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THE GOEBBELS-DIARIES

1. What are the Goebbels-“Diaries”?

Between 1923 and 1945 Joseph Goebbels produced a considerable quantity of documents on a daily basis, including notes and dictated material in both typed and handwritten formats. Many of these documents are, however, incomplete due to lost or intentionally removed material. Moreover, the bulk of the surviving material consists of photocopies whose originals can no longer be located.

Goebbels himself can be identified as the author of a portion of these documents, but the greater part was written or collated by his employees. Using these materials, Goebbels then composed a journal entry which could comprise up to 100 typed DIN-A4-pages per daily entry. Because so many employees contributed to the journal, there are considerable variations in quality and numerous repetitions. The journals as a whole should therefore be considered a compilation rather than a 'diary' as such.

On the whole, Goebbels' notes served as a basis for his work as head of the Nazi Party national propaganda apparatus and Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Their sole purpose was to justify National Socialist measures, including the terror, crime, war and inhumanity that were characteristic of the regime.

After Goebbels' death, his notes were not kept in one place but broken up into fragments that found their way to German and foreign archives.

Nevertheless, Swiss Nazi sympathizer Francois Genoud and his heirs claimed to be exclusively entitled to publish all material regarding Goebbels' just as they had already done in the case of Goering, Bormann and Himmler. (See paragraph 6 for more literature on this topic).

2. How and when were the documents published?

The Institute of Contemporary History (IfZ) in Munich made two attempts to publish Goebbels' notes as a scholarly edition. First in 1987 (4 volumes) then as a revised, second edition from 1993 – 2008. (29 volumes; both editions published by Saur Verlag, Munich). The latter, more recent edition of the 'diaries' was prepared under the supervision of the editors Elke Froehlich and the director of the IfZ, Horst Moeller.

The IfZ failed in the first instance to rise to the challenge posed by this difficult source – it was forced to withdraw the earlier edition because of poor quality editing and the discovery of new, more extensive material. The German Federal Archives in Koblenz, which had hitherto acted as publishing partner, now refused to collaborate further on the project, on the grounds that the IfZ did not fulfil the required editing standards. They were succeeded by the Russian Federal Archives (Staatlicher Archivdienst Russlands) as the IfZ's cooperating partner.

In order to revise and improve the second edition of the notes, Elke Froehlich received the support of an increased number of more professional editorial staff. Historians were also brought in to revise most of the edition's volumes. However, most of these had very limited previous experience with

professional editing, let alone the preparation of such complex sources for publication.

In a departure from standard practice, the revised edition was published without an introduction; the introduction from the 1987 edition was not used again. Finally, in 2008, an introduction was published at the very end of the edition. Far from shedding light on the dubious editorial methods employed by the Institute, however, the new introduction gave rise to further, troubling questions.

3. What is the controversy about?

The IfZ's publication of the Goebbels 'diaries' gives rise to two fundamental questions: Firstly, did the IfZ maintain basic editing standards, thus ensuring that the final product qualifies as a scholarly edition? And secondly, why is an institution as well-respected as the IfZ content with such inadequate handling of such a significant source?

It must be said that neither of the Institute's two attempts to edit the Goebbels texts meets the editing standards of a scholarly edition. In neither of the two editions have the editors thought to include an essay providing background information on the Nazi dictatorship, or the propagandistic purposes that informed the collation of the documents in the first place. There are, moreover, no explanatory annotations whatsoever as to the historical context or the motives and objectives of the supposed author. The edition also lacks an appropriate textual apparatus that records alterations and emendations that Goebbels or any of his employees made while working on the texts.

As if all this were not bad enough, the IfZ came up with a further surprise in the last volumes of the edition – they declared that Goebbels' notes amounted to a “diary”. Yet it is clear that the propaganda minister never actually wrote such a diary; nor did he collate the texts in the chronological order in which they appear in the Institute's edition. The fictional diary posited by the IfZ covers a period of seven years – from 23 May 1932 to 11 December 1939. The term 'diary' is entirely misleading, however, because the documents included in it were written at different times, places and in different notebooks. The term 'compilation' would be more appropriate.

By dividing the text into “diaries” on the one hand, and “dictations” on the other, the editors create serious problems for the reader. The many indicators in the original text that would permit an appropriate distinction to be drawn between documents of very different type are either ignored or downplayed. Taken together, these omissions generate the following confusions:

- It is impossible to discern differences in the content and context of specific documents.
- There are no indications of variations in the purposes individual documents were intended to serve.
- No reference is made to the fact that Goebbels was asked and paid for his writings by Max Amann, head of the Franz-Eher-Verlag (Publishing house of the Nazi-Party).
- The reader thus remains oblivious to the consequences of this deal with Amann, namely enhanced motivation to write for a new and larger

audience, and the support of a bureaucratic apparatus that was able to raise daily production to more than 30 or 50, sometimes even up to 100 pages of notes.

