

tong tana

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www.bmf.ch

On 10 March 2005, the Civil Court of Basel declared that Bruno Manser is presumed dead.

Presumed dead but not forgotten

Memorial service for Bruno Manser in Basel

More than 500 people attended the memorial service on May 21st for Bruno Manser in the Elisabethen church in Basel. On 10 March 2005, five years after his unaccountable disappearance in the rainforest of Borneo, the Basel Civil Court declared the Swiss rainforest advocate and human rights activist to be officially dead. People who described their recollections of Manser and the importance of his life's work included former Federal Councilor Ruth Dreifuss, the cabaret artist Franz Hohler, Basel state councilor Christoph Eymann, Mutang Urud as a representative of the indigenous people, Lukas Kundert, president of the Church Council, the environmentalist Martin Vosseler, Lukas Straumann, director of the Bruno Manser Fonds, as well as Monika Niderberger-Manser in the name of the Manser family. Tello Abing enhanced the programme with his music played on instruments from the rainforest. Kaspar Müller organised and moderated the memorial service.

Tong Tana is reprinting the speeches of Ruth Dreifuss and Franz Hohler verbatim. For further information, see reports in the daily press, or on Internet www.onlinereports.ch/2005/ManserFeier2005.htm.

Bruno Manser's Credibility

By Ruth Dreifuss

What determines a person's credibility?

Not the fact that he is prepared to risk his life. That is something that soldiers can do, any kind of fundamentalist or even lunatics.

Heroic deeds and sacrifice are evidence of a deep conviction. Others, however, can seldom comprehend them and, even less, participate in them. Because heroic deeds and sacrifice are often remote from everyday life. And I must admit that I regretted more than admired the daring of Bruno. I abhor a world, a society that demands heroic deeds of people. Heroic deeds as the price for the quiet, everyday happiness, for the simplest of basic rights. But for Bruno Manser it was clear that his lone voice would only be heard if he committed himself, singularly and entirely, to the life in the rainforest.

It is not heroism, however, that determined the influence of Bruno Manser on the people who knew him. Nor the longing for the lost or endangered paradise of the indigenous people. This alone would not have been sufficient to permanently brand the consciousness of people with the beauty of the rainforest and the threat to it, to point out the closeness of the unity between nature and man.

His power of conviction was expressed in the way in which he used both head and heart. With head - that means with his entire understanding of ethnological, zoological and botanical knowledge that was collected in his notebooks. And with heart - because his relationship with the Penan was also a love story. In doing so, he encountered not only the Penan with liking and sympathy but also the others with whom he conferred, here in Switzerland as well as in affluent countries. He wanted to understand them, in order to convince them, he offered them trust a priori and believed in their good will a priori. Not out of naivete but because he did not envisage them as prisoners of their short-term interests. It was important for him - and now we are back at the "head" - to understand the political processes and the complex connections to the timber industry so that he could position the lever exactly there where it would have the greatest effectiveness. Yes - head and heart! And in addition to that, a sense of humour and the ability to laugh at himself.

Federal Councilors have a lot to do with non-governmental organisations and with people who are involved in their concerns. The relationship is not always relaxed, and often it is a difficult one. That lies in the nature of the dialogue between officials and insistent citizens. There are not many people, however, who have given the Federal Council as much cause for concern as Bruno Manser. For instance at the time of his hunger strike when we didn't know if we should restrain him against his will. The government had difficulty with his obstinacy, with his roguishness and his childlike wisdom, with his ingenious ability to make use of the media for his own cause, with his demands for concrete, attainable action to be taken against the exploitation of the rainforest. Unfortunately, these



Charlotte Bélet and Ruth Dreifuss in the Elisabethen church in Basel.

reasonable demands were addressed inadequately at best, but they are still essential and one day they will become reality.

I had the good fortune of meeting Bruno Manser not only as a Federal Councilor. Of course he was expecting me to support his requests. And rightfully. And I also did so. It was clear that he wanted to know how he could best reach his goals within the parliamentary world of Bern. But every so often he would simply appear unexpectedly, feeling almost as much at home in my office as he did in the rainforest. My colleagues knew that I would find time for him between two appointments. He brought me his notebooks, the diary, for instance, of the summer that he spent as a shepherd in the Gurciusa valley. This valley that I had visited, when it was a question of protecting the moor regions of Switzerland, was precious for him. The protection of the Alps and their culture interested him just as much as the forests of Sarawak and its inhabitants.

