

Editorial

By the end of 2015 the copyright to Hitler's book "Mein Kampf", held by the Free State of Bavaria, expired. The editorial staff of "Totalitarismus und Demokratie" took this occasion to ask five renowned experts for contributions on the significance of "Mein Kampf" as well as on the history of its reception.

The contribution by the historian *Othmar Plöckinger* from Salzburg is dedicated to the international distribution and reception of Hitler's book prior to 1945. With great detailed knowledge, apart from the Allied states of World War II, he also deals with the Arab countries, India, Italy, Japan, China and the Vatican. Doing so, he does not only reconstruct the translation and publication history of "Mein Kampf" but also pursues the question of how the book was interpreted in the various states under the respective political circumstances and constellations of interests. As it turns out, Hitler's text was indeed controversially interpreted and judged on, most of all before the beginning of World War II. This may on the one hand be due to the fact that sometimes the editions in foreign languages were abridged. On the other hand, the interpretations were fundamentally different from each other: Some believed that the book was a result of the radicalized atmosphere of the early 1920s and was not to be taken seriously anymore in the 1930s; others assumed that Hitler as the Reich's Chancellor would unswervingly keep to the goals he had defined in his confessions and uttered appropriate warnings. Generally it becomes obvious that Hitler's book was not at all only met with enthusiasm but also with scepticism and rejection. This holds in particular for Hitler's racism as well as his statements to foreign politics.

Wolfram Pyta and *Carolin Lange* are of the opinion that the heuristic fruitfulness of Hitler's text for NS research is by far not exhausted. By having a text-immanent view at "Mein Kampf", they attempt to conclude on insights concerning the German dictator's ways of understanding politics and rule. The two researchers from the Historical Institute of the University of Stuttgart start out from the thesis that Hitler charged the political with aesthetics and tried to legitimate his policy by basing it on aesthetics. By way of literary studies-proven questions about ways of presentation and writing practices, Pyta and Lange make the bourgeois classes visible as the audience Hitler addressed. The intention of "Mein Kampf" was to legitimate a political existence by way of explicit poeticisation, that is the metamorphosis from "drummer boy" to "Führer". In his text, they say, the narrator changes from being a latently rebellious teenager to the most brilliant candidate for the position of "Führer" who follows his vocation.

The cultural historian *Hermann Glaser* presents Hitler as the incarnation of bourgeois ordinariness. By his book "Mein Kampf", he states, he had less proven himself as an ingenious seducer but as an abysmal German philistine. Glaser is of the widely spread opinion that the significance and influence of "Mein Kampf" should not be overestimated, as the book had been widely spread but hardly read. However, from this he draws a conclusion which looks paradox at first

sight. The attitude towards life and the political thinking of wide parts of the German people, Glaser states, had been congruent with what was presented and propagated in “Mein Kampf”. The book had offered all that what thrills the philistine: abysmal vulgarities, resentments expressed by inappropriate metaphors, endless rants, rhetorically prettied up platitudes. Thus Hitler’s mediocracy became the fate of his people who allowed him to step by step dissuade them from humanity and culture. According to this analysis, the rise of National Socialism did not require any kind of skilful seduction, no ingenious demonism or mendacity. All Hitler had to do, Glaser states, was being himself: mediocre, primitive, without any virtues or merits.

The political scientist *Barbara Zehnpfennig* from Passau analyses the crucial meaning of the idea of fighting in Hitler’s ideology. This idea, she states, is key to understanding both Hitler’s motivation and his policy. Zehnpfennig shows how already in his book “Mein Kampf”, whose title she believes to be programmatic in any respect, Hitler is fighting for his own identity, against the political opponent and for the success of his party the topic of discussion. Fighting, Hitler had been convinced, was the way to secure the continued existence and progress of mankind. On the other hand ideologies such as Marxism, which tried to abandon fighting, were the cause of the decline and fall of mankind. Hitler’s own fight, Zehnpfennig states, had most of all been against Marxism as well as Bolshevism and its – alleged – Jewish originators. Hitler believed that this fight required the melting of the people into a powerful fighting community – and establishing this fighting community required the “Gleichschaltung” and inner homogenisation of the German nation. Hitler’s policy, the author says, can probably not be explained without his ideology. The latter, however, is based on the principle of fighting.

Did the core statements of National Socialist ideology serve as the guideline for Hitler’s policy, or did he just use them to justify his political actions? This question is pursued by the Frankfurt historian *Manfred Zeidler*, by pointing out to contradictions between earlier statements and later actions. Such contradictions become obvious most of all in view of Hitler’s foreign-political ideas and goals from the mid-1920s as well as of the intended schedule of realising his power-political intentions. Zeidler comes to the conclusion that in the field of foreign policy Hitler must rather be considered a power politician than an ideologist.

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