Yet, the reasons for those adjustments mentioned above remain unclear. It seems that the consequences of such a drastic modification were not given enough consideration. However, questionable decisions like this seem to appear everywhere in the editing process. For instance, for the first scholarly edition Elke Froehlich included the book "Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei" as a reference in her bibliography; a book that Goebbels himself had published in 1934 purely for propaganda purposes.

The IfZ has failed thus far to respond to criticism of the edition, or to explain why it did not implement basic editing standards. The only statement on the part of the IfZ came from its director Host Moeller in the journal "Historisch-Politisches Buch", (vol. 51/1 (2003), p. 7-9). However, this highly emotional article failed to provide satisfactory answers to the questions I had raised earlier in the same magazine: (vol. 50/2 (2002), S. 117-123).

Further detailed critiques of the poor editing standards evident in this publication appeared in newspapers and historical journals, like "Publizistik", "Historische Zeitschrift", "Historisch-Politisches Buch", "Contemporanea" (Bologna) and recently in "Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte" (Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2008, 10. Band, S. 52-76.)

4. What are the weaknesses of the new "introduction"?

As mentioned earlier, there was no introduction whatsoever when the revised, second edition was published in 1993. Thus, the reader was not given any explanation of the background of the heterogeneous materials or any account of the unusual way in which the editing and publishing had been done. It took the IfZ more than twenty years to publish a “concluding” introduction at the end of the last volume in 2008 – and even then, it was consigned to the index volume. (Elke Fröhlich, Einleitung zur Gesamtedition, in: Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Im Auftrag des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte und mit Unterstützung des Staatlichen Archivdienstes Russlands hg. von ders., Teil III: Register 1923-1945. Bd. 1, S. 11-177.)

Unfortunately, this new 'introduction' merely demonstrates how completely Goebbels' motifs and the actual function of his notes as a means of propaganda have been misunderstood by the editors. The text is described as a sequence of 'confessional' utterances by its putative author, an absurd and inappropriate characterisation that can also be found in the introduction to the first edition; the reader thus receives a fundamentally misleading impression both of the situation in which Goebbels wrote down his notes and of his attitude towards his own writing.

In the new introduction, Elke Froehlich takes this bizarre conceit even further by stating that “continuous writing had an autogenic training effect” on Goebbels and that he used it to “grant himself absolution”. Just as in 1987, Froehlich comes to the conclusion that “he simply wanted to bear witness [...]. In the beginning [...] this served as a kind of a confessional “.

Apart from that, the introduction offers insufficient answers or none at all to the many open questions and passes over problematic topics altogether. Naturally, this avoidance of crucial issues gives rise to further questions and inconsistencies. Even though the introduction's bibliography lists all criticism from the past years, it does not respond to criticisms in a way that would explain the unusual editing. It almost seems as the introduction was written down in a hurry, just as if the editors were informed about the latest criticism in advance?

Evidence for this assumption can be found in the lack of structure of the introduction; it appears to have been composed in a hurry. Some sections are elaborated at disproportional length to their actual significance and follow no recognizable systematic pattern. Two sections deal with the question of "authenticity", but the topics in what appears to be random order. The lack of a discernible structure also leads to a lot of repetition within the introduction. Another faux-pas is the use of the term "Volksaufklaerer" (Enlightener of the people) where the term "propagandist" would be more appropriate - the quotation marks do not really justify the use of this term.

Moreover, the problems that arise from the term and the creation of the "diaries" receive no deeper exploration. There is no examination of the gaps in the existing material or of the later modifications to the text. The same can be said of those documents characterised by the IfZ as "quasi-original"– despite the doubts raised by their provenance and status, these elements of the "diary" receive no adequate analysis.

5. What deficits and unanswered questions remain?

Leaving aside the woefully insufficient introduction to the latest IfZ publication, there remain other unanswered questions.

Firstly: why does the public still know so little about the IfZ's contracts with certain institutions and individuals who bear no obvious relation to the edition. Francois Genoud, for example, was widely known as a Nazi-Sympathizer and partisan of Hitler, denied the existence of any gas chambers and, most importantly, admired Goebbels, calling him a "genius" and "a hero who inspired his people to do great things". That is also the reason why Genoud wanted Goebbels' notes to be published in their entirety and preferably without annotations. In the early 90's he made millions by selling documents relating to National Socialism or distributing their copyrights.

(In this connection, it is worth noting the „introduction“ that Genoud provided for Helmut Heiber [Hg.], Goebbels-Reden, Bd. 2: 1939-1945, Düsseldorf 1972, S. VIII f.): "Not only was I concerned about protecting the copyrights but also about finding editors who would be worthy of the visions of these men [Hitler, Bormann, Goebbels], who had such a drastic and great impact on world's history. [...] I am granting [the approval to publish] because it is important to me that Goebbels has his say", and his interview regarding the „genius“ Goebbels in the „Rheinischen Merkur“ [Nr. 30, 24. Juli. 1992]; Stefan Barmettler, Kniefall vor dem obersten Lügner. Handel mit Nazi-Schriften. Ein Schweizer verkauft europäischen Verlagen dubiose Aufzeichnungen – wie die des Joseph Goebbels. In: Rheinischer Merkur, Nr. 30, 24. Juli 1992, und Laske, Karl: Ein Leben zwischen Hitler und Carlos: François Genoud. Zürich 1996.).

