Klaus Tenfelde, in recent decades Germany's most influential historian of labour and the working class, died on 1 July 2011, just three months after he had retired from "his" Institute for Social Movements at the Ruhr University Bochum. Those who met Tenfelde will not easily forget him, for he was a giant of a man with a powerful voice. Extraordinarily erudite, sometimes his manner was gruff, although he was big-hearted too; and he was a passionately committed yet critical social democrat. Tenfelde always felt a strong connection with the *International Review of Social History* and the International Institute of Social History, and from 1992 to 2000 he was a member of the IISH's International Academic Advisory Board. Between 1996 and 2001 he played an important role on the Advisory Board of the *IRSH* too.

Klaus Tenfelde was born on 29 March 1944, the son of a construction worker and a housewife in the small town of Erkelenz near the Dutch border. At the age of fourteen he began an apprenticeship at the coal mine in Essen-Rossenray, but after three years in the mines joined the Bundesgrenzschutz (Federal Border Police). Taking the opportunity of becoming a mature student, he passed his final secondary school examinations (*Abitur*) in 1967 and went on to study history and a range of other subjects at the University of Münster.

His own experience of the mines shaped the direction of his academic work throughout his career. He obtained his doctorate in 1975 with an extremely wide-ranging and comprehensive thesis on the social history of mineworkers in the Ruhr in the nineteenth century,¹ and there followed ten years on the academic staff of the University of Munich, where in 1981 he completed a second doctorate (*Habilitation*) on the Bavarian coal-mining town of Penzberg.² In 1985 Tenfelde was appointed Professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, and five years later moved to Bielefeld where Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka were also active at that time. In 1995 Tenfelde was appointed Professor of Social History and Social Movements at the Ruhr University Bochum, a position he continued to hold until his retirement in 2011.

1. Klaus Tenfelde, *Sozialgeschichte der Bergarbeiterschaft an der Ruhr im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1977).

2. *Idem*, *Proletarische Provinz. Radikalisierung und Widerstand in Penzberg/Oberbayern 1900–1945* (Munich, 1982).

In Bochum, Tenfelde was also, *ex officio*, director of the Institute for Research on European Workers' Movements, which has been based there since 1980 and which has enjoyed an excellent relationship with the IISH ever since its inception. The core of its library was created in the first half of the 1970s, when tens of thousands of duplicate items were transferred from Amsterdam to Bochum. As an academic manager, Tenfelde was extraordinarily successful. The institute saw a period of significant expansion, was given a "more modern" name in 1999 (Institute for Social Movements), and, together with a number of related institutions, moved to a new building, the splendid House for the History of the Ruhr.

As a researcher, Tenfelde was a man of great distinction. He introduced new approaches to the strongly institutionally oriented history of German miners, through his own studies of proletarian communication structures, everyday life, work experience, associational culture, gender relations, and religious socialization for example;³ and by exploring less familiar sources such as petitions and photographs.⁴ He introduced a systematic international-comparative perspective,⁵ and extended the field of labour history to include not just "free" waged labour but also forced labour, especially during the Nazi era.⁶ After the fall of the Berlin Wall, he played a significant role in the historiography of the working class in the GDR,⁷ and

3. *Idem*, "Arbeiterschaft, Arbeitsmarkt und Kommunikationsstrukturen im Ruhrgebiet in den 50er Jahren des 19. Jahrhunderts", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 16 (1976), pp. 1–59; *idem*, "Mining Festivals in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (1978), pp. 377–412; *idem*, "Bergarbeiterkultur in Deutschland: Ein Überblick", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 5 (1979), pp. 12–53; *idem*, "Adventus. Zur historischen Ikonologie des Festzugs", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 235 (1982), pp. 45–84; *idem*, "Die Entfaltung des Vereinswesens während der Industriellen Revolution in Deutschland (1850–1873)", *Historische Zeitschrift. Beihefte*, New Series, 9 (1984), pp. 55–114; *idem*, "Arbeiterfamilie und Geschlechterbeziehungen im Deutschen Kaiserreich", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 18 (1992), pp. 179–203; *idem* (ed.), *Religiöse Sozialisationen im 20. Jahrhundert. Historische und vergleichende Perspektiven* (Essen, 2010).

4. Klaus Tenfelde and Helmuth Trischler (eds), *Bis vor die Stufen des Throns. Bittschriften und Beschwerden von Bergleuten im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung* (Munich, 1986); Klaus Tenfelde (ed.), *Pictures of Krupp: Photography and History in the Industrial Age* (London, 2005).

5. Gerald D. Feldman and Klaus Tenfelde (eds), *Workers, Owners and Politics in Coal Mining: An International Comparison of Industrial Relations* (New York, 1990); Klaus Tenfelde (ed.), *Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Munich, 1992). See also the collection of essays, which runs to almost 900 pages, published as Klaus Tenfelde (ed.), *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung im Vergleich. Berichte zur internationalen Forschung* (Munich, 1986).

6. Klaus Tenfelde and Hans-Christoph Seidel (eds), *Zwangsarbeit im Bergwerk. Der Arbeitsinsatz im Kohlenbergbau des Deutschen Reiches und der besetzten Gebiete im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Essen, 2005), 2 vols; *idem* (eds), *Zwangsarbeit im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts. Bewältigung und vergleichende Aspekte* (Essen, 2007).

7. Klaus Tenfelde (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte des deutschen Kommunismus* (Göttingen, 1995); Peter Hübner and Klaus Tenfelde (eds), *Arbeiter in der SBZ-DDR* (Essen, 1999); Peter Hübner,

he made a major contribution to the integral historiography of the German working class as a whole.⁸

During the course of 2010 Tenfelde was diagnosed with lung cancer. Just five months before his death, he wrote to me: “Now, after six months of treatment, the worst seems to be over, and I may start recovering – but this is a deceptive disease. Slowly, I am fighting my way back.” It seemed, briefly, as if he would win his battle. He began to contribute to academic conferences again, although the man whose voice had once been so powerful was now able only to whisper. But that deceptive disease eventually got the better of him.

In retirement, Tenfelde had hoped to continue work on his substantial “History of the Ruhr”, but his illness prevented it.⁹ Tenfelde is survived by his wife, Ellen, and their two children.

Marcel van der Linden

Christoph Klessmann, and Klaus Tenfelde (eds), *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* (Cologne, 2005).

8. See the monumental study Gerhard A. Ritter and Klaus Tenfelde, *Arbeiter im Deutschen Kaiserreich, 1871 bis 1914* (Bonn, 1992), and also Klaus Tenfelde (ed.), *Arbeiter im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1991).

9. The first instalment is the massive, three-kilo tome: Klaus Tenfelde and Thomas Urban (eds), *Das Ruhrgebiet. Ein historisches Lesebuch* (Essen, 2010).