

Elisabeth Zimmermann-Modler 1956–2025: Trotskyist and fighter for the working class

Marianne Arens, Peter Schwarz
9 December 2025

Elisabeth Zimmermann-Modler devoted her entire adult life to building a better, socialist society. In 1975, at the age of 19, she joined the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and remained an active and leading member for the rest of her life. On November 28 she died from the consequences of a tragic accident in her flat in Duisburg.

Her German and international comrades will remember “Elli,” as everyone called her, for the tireless energy with which she championed Marxism among workers and party members, for her firmness of principle and for her human warmth. Dozens of messages of condolence received by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) from all over the world express this.

“For Elli, the struggle to build the International Committee of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution was her alpha and omega. She defined comradeship and embodied socialist internationalism in everything that she did,” writes Chris Marsden, national secretary of the British Socialist Equality Party.

Other letters say: “She showed enormous energy and seriousness as she dedicated her life to building the revolutionary party, our international party, which will lead the working class to power and overthrow the capitalist system.” “She was profoundly concerned about the living conditions of the working class, which was reflected in many of her articles.” And: “She was always ready to engage in extensive discussions with members, worked intensively to clarify fundamental questions of programme and perspective and to exchange experiences. She belonged to that generation who never saw themselves as part of a national section, but as part of a world party.”

Elli was not only a fighter for socialism in a difficult period; her life was also a reflection of that period. Many of those who once journeyed alongside her were not equal to the political pressures they faced. Elli stood firm because, basing herself on the history of the ICFI, she repeatedly strove for a Marxist understanding of the objective crisis of capitalism, which lay behind the political changes of the last 50 years.

1956–1974 – Childhood and youth

Elli did not grow up on the sunny side of life. Her childhood and youth were marked by the unhealed wounds and scars that the crimes and wars of the Nazis had left deep in German society and within families, and by the dull, backward culture of the Adenauer era.

When Elli was born on November 10, 1956, her mother, Gerda Schmidt, was only 17 years of age. She came from Reichenberg (today in the Czech Republic), had experienced the flight to the West in 1945 at the age of six and then grown up in Nuremberg. Gerda’s father had been at war from 1939 to 1945 and, as Elli later reported, “never spoke about his, without

doubt, traumatic experiences during this time—neither about what he had done to others nor about what he himself had suffered.”

Elli only met her biological father, a Catholic priest and religion teacher of her much younger mother, when she was 16. She never developed a relationship with him. He had refused to acknowledge his child and had tried to press Gerda into having an abortion, completely illegal at that time. Gerda refused but had to leave Nuremberg “so as not to bring shame on the family.” She continued her training as a teacher in Bad Reichenhall and Würzburg and placed baby Elli with a foster family in Salzburg, where the child spent her first four years together with three other adopted children. Her mother visited her every weekend.

Elli spent a further three years with her grandparents in Nuremberg in a small two-room flat. Only in 1964, after her mother had married another man and given birth to her half-brother Peter that same year, did the small family finally also take Elli in. Because her father was repeatedly changing jobs to improve his position, the family moved often. During the Stuttgart period (around 1968–69), Elli underwent spinal surgery because of scoliosis. This illness caused the 12-year-old great pain and hardship—plaster beds, a hospital stay surrounding the operation and six months in which she had to lie flat. Despite extensive absences from school, the inquisitive and intelligent child did not have to repeat a year.

In 1971 the family moved to Frankfurt, where Elli, alongside attending school, worked as a nursing assistant in a hospital. She began to feel at home in the city and to make friends. But the family then moved again, this time to the countryside, to the tiny village of Michelbach (only 200 inhabitants) in the Hintertaunus region, which had hardly any contact with the outside world—at that time, there was neither internet nor social media—and did not even have a public transport connection. For Elli this was “a catastrophe.”

In spite of this, she began to take an interest in political questions. She read Rolf Hochhuth’s play *The Deputy* about the collaboration of the Vatican with the Nazis and left the church. Together with her mother, she watched films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, which raised the painful issues of the postwar period.

1975 – Joining the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter

At the age of 18, Elli, at her own request, moved to Frankfurt to do her Abitur (university entrance qualification) there. In the same year, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) government under Willy Brandt had lowered the age of majority from 21 to 18. Elli “was overjoyed to escape the loneliness and isolation of the Hintertaunus.”