The message of Bruno is still alive because the message and the person form(ed) a unity. Bruno is still alive in us because he fought for life. He was not able to complete what he set out to do, but he was confident that others would do so. The voice of Bruno is not to be ignored. And with his voice, the voices of the Penan and the sounds of the rainforest. They are not to be ignored and remain so. We will go on listening to them.

Ruth Dreifuss, representative of the Social Democratic Party, was a member of the Federal Council from 1993 until 2002 and President of the Confederation in 1999.

Missing and presumed dead

by Franz Hohler

“Presumed dead” is one of the most harrowing phrases that I know.

The condition that it describes is not death but rather the presumption of death, and that is almost worse than death itself because it gives hope to the small seedling for a tiny bit of earth on which it can grow, a crack in the concrete of finality, and it shoots up now, in defiance of the cold and dry winds of reason and whispers to us: Perhaps, perhaps, this missing person will nevertheless reappear one day, with an embarrassed smile and a murmured apology because he hadn't got in touch with us for so long. And when we ask “Where were you?” he will recall Peer Gynt upon his homecoming and answer: “In your thoughts, in your dreams”.

I believe that the time has come for us to bid farewell to this hope. If he were still alive, Bruno would have given us some sort of sign. Instead of referring to him with the harrowing “presumed dead”, perhaps it would be better for us to say, “Bruno is dead”.

Nevertheless, all of us see him on the stage of our recollections as one who demanded much of his own life, not only thoughts and dreams but also deeds. And not only symbolic deeds but deeds that called for the entire person and his entire life. It awakens in all of us – although I am sure he did not want it to be so – a somewhat guilty conscience, or at least the feeling that we could do even more.

Encounters with Bruno were always encounters with another way of living. He once came to one of my performances in the “théâtre fauteuil” in Basel, and then we went up the Spalenberg together to a small office on the Heuberg where he said he occasionally spent the night. His office proved to be a kind of jungle, a forest of paper and boxes, with tree trunks of books and information brochures,

ferns made of flyers, lianas (bushropes) made from the small woven baskets of his Penan friends into which bundles of poison arrows had been stuck, with palm leaves out of petition forms, and somewhere in the middle of it all was a computer – squatting like a toad in the rainforest. Whatever it was, employees schooled in the conventional order and routine of an office would have lost their way simply by trying to find a postage stamp in the thicket of paper.

In answer to my somewhat naïve question as to where he slept, he opened the door leading to a small balcony and there was his bed in the form of a hammock. As it was already October, I asked him the additional and equally naïve question as to whether it were not too cold, and he answered with his smile that is familiar to all of us.

He did not like to sleep in houses, he explained, and questioned the entire centuries-old panorama of houses that we were overlooking in the city of Basel. And it reminded me that there was another condition of mankind, the pre and external domesticity, and that the human primeval condition is actually far removed from settlements of one-family houses and office skyscrapers, in fields of force that are totally different from those between transformers, freeway access roads and antennas for mobile telephones. Bruno Manser, throughout his life, sought his ‘native land’ in these primary fields of force. He understood the language of the trees, he understood the language of the animals, he understood the language of the earth and the stars, he understood the language of life. And thus I cannot imagine anything other than his feeling familiar and secure in this part of life that we call death.

Franz Hohler is an author and cabaret artist living in Zurich



A pole in memory of Bruno Manser, carved by his friends from a tree trunk, was erected on the square in front of Basels theatre as part of the memorial service on 21 May 2005.

News in brief

Tello Abing protests in Bern against MTCC's timber certification

At the invitation of the Bruno Manser Fonds, Tello Abing, the only member of the Penan people who is living in Europe, met with a delegation of the Malaysian Timber Certification Council, MTCC, in connection with a workshop in Bern organised by the International Tropical Timber Organisation, ITTO. The Bruno Manser Fonds was active with an information stand at Bern's 'Käfigturm' on the same day.



