

A life spent fighting for a different world  
An obituary for Dieter Müller, 1959 - 2023

If you could make a monument to the political post-68 generation, now patronisingly dubbed "boomers", in human form, it would be Dieter Müller. We are not writing this here because hyperbole is customary in obituaries. No, Dieter was a polyglot internationalist who grew up in Italy and Spain and whose home was the movement of those fighting for a different, fairer world.

In contrast to the 68 generation who, with their Vietnam solidarity, knew little about Vietnam but a great deal about imperialism, Dieter knew every nook and cranny of the political and economic conditions there, where he began as politically active and later went on to make these politics his profession and vocation. Like many of his generation, he was active in the solidarity movement with the liberation movements in Central America, particularly in Guatemala. He came to medico international in 1988 without completing his geography degree. It's not as if he needed one.

For more than 30 years, he then worked for medico in various project roles: from Central America expert to head of the project department to management responsibility for various field offices. Listing these, it hits home that Dieter never cared about titles and posts. He wanted to be wherever he was most useful.

Anyone new to medico just needed to talk to Dieter to understand what was at the heart of medico: an unconditional sense of solidarity with the excluded, the ostracised and the poor. For Dieter, this also meant being brutally honest about the mistakes and failures of political organisations when they pretended to speak on their behalf but were first and foremost pursuing their own interests.

Those who wanted to meet project partners with Dieter had to travel far from whichever capital it was. Dieter despised the increasingly professionalised development aid that cosied up in nice offices with good salaries in the capitals of the South and became an expat elite. He demanded of himself and others that they throw themselves into the fray of the margins of society and work there in step with the people and the complex realities of their lives.

With Dieter's support, the idea and practice of Islands of Reason emerged at medico. One example was the collaboration with the Guatemalan health and community organisation ACCSS. With his friends Elisabeth and Humberto, whom he knew from back in the days of the underground movement in Guatemala, he worked for decades on the reparation of a Guatemalan border region with Mexico that had been ravaged by civil war. Together they organised the return of Guatemalan refugees, saw to the resettlement of secret villages hiding in the jungle from the civil war, turned skills

learnt as refugees into job descriptions, including training health promoters to perform basic dental care and minor operations. In the heart of the abandoned province of Ixcán, which lives off drug and migration smuggling, they set up an ecological showcase centre for vocational and political training for young people. (<https://www.medico.de/eine-kleine-geschichte-der-solidaritaet-13872>).

The unwavering will of Dieter and his colleagues in Germany and Guatemala to establish such islands as pockets of resistance against neglect and abandonment ran counter to every idea of project work that is designed for the market and marketing. For him it was always about providing thoughtful and cautious support to those who wanted to put ideas of emancipatory change into practice. Supporting this lastingly, wisely and in a spirit of constant learning was Dieter's lifeblood.

When Dieter went to Ramallah in the West Bank for medico, it seemed like a job that would be perfect for harnessing his experience in running large co-financed, i.e. state-sponsored projects – because he was also a conscientious project worker, familiar with all the ins and outs of accounting. And yet, in Ramallah, too, he avoided the bubble of international non-governmental organisations that were in abundance in the Palestinian capital at that time. For him, they symbolised aid that had become nothing but a business. Instead, he travelled regularly to the Gaza Strip, specifically to the no-go zone, which nothing true is known about, just propagandistic motifs. There he met Palestinian colleagues who, like him, persist and persevere in an abandoned part of the world because it is the mission that they have accepted. For anyone wondering today about the future of solidarity-based aid in catastrophic times, this mindset holds the answer.

How Dieter combined this uncompromising life out in the world with his family life remains a mystery. His wife Carmen, his children Chantal and Alyosha and his four grandchildren were his rock in his life's work grappling with the injustice and destruction that colonialism and neo-colonialism have wrought and continue to wreak.

When Dieter left medico after more than 30 years, it was only bearable because he went to Mexico to work as an office manager for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Back to Latin America, to his second home. He was happy as the Foundation's office manager, travelled a lot, including to his beloved Guatemala again, whose political development is so bleak. He worked as ever - day and night. Some say he didn't have time to settle in properly. But as we know, comfort and convenience were not something he attached importance to.

After a brief serious illness, Dieter Müller died much too soon on 12 August 2023 in Mexico City. We are devastated at the loss of this indomitable human being and our thoughts are with his family and friends.

- *The colleagues of medico international*