

ESOF 2008 Barcelona:
Ethics in Science Journalism
Science under the Swastika
Wolfgang C. Goede
July 20, 14.30 – 18.00

Latest research reveals: It's a myth that the Nazis applied force to subdue German scientists and science journalists. Not only did they for the most part voluntarily follow the party line, they even surpassed party officials. More than 60 years after the end of WW II historians are producing new and shocking evidence that the influence of the Third Reich was deeply ingrained in the German population. Indeed, Germans enjoyed more liberties than previously assumed! Why did the scientific community and journalists support Hitler's ideology, the war and the holocaust? And how does this impact science and science journalism today?

The German Association of Science Writers (TELI), founded in 1929 in Berlin, is the oldest of its kind and is the first journalistic organization which has tried to come to grips with its past. The historian Hans Christian Foerster has dug into the Association's archive, researched its development from the period of its founding until 1945 and has documented astounding contradictions in his recent publication „In the Beginning was the TELI. Journalists for Science and Technique 1929 – 1945“ („Am Anfang war die TELI, Journalismus für Wissenschaft und Technik 1929 bis 1945“).

TELI's founders were leading journalists in Berlin who shared a surprisingly farsighted and modern vision, even by contemporary standards. They wanted to enlighten their readership, help them to recognize mistakes in advance, foster critical judgement and encourage a dialogue between experts and the public as well as influence the opinions of politicians and promote public participation in the Weimar Republic (1919 – 1933). TELI's first president, Siegfried Hartmann, had become Germany's first technical writer in 1919. He advocated strictly separating the editorial and advertising departments. Co-founder Kurt Joel was one of the finest experts on science, a liberal and a democrat who defended Albert Einstein from anti-Semitic attacks.

In 1933, the Nazi party came into power. Almost immediately, journalists were obliged to work under the auspices of Joseph Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry. „You will receive not only information, but also instructions“, he announced on March 15, 1933. Six weeks later, the National Journalists' Association elected a Nazi as its new president. Six months later, a new law was passed which decreed that every journalist prove his Aryan descent. Jews were automatically forced to resign from their positions.

How did that effect the TELI? While the Jewish members were leaving the organization (some went into exile, some died in the concentration camps), Hartmann steered clear of Nazi politics and refrained from using Nazi jargon like „German technique“ or „the new state“. However, when he died in 1935 the journalists' organization toed the line increasingly; resistance vanished. The organization split into three factions: the „non-political“ members who believed that research and technology should not be associated with politics; the enthusiasts who were impressed by the Nazis' commitment to science and technology and finally the opportunists who were hoping for personal advantage in the form of rewarding

careers.

A few examples of what happened to some members: While Dr. Dr. Hans Baumann, press officer of the German Railroad, left in 1933 and somehow managed as a Jew to survive the Nazi terror in Berlin, Eduard Rhein became one of the most prominent technical journalists of the Third Reich. He wrote for the „Signal“, a magazine which had a wide circulation in the occupied countries. Surprisingly, co-founder Willy Moebus – although a social democrat – continued to make a living as a journalist despite the fact that he was under surveillance by the Nazis. Naturally his articles were written very carefully. In 1939, six months before the war, he published a piece with the title „Politics shapes Technology“ in which he states: „Engineers are at the front, every German is a soldier.“ Hans Dominik was the author of best-selling science fiction books which earned him the reputation as a „German Jules Verne“. He was a conservative, despised the Nazis although he supported them, even making Goebbels an offer to revise his own books and give them a national socialist slant. The paper shortage foiled Dominik's ambitions.

Slowly but surely the TELI sold out. In 1938 the organization accepted the appointment of two loyal Nazis to the board of directors as controllers. That loss of independence could have been stopped as other scientific organizations managed to do. One year later, on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, the TELI was warmly embraced by party officials who lured the organization to participate in a so-called „techno-political education“ seminar which taught propaganda methods. Thereafter, many Nazis, SS- and SA members joined TELI's ranks.

In 1939, once the war began, „the members lost their integrity completely“ according to Foerster. Many long-standing members actively promoted and glorified the regime: in their assignments as reporters, as public relation officers in key ministries such as war and armament and communication as well as their involvement in companies which produced weapons and materials relevant to the military. More than 50 percent out of 110 TELI members were not only supporters of the Nazi ideology, they actively participated in spreading Nazism and, according to Foerster, „became guilty“. After the war 38 publications by 18 TELI members were confiscated for their blatant national socialistic contents.