The IfZ's own announcements regarding its cooperation with Genoud arouse suspicion, to say the least; in 2008, the Institute stated that they had reached “a practical compromise” when working out the details of the publication with Genoud. If the IfZ had been a bit clearer on their information, however, they could have counteracted these suspicions.

Why did the IfZ not keep to the usual editing standards? As stated above, there was no textual essay to provide background information on the documents as an alternative to a detailed commentary. That and the fact that the editor chose not to print selected parts of the redundant propagandistic texts but rather to publish them in their entirety leads to another thought: Was this approach part of the deal with Genoud? This does not seem like an absurd idea if one considers that Genoud has announced several times in public that it was his wish to have Goebbels' texts published entirely and without any commentary by historians. This is also supported by a statement of the IfZ regarding an earlier promised additional volume of annotations with register. This volume is not likely to be published though since the IfZ states that “the plan [of a detailed commentary] had to be given up mainly [!] due to financial reasons.”

How can we account for the creation of this fictional “diary” between the years 1923-1939? Oddly enough, the modifications made by the editors are not apparent in the text, though transparency on these matters is crucial, if other historians are to form their own opinion on the interpretation and form of the original text.

On what basis was the assumption made that Goebbels simply wanted to bear witness through his writing and that over the years he merely lost

some of his “relatively great, subjective honesty and some of his self-reflection [...]?”

Why did the IfZ not work together with other specialist departments or host transdisciplinary conferences? This could have been useful in helping the editors and the scholarly community to better understand the propagandistic intentions and dimension of the documents. By this means, a concept might have been developed that would have done justice to the complexity of the project as well as to the editorial challenges posed by this particular text.

In conclusion, the IfZ and its publication have failed readers and scholars in three different ways, first, by accepting such poor editing standards; second, through the rather dubious portrayal of Goebbels’ motivations and valuation of his notes; and thirdly, by their refusal to respond in detail to criticism.

The consequences of these shortcomings are serious indeed, for the Goebbels’ notes among the most important documents we have for the evaluation of national socialist propaganda, the legitimization strategies of the leaders and conflicts within the regime, as seen through of the senior servant of the regime, not to mention a rich source on the biography of Joseph Goebbels, his thoughts, actions and motivations.

6. Bibliography

Regarding the documentary attempts of the IfZ:

“ Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels“ were published on request of the IfZ “and with support of the Russian Federal Archives (Staatlicher Archivdienst Russlands)” by Elke Froehlich in three parts:

„I. Aufzeichnungen 1923-1941" (9 Bde., 1-3 in mehreren Teilbänden),
„II. Diktate 1941-1945" (15 Bde.), „III. Register 1923-1945" (3 Bde.).
K. G. Saur Verlag, München 1993-2008.

Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente. Hg. von Elke Fröhlich. Teil I: Aufzeichnungen 1924-1941. 4+1 Bde. (Interimsregister). München 1987.

Regarding the controversy:

(titles indicated with a * are missing in the lfZ's introduction of 2008)

* Barmettler, Stefan: Kniefall vor dem obersten Lügner. Handel mit Nazi-Schriften. Ein Schweizer verkauft europäischen Verlagen dubiose Aufzeichnungen – wie die des Joseph Goebbels. In: Rheinischer Merkur, Nr. 30, 24. Juli 1992.

*Karl Laske, Ein Leben zwischen Hitler und Carlos: François Genoud. Zürich 1996.

* Nordemann, Wilhelm: Die "Tagebücher" des Joseph Goebbels im Spannungsfeld von Besatzungs-, Persönlichkeits- und Urheberrecht. in: Festschrift für Karlheinz Quack zum 65. Geburtstag, hg. von H.P. Westermann / Wolfgang Rosener, Berlin 1991, S. 73-88.

* Roegele, Otto B.: „Aus den Notaten des Dr. Goebbels. Der Wunsch nach einer kritischen Edition der Tagebücher des Reichspropagandaministers bleibt weiter offen“. In: Rheinischer Merkur 40, 2. Oktober 1992.

Bernd Sösemann (zusammen mit Jürgen M. Schulz und Annette Weinke): Die Tagesaufzeichnungen des Joseph Goebbels und ihre unzulänglichen Veröffentlichungen. In: Publizistik 37 (1992), S. 213-244.

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* Ders., Gli pseudo-diario di Joseph Goebbels: una edizione discutibile. In: Contemporanea. Rivista di storia dell'800 e del '900, Jg. 6,2 (April 2003), S. 403-409.

Zuletzt erschien von Bernd Sösemann:

„Alles nur Goebbels-Propaganda? Untersuchungen zur revidierten Ausgabe der sogenannten Goebbels- Tagebücher des Münchner Instituts für Zeitgeschichte“. In: Jahrbuch für

Kommunikationsgeschichte 10 (Stuttgart 2008), S.
52-76.