Tello Abing presented a letter to the MTCC delegation under Harnarinder Singh. It was signed by eight Penan headmen in protest against the recent certification of a forest concession of the Samling company in the area of the Sela'an and Linau rivers (see *Tong Tana* April 2005). The Penan wrote: "This is our final decision. We headmen and our communities unanimously reject the certification of Samling." All members of the ITTO workshop received documentation on the controversial issue.

Until now, MTCC has only reacted evasively to the criticism. In the meantime, the matter that was brought to international public attention by the Bruno Manser Fonds has been prominently taken up in a report by Greenpeace International.

Further information can be found on our homepage www.bmf.ch as well as under www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/missing-links.

Thanks to Roger and Erika!

More than other institutions, the Bruno Manser Fonds lives from the honorary commitment of numerous volunteers. At the last annual meeting in 2005, two especially important volunteers took leave of their regular collaboration with BMF: Roger Graf and Erika Müri-Marrer. Roger Graf became acquainted with Bruno Manser in the rainforest of Sarawak in 1987 and, upon his

return to Switzerland in 1988, founded the "Pro Penan" organisation which in turn became the Bruno Manser Fonds in 1992. At the beginning of the 1990's, Roger was in charge of the BMF secretariat for two years. In view of the crisis within the organisation that followed the disappearance of Bruno Manser, Roger agreed to work on the executive board in the summer of 2003. Now that he realises the BMF is once again on a good way, he has announced his resignation. Erika Müri-Marrer, our honorary bookkeeper of many years standing, also began her collaboration under Bruno Manser. She is now sensing the wish for something new. Heartfelt thanks to Roger and Erika.

Manser biography to appear in autumn

A biography of Bruno Manser entitled "Bruno Manser – die Stimme des Waldes" [Bruno Manser, the Voice of the Rainforest] is scheduled to be published in September 2005 by the Zytglogge publishing house in Bern. Ruedi Suter, the Basel journalist and authority on Manser, is the author of the eagerly awaited book. A subscription offer for the biography will be included in the next edition of *Tong Tana*

54 new forest-friendly communities

Since the publication of the last *Tong Tana*, the following 54 Swiss communities have committed themselves to respecting the integrity of the tropical forests:

Aargau: Dottikon, Hellikon, Hirschthal, Zeihen. Baselland: Bubendorf, Frenkendorf, Nenzlingen. Bern: Aarberg, Allmendingen, Frutigen, Grosshöchstetten, Guttannen, Kandersteg, Lyss, Nidau, Niederstocken, Reichenbach, Urtenen-Schönbühl. Geneva: Carouge, Cartigny, Choulex, Meinier. Grisons: Casti-Wergenstein, Domat/Ems, Rhäzüns. Jura: Bonfol, Montsevelier, Vendlincourt. St. Gallen: Bronschhofen, Eichberg, Laupersdorf, Mosnang, Muolen, Steinach. Tessin: Camorino, Comano, Giubiasco, Lumino, Melide, Mendrisio, Monte Carasso, Orselina, Rovio, Verscio. Vaud: Cottens, La Sarraz, Romainmôtier-Envy. Valais: Bitsch, Randa. Zurich: Buch am Irchel, Dällikon, Grüningen, Niederglatt, Seegräben.

An updated list of communities and additional information can be found under: www.urwaldfreundlich.ch.



Bruno-Manser-Fonds with its new Executive Board

On the morning prior to the memorial service for Bruno Manser, the BMF held its annual meeting. The annual report and the yearly account were approved and the Executive Board renewed by regular rotation. Chantel Etter, free-lance lawyer in Uetion am See (ZH), and Sibylle Spengler, marketing director for the Declaration of Bern, Zurich, were newly elected to the Executive Board. Dominik Bucheli, geography student and president of BMF in Langenthal, and Christoph Wiedmer, forest activist for Greenpeace Switzerland, were confirmed in their offices. A warm welcome to the new members of the Executive Board!

Impressum

Tong Tana means «forest» in the language of the indigenous Penan living in the rainforest of Sarawak (Malaysia)

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