In concrete figures: Between 1938 and 1943 the TELI had 110 registered members, 57 journalists and 53 associated members with technical and scientific professions as well as communication and public relation experts. More than half of the journalists and two thirds of the associated membership were enrolled in the Nazi party. The Nazi movement came in three waves: 1933 after Hitler had come into power, 1936 during the Olympic games in Berlin, 1940 when Hitler had conquered France and started to occupy vast parts of Europe.

The hope of many members to survive in an „unpolitical niche“ turned out to be an illusion because a striving for excellency in technology was embedded in Nazi politics as a basic element. Nonetheless, after 1945 TELI members created the myth that they had stayed unpolitical or were forced to aid the regime. Suddenly everybody considered himself a victim. Many other journalists and publishers, in fact the entire country used this excuse and it became legendary. The Bertelsmann publishing company which profited during the war from anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi literature such as „Landser-Hefte“ (moral and emotional ammunition for soldiers at the front) could

successfully defend until 1998 its role as a victim. The Rowohlt Publishing Company, famous for its paperbacks and a pronounced liberal and critical course during the postwar period, has only recently admitted that its chief executive participated in propaganda campaigns against Jews in the Arabic world. Journalists have rarely bothered to take a direct look at their own role in the Third Reich.

Many who were committed to the Nazi regime became leaders of public opinion during the 1950s and 60s – and no one ever dared to contest their claims. Even Henri Nannen, founder of the „stern“ which reached a circulation of several million copies in its heyday, mimed Nazi language as a young journalist .

Scientists, of course, engaged in this collective cover-up as well. During the last decade, however, major German research organizations have begun to look into their own histories. Here are some of the results:

Last year an exhibition in Germany shed light on the forgotten „Masterplan East“. Agronomists had drafted a scheme to colonize Eastern Europe with the aim of deporting 30 million people. Germans were to settle this region while the local population was to be taken to concentration camps or killed. The scientists developed the plans entirely on their own without any pressure from functionaries. On maps which planned out the details, an Autobahn can be seen leading from Berlin to Moscow, another one goes as far as the Black Sea. The prestigious “German Research Society” DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) financed this project with 500 000 Reichsmark – 10 percent of its budget. The initiator of the Masterplan East was professor Konrad Meyer. About a dozen different scientific disciplines such as geology, climatology and urban planning were involved in the initial planning stage. After the war, Meyer was acquitted of his crime, claiming that he had received orders and consequently was able to continue his career. In a separate study, just recently initiated, the DFG admits that as of 1933 it „wholeheartedly supported the NS regime“, that it participated in banning Jewish and democratic scientists from academic life. Moreover, the organization feels guilty for having sponsored „criminal research“ and financed sterilization experiments at the Auschwitz concentration camp as well as Josef Mengele’s research on twins.

The German Physicists Society (DPG) is one of the oldest and most renowned research organizations in the country. Its most prominent member was Albert Einstein who was DPG president from 1916 to 1918; in 1933 he resigned from the organisation and emigrated after 20 years of activity in political life to the USA. Note: science and politics are not mutually exclusive! German physicists were fond of claiming their resistance to the Nazi party and the concept of „Germanized physics“ which disqualified Einstein's theory of relativity as a Jewish conspiracy. This claim can only be partially validated, cautions a newly published book with the title „Physicists between autonomy and opportunity“. Although it is true that the association managed for many years to keep its distance from the regime, when political pressure increased, by 1938 all Jewish members were asked to resign. By contrast, the TLI had already caved in in 1933. Until 1944 the DPG physicists had ignored a request to place a Nazi member as controller (and spy!) on their board of directors. Only three months before the end of the war, in January 1945, president Carl Ramsauer admitted at the 100th anniversary of the DPG: that „physics has become a major military factor which is decisive for war and peace“ and that German physicists were going to compete more eagerly with the anglo-saxon

countries and in the development of new weapons. 18 months later, the US dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan.

Would the Germans have won the A-bomb race if physicists had collaborated with the regime from the beginning? And how would that have changed the war?

While physicists tried to resist, sometimes successfully, physicians did not even make the attempt, despite their oath. They engaged in the most awful medical tests on humans. For example, placing prisoners in ice water in order to observe the moment of death or implanting slivers of wood and glass into bodies to study the development of infection – all this, of course, with the purpose of „enhancing medicine“. The Robert-Koch-Institute infected people with typhus and plague in the pursuit of suitable vaccines.