She moved to a city in which politics was simmering. Alongside Berlin, Frankfurt had been a centre of the student revolt that brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets in 1967–68. But when Elli moved to Frankfurt,

the student movement was already in an advanced stage of disintegration. The huge wave of workers' struggles that had erupted from 1968 onwards, beginning in France and spreading to Germany, Britain and large parts of Europe, had blown apart the petty-bourgeois protest movement.

One part oriented towards the SPD and climbed the career ladder right up into top government posts. Others turned towards the Stalinist German Communist Party (DKP) or Maoism and joined the so-called K-groups. A small minority embarked on the path of individual terror, murdered leading politicians and business leaders and gave the ruling class a pretext for frenzied state rearmament.

At the universities, anti-Marxist theories of postmodernism made inroads. Environmental and gender issues displaced the lip service previously paid to socialism and proletarian class struggle. In the same year that Elli moved to Frankfurt, the German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation (BUND) was founded. Five years later came the founding of the Green Party. In 1985, the former street fighter and later German foreign minister Joschka Fischer entered a state government in Hesse as the first Green minister.

Elli was one of the few of her generation who did not allow herself to be swept along by this inward turn, by the rejection of class struggle in favour of allegedly cross-class "questions of humanity" and by the renunciation of the working class in favour of one's own career. In 1975 she encountered the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA, League of Socialist Workers), as the German section of the ICFI was then called, and after a short time became a member.

This was the most important step in her life. In the face of numerous Stalinist, left-reformist and petty-bourgeois protest and environmental groups active in Frankfurt at the time, Elli made a conscious decision in favor of the building of a Marxist party in the working class. She never deviated from this decision for the rest of her life and never regretted it.

The BSA was the only party that stood for orthodox Marxism, for the position defended by Leon Trotsky against Stalin, namely that the inner contradictions of world capitalism inevitably lead to revolutionary crises that pose humanity with the alternative of socialism or barbarism, and that solving humanity's crisis depends on building a revolutionary leadership in the working class.

Elli first encountered the BSA on May 1, 1975, when Helmut Arens, a founding member of the party, sold her a copy of the party newspaper *Der Funke* (*The Spark*). Only a week later, she travelled to Essen and took part in a national demonstration and meeting of the BSA against unemployment and for the building of the Trotskyist party, which was attended by several hundred workers and young people.

Elli now regularly attended meetings and "Marxist study circles" at the Frankfurt-Mitte youth centre, and took part in selling and building up the party newspaper.

A look at the first issue of *Der Funke*, which Elli bought and read on May 1, 1975, provides an exemplar of the political perspective she chose. The BSA's internationalism, its orientation to the working class, its hostility to Pabloism and Stalinism and its striving to build a revolutionary party in the working class and youth find clear expression on its 12 pages.

The issue contains a major report headlined "VW workers want to fight!"; articles on the class struggle in Portugal, Indochina, Lebanon and Italy; an appeal "We demand the right to work and training!" for the BSA demonstration on May 8; a speech by Leon Trotsky from 1924 for the 35th anniversary of May Day; the first part of a series "The pseudo-socialism of the DKP [postwar German Communist Party]"; the fifth part of a discussion of the book series *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* under the heading "Pablo's 'self-reform of the bureaucracy'"; a polemic against the Pabloite GIM [International Marxist Group] and the Spartacist League; and an advertisement for the weekly meetings and Marxist study circles of the Socialist Youth League in 21 different towns and districts.

1976–1985: Taking on leadership responsibilities in the BSA

Elli threw herself wholeheartedly into political activity. She sold *Der Funke* and, from September 1976, its successor *Neue Arbeiterpresse* (*New Workers' Press*) at factory gates, at schools and universities, in the city centre and door to door in working class districts, and discussed with hundreds, indeed thousands of workers and young people.

"On the side," she worked to earn a living, completed her Abitur at the Musterschule in Frankfurt and began training at a commercial college. In 1976 she married Wolfgang Zimmermann, who had been a member of the BSA for some time. The marriage did not last long; by 1977 their paths had parted.

Elli now worked almost full-time for the BSA and was soon elected to the party's leadership. She took part in almost all the "Euromarches" organised by the ICFI between 1977 and 1983. She even sacrificed her vocational training for these exhausting campaigns.

The marches, which were initiated by the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), were based on an opportunist concept. They appealed to the reformist and Stalinist apparatuses and were meant to impress the nationalist regimes in the Middle East, with which the WRP was building close relations behind the back of the ICFI. Most of the participants, however, were not aware of this. Like Elli, they welcomed the opportunity to discuss with workers in other European countries and to establish contacts and friendships with international comrades. Some comrades who have now sent condolence messages have known Elli since that time.