As a result, 250 000 innocent people were murdered, among them 80 000 handicapped who were euthanized. 20 medical doctors and 3 NS functionaries stood trial in Nuremberg in 1946. 8 were sentenced to death, 7 received a life sentence – most were released by 1954. Professor Hubertus Strughold, highest ranking doctor in the German Air Force, was not tried but taken to the USA with his research where he became the father of space medicine. Why did hundreds, perhaps thousands of physicians kill people? Although incomprehensible to us, scientific curiosity must have been one of their motivations. Still, the majority shared the ideological and racist belief in eugenics and euthanasia which some Germans considered necessary for survival in a hostile environment. The topic remains controversial: In the spring of 2008, German doctors rewarded 92 year old Hans-Joachim Sewering for his merits as one of Germany's leading physician. He had been a member of the SS and had allegedly contributed to the euthanasia program.

The German Red Cross turned into a „Brown Cross“ according to a new study, released just last month. For example, an international Red Cross delegation which visited the concentration camp Theresienstadt was misled by its German colleagues. An artificial environment was prepared for the visitors in order to cover the misery and horror. The physician Ernst-Robert Grawitz, one of the key people behind euthanasia and human experiments in the concentration camps, became the president of the German Red Cross.

Of course, medical doctors perverted and killed people for scientific and ideological reasons, not only in Nazi Germany. Hitler's far eastern allies, the Japanese, were just as committed to medical murder as the Germans, as my Russian colleague Alexander Choma has found. He did research on Unit 731 which Japanese doctors established during WW II in Manchukuo. The subjects of their investigation were branded „Maruta“, i.e., „log“. To gain more knowledge on human bodies and their tolerance the Japanese doctors subjected prisoners to vivisection without anesthesia. They amputated arms and legs to study blood loss, limbs were frozen and then thawed to study the effects of decay, human targets were used to test the effect of grenades positioned at various distances, people were hung by their feet to see how long the death process would take, others were placed into high- and low-pressure chambers or exposed to very low or very high temperatures, put into centrifuges and spun to death, exposed to lethal doses of x-ray radiation. More than 10 000 people died, most of them Chinese and Russians.

At the end of the war, General MacArthur granted immunity to the physicians of Unit 731 in exchange for providing his country with their research, including data on biological warfare. This information came in handy according to some sources during the Vietnam war. The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal heard only one reference to Japanese experiments with „poisonous serums“ on Chinese civilians. It was dismissed by the tribunal president, Sir William Webb for lack of evidence. Only the Soviet Union prosecuted perpetrators of such atrocities and sent some Japanese doctors for up to 25 years in a Siberian labor camp. The majority was not held responsible. Former members of Unit 731 became part of the Japanese medical establishment. One led Japan's largest pharmaceutical company. Shiro Ishii, the commander of the unit, moved to the US to work on bio-weapons research. Japanese school children will look in vain for information about Unit 731 in their history books. It took until 2002 for a Tokyo court to admit its existence. In 2005, it ruled that the victims and their families weren't eligible for any compensation.

During the war there was no opposition to the horrendous practices of the Unit. Supposedly Japan's prime minister and even the emperor knew about it and approved of it. Euthanasia in Germany was not contested either, except by Lothar Kreyssig. He was a judge and a member of a Protestant movement („Bekennende Kirche“), which opposed Hitler. In 1940, he realized that handicapped people were being killed. He addressed a letter to the chief justice and learned that Hitler himself had ordered these measures. Kreyssig filed charges and intervened in the institutions for the disabled: „Nobody shall be handed over to the authorities without my permission.“ The conflict escalated, Hitler's office showed him the euthanasia order, but the judge calmly responded: „The Führer's order is not equivalent to a law.“ It took 16 months until Hitler decided to punish his adversary, very mildly though. Kreyssig was fired and went into early retirement. In 1958, he founded „Action Reconciliation“ which sends young volunteers to countries which suffered under German occupation. It has just celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Germans, especially journalists and historians, have been very active in uncovering war crimes – especially during the past ten years. Only recently did the Quandt family, which owns 46,6 percent of the automobile manufacturer BMW, respond to media pressure and nominate a historical commission to investigate its own history. Günther Quandt, propaganda minister Goebbels's stepson, had set up a booming empire in industrial plants during the Nazi regime. It produced, among other things, batteries for submarines. A new publication claims that the Krupp concern, major producer of armaments during the war, employed 60 000 slave workers, many more than had previously been assumed. At the end of last year, a TV production raised the question whether the Berlin philharmonic orchestra was a Nazi orchestra because of its role as amplifier for Nazi propaganda.

Last but not least, the German Railroad has documented its own role in mobilizing the holocaust. Currently, the exhibition „Special Trains to Death“, displayed at train stations in cities throughout Germany, explores how the „Reichsbahn“ deported millions of Jews to the concentration camps.

Not only do Germans of a past generation live with the burden of Nazism, all Germans are affected. The syndicate of chimney sweepers, which provided ample jobs to Nazi party members, still has a monopoly in the country; the reflectors on bicycle pedals were invented by Nazis and were made mandatory, thus producing a

tidy profit for the party. And, of course, the „people's car“, the Volkswagen, was invented and named, exactly 70 years ago, by Mr. Hitler himself. The original logo, designed by the Nazis, is still used. We should consider it a warning about the abuse of technology.

Technology was the backbone of the regime which attracted TELI journalists and engineers alike. Still, not everyone realized back then that radio and television (which by the way was inaugurated in 1936 for the Olympics), as well as cars and autobahns were to become the basis for propaganda, a means of gaining the sympathy of the general population and, lastly, leading to militarization and war. For example: The engineer Wernher von Braun had a dream. He wanted to build the first rocket. He developed the „Wunderwaffe“ V2, a marvel of science, which in 1944 destroyed large segments of London. Later he felt sorry for the death of some 5000 people and apologized stubbornly: „But I wanted to fly to the moon,“ he insisted. Let us also not forget that many thousand of prisoners died during the development phase of von Braun's project.

After the war, V2 constructor Wernher von Braun was brought to the United States. There he continued his research on rockets and became the mastermind of the Apollo program, the flight to the moon and space flight in general. In September 2007 a German newspaper reviewed US-historian Michael Neufeld's new book „Von Braun. Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War“. The title of his review was caustically well-articulated: „Doctor Faustus, redeemed by Sputnik“. The escalating cold war and the Russian competition in space finally made von Braun's dream come true. He would have worked for anyone to get his rockets to the moon. Only for that reason did he become a member of the SS, although he rarely wore a uniform. A debate held in Munich during the year of the humanities in 2007 focused on the ethics of engineers. One participant said: „Engineers constitute a moral vacuum and are the best allies of dictators.“

German fascism offered tremendous opportunities for many people: careers and unlimited research. There were no legal strings attached, free labour and the most generous funding if projects met the murderous goals of Nazi ideology. Numerous smart and ambitious people knew how to take advantage of this unique situation. It was like being in paradise, some probably felt a little like God.

And yet, there are still other clues to solve the mystery of the attraction of murderous ideologies. For the past 61 years, the weekly magazine „Spiegel“ has been trying to discover why so many Germans fell for the Nazi ideology. In the March 10, 2008 edition of the magazine there was an article with the title: „The delinquents. Why so many Germans became murderers“. Approximately 200 000 Germans participated in killing six million Jews, but they were „neither sadists, nor psychopaths just normal men“. No case has been documented to prove that anyone was forced to kill. If someone did not want to participate he was free to leave without suffering personal consequences. Some commanders were literally driven to tears when receiving orders to execute people, and justified their acts by desperately muttering: „An order is an order.“ The bloodshed was so stressful that even SS boss, Heinrich Himmler, once almost fainted when he witnessed an execution. To help overcome these practical difficulties, gas chambers were invented and welcomed, without any cynicism, as a means of „humanizing murder“.

Gas chambers industrialized death, made the holocaust anonymous, and diffused responsibilities. Most importantly, as the psychologist Harald Welzer points out, the Nazis were able to move the „normative reference frame“ by turning Jews into outlaws and labeling them lesser beings or even sub-humans – in contrast of course to the German master race. Japanese technicians of murder applied the same formula calling Chinese and Russians „Maruta“ - dead wood. The German defeat at the conclusion of WW I, the economic depression were instrumentalized as machinations of the Jews. They were the scapegoats and no one needed to feel guilty for solving the „Jewish problem“. This is quite evident in the attitudes of the war criminals at the Nuremberg Trials. Many scientists and journalists most likely shared these feelings, although some did manage to maintain their own judgement.

Between 1933 and 1945 there was plenty of leeway on all levels of society, especially at universities. One witness, Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, Grand Old Lady of German politics, a truly democratic spirit, herself half Jewish, studied chemistry at Heinrich Wieland's institute, a part of the Munich University. In 1945 she finished her doctoral thesis and received her PhD. The biochemist Wieland was already renowned as a Nobel Laureate. „He was a courageous anti-Nazi“, the 87 years old woman recently told a crowd of students, „who protected students like myself who were always at risk“ and, if necessary, personally intervened on their behalf with the Nazi administration. His institute was a „center of excellency“ and an „oasis of decency in a brown desert“, Ms. Hamm-Brücher recalled. There was no spying, no denunciations, no Nazi jargon nor racial phrases, only hard work, at least ten hours a day. „Wieland was a lighthouse in the dark“, his former student concluded .