In Germany, Elli played an important role in the work among steelworkers. When they went on strike for six weeks in the winter of 1978-79 for the 35-hour week, Elli was at the picket lines from morning until night despite the freezing cold, selling the *Neue Arbeiterpresse*, quickly gaining the trust of the steelworkers and discussing with them for hours. Once, workers took her into the steelworks to show it to her with pride.

During this period, Elli was also entrusted with difficult tasks. In Paris, she took part in events and campaigns around the film *From Tsar to Lenin*. She was tasked with building a local branch in the Saarland, where she had to find both work and accommodation.

The steel and coal industries, the industrial backbone of the Saarland, were being systematically dismantled at that time, provoking fierce resistance from the workers. The then-leader of the state SPD and mayor of Saarbrücken, Oskar Lafontaine, followed the reporting of *Neue Arbeiterpresse* closely. Lafontaine played a key role in neutralising workers' resistance to the destruction of jobs. In 1985 he became Minister-President of the Saarland and, thanks to his good relations with the IG Metall union, oversaw the seamless closure of the steel industry. The steelworks in Völklingen, founded in 1873 and in front of which Elli sold many issues of *Neue Arbeiterpresse*, is today an industrial monument. Lafontaine later became national chairman of the SPD, federal finance minister and co-founder of the Left Party (Die Linke) and the Sahara Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW).

Elli also took part in several international schools at the WRP's Marxist centre in Parwich (Derbyshire, UK). Here too she built many friendships with comrades from around the world.

She regularly spoke at the BSA's annual meetings held on the anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination. There she reported on the investigation Security and the Fourth International and condemned the treacherous murder of Tom Henehan, a young leading member of the Workers League, who was shot dead by hired killers in New York in 1977. The murder was intended to intimidate the predecessor of today's

Socialist Equality Party and to halt further investigations. But, as Elli said, “no attempt at intimidation could stop the campaign for Security and the Fourth International.”

In the early 1980s, NATO’s “dual-track decision” on nuclear rearmament provoked mass protests throughout West Germany. On October 10, 1981, 300,000 people demonstrated in Bonn, the capital of West Germany, against the danger of war. The Easter marches drew large crowds. The BSA opposed bankrupt bourgeois pacifism and explained: “Those who want disarmament must fight for the overthrow of capitalism, because the cause of war is the capitalist profit system.”

But the foot soldiers of the trade unions, the Stalinist DKP and its youth organisation SDAJ did everything in their power, together with the Social Democrats and church groups, to silence the BSA. They did not succeed. In this hostile environment, Elli proved to be, as an eyewitness from that time writes, “solid as a rock.”

In February 1984, Elli chaired a BSA meeting in defence of foreign workers against the Mannesmann corporation. In Duisburg-Hüttenheim, the company was offering foreign workers “redundancy payments” if they “voluntarily” gave up their jobs and left the country. “We are not conducting this campaign on humanitarian grounds,” Elli said at the meeting, “but as a call to fight against the mass destruction of jobs and against the deportation measures of the employers and their reactionary Kohl government.”

She also directed her fire explicitly against the works councils and trade union leaders in IG Metall, who refused to warn and support the Turkish workers in the struggle over jobs. Elli described this behaviour as “a huge blow to the working class as a whole because it enables division and therefore is weakening. The basis for this betrayal is the opportunist attitude of these leaders, who adapt themselves to capitalism and what is possible within this system.” These words have not lost any of their relevance to this day.

On June 18, 1983, during a sales campaign for the *Neue Arbeiterpresse*, Elli met her future husband, Peter Modler, a steelworker and shop steward at Thyssen. He became Elli’s love and refuge and thereafter always offered her a trusted place of retreat in difficult situations.

1985–1986 – The political and theoretical rearmament of the ICFI

The opportunist degeneration of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) increasingly put the BSA under pressure in the 1970s and 1980s. The Euromarches were only one form through which the WRP tried to push the German section in an opportunist direction. This led to intense political and organisational crises and almost destroyed the section.

The British section and its leader, Gerry Healy, enjoyed enormous political authority in the BSA. This rested on the struggle Healy had waged against Pabloite revisionism in the 1960s and on the role he had played in the founding of the BSA in 1971. But over the course of the 1970s, Healy shifted onto the Pabloite course he had earlier opposed. He built opportunist relations with Labour politicians, Stalinists, trade union leaders and bourgeois-nationalist rulers in the Middle East and put pressure on the BSA to follow suit.

The BSA resisted, but it was politically too inexperienced to grasp the extent of Healy’s opportunism and to fight it politically and theoretically. This task was taken on by the Workers League in the US, which in 1982 and 1984, under the leadership of David North, produced a comprehensive critique of Healy’s theoretical positions and of the WRP’s opportunist degeneration. Healy suppressed discussion of this, threatened the Workers League with expulsion and sought to isolate it.

This isolation was broken when, under the pressure of its own crisis, the

WRP imploded in 1985 and the critique of the Workers League could be discussed openly throughout the ICFI. The BSA aligned itself unanimously with the critique, defended the ICFI against the attacks of the WRP renegades and began systematically to educate its membership in the history of the ICFI and in the lessons of the split.

The years of the break with the WRP were a period of intense historical study and international discussion for the entire ICFI, on the basis of which the world party was politically and theoretically rearmed and took a major step forward.

Despite her great respect for Gerry Healy, Elli did not hesitate to take the side of internationalism and the ICFI. She studied the documents of the split and assimilated its lessons. Whenever she could, Elli participated in campaigns, schools and congresses in Germany, Britain, the US and even Australia, and helped with political education. She patiently introduced younger members in particular to the complex issues. At international conferences she also often helped as a translator.

“The fact that the Fourth International has survived, that it exists and is fighting, is proof of the correctness of its programme and the political strength of its principles,” was how Elli summed up the lessons of the split on October 16, 1988 at a meeting marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International.

She established especially close contacts with the British comrades who, during the split with the WRP, had supported the ICFI and founded today’s Socialist Equality Party in the UK. The BSA and the new British section held joint summer schools and European election campaigns. “She was a constant presence as we collectively worked through its lessons and renewed and developed the unified historical and internationalist political perspective of Trotskyism that the WRP had broken from and sought to eradicate,” writes Chris Marsden in his message of condolence.

1987–88 – The struggle at Krupp-Rheinhausen steelworks and as a shop steward at Siemens

The break with the WRP removed the political pressure to adapt to the trade union bureaucracy. In its 1988 perspectives resolution, “The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International,” the ICFI analysed the changes in the world economy which underlay the WRP’s crisis. The extensive resolution demonstrated that globalisation—the unprecedented integration of the world market and the internationalisation of production—had undermined all national programmes.

This applied both to the perspective of “socialism in one country,” put forward by the Stalinists, who in the following years liquidated public ownership in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, and to the social reformism of the trade unions and Social Democracy. It was no longer possible to negotiate social compromises at a national level when global corporations could relocate production to other countries without difficulty.

The trade unions responded by transforming themselves into the co-managers and factory police of the corporations. They ensured the competitiveness of the companies by drawing up cost-cutting plans themselves and enforcing them against the workforce. For this they were richly rewarded.

In the winter of 1987–88, the last major industrial struggle before German unification erupted in Duisburg, where Elli lived. The Krupp corporation announced the closure of the steelworks in the Rheinhausen district, where 6,300 of formerly 16,000 workers remained and met fierce resistance. The struggle lasted 164 days and ended in a bitter defeat.

The BSA systematically exposed the treacherous role of IG Metall. While the local officials spouted radical phrases, supported by the Stalinist

DKP, the Maoist MLPD and other pseudo-lefts, the IG Metall executive in Frankfurt agreed to the destruction of 35,000 jobs in the German steel industry. The BSA published the secret agreement. Under the mediation of the Hesse Social Democratic Minister-President and later Federal President Johannes Rau, the struggle in Rheinhausen was ultimately strangled.

Although she had to work during the day, Elli threw herself into the effort to warn the steelworkers against this sell-out. She sold the *Neue Arbeiterpresse* at the plant gate, on the streets and in residential areas and intervened at meetings. "From the first to the last minute of any assignment she was politically focused and discussed the political issues at stake in the struggle over jobs, the treacherous role of IG Metall, Social Democracy, Stalinism and the MLPD at the highest political level," writes a comrade who worked closely with her at the time.

After the split with the WRP, Elli took a job as a clerk at Siemens in Düsseldorf, which she carried out for 35 years until retirement, despite continuing back problems. There she was soon elected as a shop steward and, in that capacity, intervened in IG Metall in support of the BSA's perspective. At IG Metall delegates' meetings, she consistently opposed the lies and evasions of the trade union functionaries.