Let's finish with a short summary and an outlook. As the Max Planck Society (MPG), formerly the Imperial Research Institutions („Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft“), concluded in an investigation carried out by independent historians and published in 2005: No scientist were forced to do things against their will. Whoever participated did so voluntarily. More than 50 percent of the biologists employed by the imperial institutions joined the Nazi party. By the way: The leading protagonist for eugenics was Konrad Lorenz, who in 1973 was honoured with the Nobel Prize – so much for the memory, conscience and investigative competence of the international science community. The ethical responsibility of this body has become more important than ever in today's globalized world .

Dr. Susanne Heim, who headed the historical commission summarized her Max Planck study in a single sentence: Scientists are highly vulnerable to intellectual and moral corruption – “Opportunities will be used if they promise more influence and success.“

If we want to do better than this, now and in the future, ethical guidelines will be needed to reverse this apparently very common attitude!

Context

„Science under the Swastika“ will be presented at ESOF 2008 in Barcelona as part of the panel „Ethics in Science Journalism“ on July 20, 14.30 to 18.00. James Cornell will review the ethics of current science reporting in view of the grey area of PR-generated science news and argue for a professional watchdog system. Marc Dressler will take a look at ethics from the philosopher's view. The moral values in

science are the moral values of a free, democratic society. Dressler argues with Kant that freedom is the prerequisite of reason, and the root of freedom is the freedom of argument. Viola Egikova will scrutinize science and science journalism during communism in the Soviet Union, focusing on Stalinism during the 1930s, but also assessing the 1970s and 1980s and her own experience during that period.

Acknowledgements

The author wants to express his thanks to P.J. Blumenthal who edited this text.

Participants

Organizer and chair: Hanns-J. Neubert, Hamburg:

hajo.neubert@teli.de

Journalist, President European Union of Science Journalists' Associations (EUSJA)

James Cornell, Tuscon, AZ:

cornelljc@earthlink.net

Journalist, President International Science Writers' Association (ISWA)

Dr. Marc Dressler, Stuttgart:

info@inspective.de

Philosopher, Inspective

Viola M. Egikova, Moscow:

egikova@mospravda.ru

Journalist, President Association of Science Writers and Journalists INTELLECT

Hans Christian Foerster, Berlin:

hcfoerster@gmx.de

Historian (Foerster apologized and cannot be present because of urgent family matters – he sent a video clip which will be presented)

Wolfgang C. Goede, Munich:

w.goede@gmx.net

Editor, German Association of Science Writers (TELI)

Remark: The TELI archive contains many valuable materials which have not been evaluated yet by HC Foerster. Historians who want to deepen his work are welcome to do so!

References: Science under the Swastika

Deutsche Bahn Ausstellung

http://www.db.de/site/bahn/de/unternehmen/konzern/geschichte/themen/ausstellung_deportation/ausstellung_deportation.html

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Der Generalplan Ost der Nationalsozialisten

www.dfg.de/generalplan-ost

Foerster, Hans Christian

„Am Anfang war die TELI

Journalismus für Wissenschaft und Technik 1929 bis 1945“

<http://www.teli.de/geschichte/2007-brosch/html/brosch-index.html>

Goede, Wolfgang C.

The Twenties – Exciting Times in Germany
EUSJA anniversary book

www.esf.org/eusja

www.pantaneto.co.uk/issue26/goede.htm

Hachmeister, Lutz / Kloft, Michael

Das Goebbels-Experiment

DVA-Spiegel-Verlag

<http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/zeitgeschichte/0,1518,342422,00.html>

Hoffmann, D. / Walker M

Physiker zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung

Die deutsche physikalische Gesellschaft im Dritten Reich

Wiley-VCH

www.dpg-physik.de/pdf/dpg_im_dritten_reich.pdf

Max-Planck-Gesellschaft

History of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society in the National Socialist Era

www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/KWG/engl.htm

Neufeld, Michael J

Von Braun. Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War

Knopf Publishers

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/13/AR2007091302117.html>

TELI's history (a collection of various documents, yet most of TELI's valuable archive has not been reviewed and is awaiting further scientific investigation!)

<http://www.teli.de/geschichte/geschichte.html>

Welzer, Harald

Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden

Fischer Verlag

<http://www.perlentaucher.de/buch/22337.html>

Contact & more information

Wolfgang C. Goede

w.goede@gmx.net

www.pm-magazin.de/openscience

www.teli.de