Thus, in June 1989 she warned against the "European Single Market" project supported by the bureaucracy. She described the Single Market as "an instrument of the most powerful European corporations for trade war against their American and Japanese rivals on the world market, and for class war against the working class in each individual country." It must "not be allowed that workforces of the same company in different countries, plants or departments are played off against one another."

In September 1990, she attempted to introduce an emergency motion at an IG Metall meeting in Düsseldorf in defence of Iraq against the war of the United States, which sent the bureaucrats into a rage.

In March 1992, Elli spoke out in Düsseldorf against the wage restraint agreed by IG Metall as part of the restoration of capitalism into the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany). In a courageous speech, she held the entire IG Metall executive responsible and attacked its support for mass sackings in eastern Germany. "In particular the close collaboration between trade union leaders, the Treuhand privatisation agency and the Kohl government in closing factories and organising mass redundancies in eastern Germany must be rejected," she said.

1989–2019 – Founding the SGP and building the WSWs

When mass protests broke out in the GDR against the Honecker regime in the autumn of 1989, the BSA intervened energetically and smuggled leaflets across the inner-German border for the first time. It supported the opposition to the Stalinist regime but resolutely opposed the introduction of capitalism and re-unification on a capitalist basis. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the BSA sold tens of thousands of copies of *Neue Arbeiterpresse* and of Trotsky's books, and stood its own candidates in the last Volkskammer (People's Chamber) election in the GDR in March 1990.

Elli could only take part in this intervention to a limited extent because of her work at Siemens. In 1991, she supported Hanne Levien, an East German worker who, as a single mother with two children, one of them severely disabled, had been summarily dismissed for political reasons. In September 1991, Elli reported on the case at an IG Metall delegates' meeting in Düsseldorf, distributed leaflets and collected signatures in support.

Social Democrats, Stalinists and trade unions reacted to the collapse of the GDR and the dissolution of the Soviet Union with a further shift to the

right. They backed bourgeois propaganda that socialism had failed. Pseudo-Trotskyist groups such as the Pabloite GIM dissolved themselves into the PDS, the successor to the Stalinist party of state the SED, and later into the Left Party (Die Linke), which itself declared capitalism to be the only alternative and supported capitalist restoration.

The ICFI was the only political force that opposed this renunciationism and drew the political conclusion that a new revolutionary party would not emerge from the ruins of the old, politically bankrupt organisations but only through rallying politically advanced workers around the programme of the Fourth International. The task was no longer to use tactical initiatives to expose reformist leaders but to found a new, international party with which the working class could intervene as an independent force in political life.

In the second half of the 1990s, the sections of the ICFI, which had previously called themselves "leagues," transformed themselves into parties. In 1998, they discontinued their national printed newspapers, and the ICFI began the daily publication of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Elli played an important role in this work. In 1997, she was elected to the leadership body of the new party, on which she served until 2024. She stood several times as a party candidate in European, federal and state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia. In this capacity, she appeared on television election programmes and public panel discussions. She also played an energetic role in collecting the many thousands of signatures needed to place the party's candidates on the ballot.

Freed from the physically demanding burden of newspaper selling, Elli wrote more than 300 articles for the WSWs. She dealt with the social conditions of the working class, low wages, unemployment, poverty and homelessness, and with the attacks on refugees and migrants. Another of her topics was the problems facing steel and metalworkers in the Ruhr region. Elli took personal risks when it came to exposing the scandals of her own company, Siemens, and the collaboration of IG Metall with management. Here her steadfastness and courage were particularly evident.

In 2004 she condemned the drastic wage cuts which Siemens enforced with the threat of moving thousands of jobs to Eastern Europe. She wrote: "The role of the trade union functionaries is to pass on and enforce the management's blackmail downwards. At no point were they prepared to organise a joint struggle together with workers in Hungary and other Eastern European countries."

And in October 2015, when Siemens embarked on job cuts and a new austerity programme to eliminate more than a thousand posts, impose wage cutting and introduce sweeping flexibilisation of working hours, she wrote: "What is now becoming clear are the consequences of the so-called 'conciliation of interests' that the Siemens central works council signed."

She unsparingly denounced the collaboration of the apparatus: "IG Metall and the works council claim that, through long and tough negotiations, they have almost halved the planned destruction of jobs, and that this is a great success. But that is the usual eyewash that follows a pre-arranged ritual. First, the corporation announces high numbers of redundancies in consultation with the works council; then, a few completely harmless trade union protests follow; and finally, the works council agrees to a reduced level of job cuts and celebrates the reduction as a great success."

Again and again she drew the conclusion: "All the more urgent is an international socialist perspective for the defence of jobs, whether at Siemens, VW or Bombardier, to name only some of the international companies that have recently announced massive job cuts."

Elli knew the role played by Siemens and other German corporations, such as Krupp, Thyssen, IG Farben, VW, Daimler-Benz, the Quandt group and Deutsche Bank, in the rise and crimes of Hitler fascism. Again and again, she wrote about the refusal of the German judiciary to settle accounts with the crimes of National Socialism (Nazism).

In January 2010, on the trial of John Demjanjuk, a former SS guard of the Sobibor concentration camp, she wrote: "Many of those most responsible for the Nazi crimes, and most of their accomplices, have never been brought to trial and held to account in the Federal Republic." She continued:

Historians estimate that around 170,000 people were involved in the murders carried out by Nazi Germany. Only 6,500 culprits were sentenced in postwar Germany and often given very low fines. Not only were many of those responsible who had worked in the judiciary, the intelligence services and police in Nazi Germany never held accountable, but they seamlessly continued their activities in leading positions in postwar Germany.

Elli repeatedly returned to the failure of the Federal Republic to come clean on this question and also shed light on the case of the former SS Obergruppenführer Hartmann Lauterbacher, whom the foreign intelligence service (BND) employed as an agent for 13 years after the war.

She also wrote about the war crimes of the Waffen SS and Hitler's army, the Wehrmacht, in Greece (Distomo, Cephalonia) and Italy (Marzabotto). She warned against the illusion "that under present social conditions the survivors of these crimes will be granted genuine justice (insofar as this is possible at all), and that they will truly receive compensation for the wrongdoing and suffering inflicted upon them." She added:

A real reckoning with the crimes of German Nazi rule and a genuine reconciliation with the victims of those crimes is only possible through a joint international struggle by the working class to overcome capitalism. At the end of the Second World War, the German and European working class was prevented from settling accounts by the Allies and the Stalinists, who did everything in their power to save the totally discredited bourgeois order.

With equal determination, she named the new crimes and their social consequences. Time and again she wrote about the catastrophic floods in the Ahr valley, in which many lives could have been saved. "What is left is anger and bitterness in the face of a policy that has failed so disastrously and yet, to this day, provocatively denies it," she wrote.

Her defence of refugees and migrants and rejection of deportations and right-wing extremism read prophetically today. She repeatedly returned to this topic, which was especially close to her heart. She wrote about far-right attacks and arson, about racist police violence and about new asylum and immigration laws.

In March 2002, she drafted, together with Ulrich Rippert, the appeal "Xenophobes in government," aimed against the new immigration law of the Schröder-Fischer government. It stated: "The character of a government is always revealed most clearly in its treatment of the socially weakest members of society." The passing of the law was a serious warning: "The sharpness and aggressiveness with which the social and political rights of foreigners are being attacked is also directed against social benefit claimants, the unemployed and the vast majority of working people."

Even in this period, Elli took part in numerous conferences, schools and congresses of other sections, including the 2016 party congress of the British SEP in Sheffield and the 2018 congress of the US SEP in Michigan. For the younger generation, as one message of condolence puts

The last years

In the autumn of 2020, Elisabeth Zimmermann retired, but she was not able to enjoy retirement for long. Only two years later she suffered a serious stroke. From then on, she struggled with high blood pressure, acute sleep disturbances and heart problems and had to constantly take strong medication. It was also during this period that her mother died, for whom Elli wrote a long obituary.

Nevertheless, Elli continued to visit comrades, even over long distances, and to attend party demonstrations and meetings. She was last in Berlin on November 19 to hear David North's lecture "Where Is America Going?" at Humboldt University.

Elli's tragic and far too early death has robbed the SGP, the ICFI and the working class of a precious member. Elisabeth Zimmermann-Modler was one of very few of her generation who, despite great political and ideological pressures, consciously decided to devote her entire life to the service of the working class. She had understood that this required the building of the international Trotskyist party, and she remained loyal to this path for more than 50 years.

Elli's life represented the best of the workers' movement and is a part of the history of our own movement. It is remarkable what strength, endurance and unshakeable loyalty she brought to the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International. For this she will go down in history as a fighter for the liberation of the international working class.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact