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Germany (1925–1945)**

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OTHMAR PLÖCKINGER

A RÉSUMÉ OF THE RECEPTION OF »MEIN KAMPF«
IN GERMANY (1925–1945)

The last time »Mein Kampf« attracted major attention was during the Nuremberg trial against the major war criminals in 1945/46. Several passages of the book were used as evidence against the defendants. One of the most interesting disputes developed between a Soviet prosecutor and Albert Speer, Hitler's favourite architect and later Armament Minister. The prosecutor confronted Speer with passages from »Mein Kampf«, which in his opinion showed clearly Hitler's plans of attacking and destroying the Soviet Union. Speer replied that the Soviet diplomats must have read the book as well and nevertheless made the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. Thereupon the Soviet prosecutor ended this dispute with the remark that he does not want a further discussion about the question, who read »Mein Kampf« and who did not.

This episode shows that the question of the readership of »Mein Kampf« was virulent immediately after the war and ever since. And it proves that the book was always subject and instrument of accusation and justification in debates on the historical, political and ethical dimensions of National Socialism and its legacy. But we have to be aware that this question has some traps which can lead to misinterpretations or even mistakes in the historical analysis.

Firstly, it assumes that »Mein Kampf« was the key to knowledge and understanding of Hitler's conceptions and the National Socialist ideology in general. Surely, having read »Mein Kampf« made it easier to be aware of what was going on in Germany, but it was not the precondition for that. So having read »Mein Kampf« did not mean full information – and not having read »Mein Kampf« did not mean having no information. This situation was in some respect characterised by the Austrian author and journalist Karl Kraus, when he opened his remarkable and comprehensive text »Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht« (1933/1952) with the legendary sentence: »Mir fällt zu Hitler nichts ein« – »I cannot think of anything to say about Hitler« – just to prove thereafter on hundreds of pages, how much he knew about National Socialist Germany, including Hitler's book¹.

Secondly – and this concerns mainly Germany – the question of the readership of »Mein Kampf« includes the assumption that the German people would have rejected Hitler, if only they had read his book. The Jewish German scholar of Romanic languages Victor Klemperer wrote about this aspect in his famous »Lingua Tertii Imperii«: »It will always remain the greatest mystery of the Third Reich to me, how this book could indeed had to be distributed in full public, and how Hitler's reign could nevertheless come about and how this reign lasted for twelve years, even though the Bible of National Socialism was already circulating years before the seizure of power.«²

- 1 Karl KRAUS, *Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht*, München 1967, p. 9. All translations from German by the author.
- 2 VICTOR KLEMPERER, *LTI. Lingua Tertii Imperii. Die Sprache des Dritten Reiches*, Leipzig ³1991, p. 29–28: »Es wird mir immer das größte Rätsel des Dritten Reiches bleiben, wie dieses Buch in voller Öffentlichkeit verbreitet werden durfte, ja musste, und wie es dennoch zur Herrschaft Hitlers und zu zwölfjähriger Dauer dieser Herrschaft kommen konnte, obwohl die Bibel des Nationalsozialismus schon Jahre vor der Machtübernahme kursierte.«

In this respect, the question of who and how many people read »Mein Kampf«, was and still is a part of the post-war legend that the Germans were seduced by Hitler without knowing which policies he stood for and what his intentions were. In this way, it is easy to overlook the comprehensive or partial consent, which Hitler's ideology found in considerable parts of the German society. While analysing the reception of »Mein Kampf« we must bear in mind that we are dealing not only with a book, but with a symbol of National Socialist ideology highly valuable for the regime as well as with the post-war legends of a society. Yet precisely these aspects make it necessary and fruitful to ask: Who read the book? Which parts have been read most? When, at which occasions and with which purpose did Germans read »Mein Kampf«?

Therefore at least three different fields of investigation should be considered: The public, the state (including semi-state institutions and organisations) and the private fields. As for Germany, of course these fields can be distinguished clearly only until 1933. After the so-called Nazi seizure of power the situation was quite different.

Publishing History and Public Reception 1925–1933

The first volume of »Mein Kampf« was quite a success when it was published in July 1925 by the National Socialist publishing-house Franz Eher Nachf.[olger] in Munich. Within a few months all 10,000 copies were sold out and a second edition was necessary. The audience was eager to find out what the convicted high traitor had to say about his failed coup d'état, the Munich Beer Hall Putsch on 9 November 1923. Therefore the public reaction was quite intense. Dozens of reviews were published in newspapers and magazines. Some of them were local and regional papers, but also national and international papers as the »Frankfurter Zeitung« or the »Neue Zürcher Zeitung« wrote extensively about Hitler's book. He still had the glamour of a radical politician, and therefore several reviewers were disappointed that Hitler did not write anything about his political rise in Bavaria and his coup in November 1923. Consequently, the second volume, published in December 1926, attracted much less public interest³. The sales-figures declined continuously and reached their low point in 1928 when no more than 3,000 copies were sold. Since 1929 the situation began to change with the Great Depression and with improved election results in 1930. Interest in »Mein Kampf« awakened again and the publisher, after having decided to have the book intensively proofread by Hitler's then private secretary, Rudolf Heß⁴, published a version which contained both parts in one single volume and was much cheaper than the previous editions. It was this »Volksausgabe«, a popular edition in both senses of the word, which became the widest spread version in Germany – until January 1933 more than a quarter of a million copies were sold. During the following months the sales figures increased phenomenally. Heß proudly noted in April 1933 that about 4,000 copies were sold per day⁵, by the end of 1933 the numbers summed up to almost one million copies in that

3 The phenomenon that the first volume was more popular than the second still persisted after 1933 although the merging of the two volumes into one smoothened it.

4 Heß mainly corrected stylistic deficiencies, erratas and – to a high degree – the headlines of each page. But although more or less comprehensive stylistic changes have been carried out continuously, there have been no major changes content-wise from 1925 until 1945. The most important change concerned a passage about the structure of the NSDAP, as in 1930 the concept of »Germanic democracy« was replaced by the »unconditional authority of the leader« who should dominate the party. Cf. Othmar PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches. Adolf Hitlers »Mein Kampf« 1922–1945*, Munich ²2011, p. 192–194; Christian HARTMANN, Thomas VORDERMAYER, Othmar PLÖCKINGER, Roman TÖPPEL (eds.), *Hitler, Mein Kampf. Eine kritische Edition*, publ. by the Institute of Contemporary History Munich-Berlin, 2 vols, Munich, Berlin 2016, vol. 1, p. 286–287.

5 Cf. letter from Rudolf Heß, dated 19 April 1933, in: Bundesarchiv Bern, NL Heß, J1.211 – 1989/148, 51.

year. Though sales figures declined in the coming years temporarily they reached even higher numbers during war-time again, as numerous other versions were launched additionally. But none of them reached the popularity of the »Volksausgabe«. Only the so-called »Dünndruckausgabe« or »Feldausgabe«, printed on extra-thin and light printing paper for use in the Wehrmacht and at the front, reached the number of nearly one million copies. All in all about 12.5 million copies were produced in Germany, two thirds of them during the war⁶.

Looking at the public perception during the Weimar Republic about 50 reviews were published from 1925 until 1930 covering a wide range of appraisals. We find enthusiastic reviews from party-members like Alfred Rosenberg in the »Berliner Arbeiterzeitung« in 1926, although he was always quite irritated with Hitler's success being much bigger than the success of his own book »Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts« published in 1930⁷. One of the most exuberant texts came from Adolf Bartels, the leading »völkisch« and anti-Semitic literature critic, who in 1927 saw Hitler's book as the most important political publication in Germany since Bismarck's autobiographical »Gedanken und Erinnerungen« (1888)⁸. We find ambivalent or even hostile reviews also in volkisch and nationalist newspapers like the influential »Deutsche Zeitung« who published a mainly negative review in 1925. Otto Bonhard, a main figure in the influential volkisch »Alldeutscher Verband«, paid some tribute to Hitler's effort in writing a book as he had no higher education; Bonhard conceded that the author had some remarkable skills in propaganda. But the reviewer also stated a lot of knowledge gaps not only in history, a field so much appreciated by Hitler and central to his reasoning, but also in »Staatswissenschaft« and »Rassenkunde«, in political and racial sciences. Moreover he found no inventive thoughts in the book whatsoever and criticised Hitler for thinking that he himself had formulated new insights which, in reality, were already well-known⁹. This review was quite annoying for Hitler, as a lot of liberal and left-wing newspapers refrained from writing own reviews but reprinted parts of this one with delight. Hitler even mentioned this humiliating review in the second volume of »Mein Kampf« trying to defend himself¹⁰.

We find mocking reviews in socialist and liberal papers, most of them dealing with Hitler as a figure of the past and not of the future, as the »Frankfurter Zeitung« put it in 1925: »In the meantime, however, the constructive politicians have triumphed over the spirits of chaos. In the meantime, they have rebuilt Germany and are in the process of securing Europe. [...] The friends of constructive politics will take Hitler's book and see from it how right they were with everything they thought. Time has moved on; but Hitler is – completely in the aftermath of this self-confession – finished«¹¹. And Stefan Grossmann, a journalist, writer and assistant of Bertolt Brecht, summarised his comprehensive review of the book in 1925: »This book shows

6 For the publication-history of »Mein Kampf« cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 173–191. For the years until November 1933 the records of the Eher-Verlag have been preserved so that the figures for this period are detailed and accurate, cf. ID. (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte von »Mein Kampf«. 1924–1945*, Stuttgart 2016, p. 137–160.

7 Cf. PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 267–273; Alfred ROSENBERG, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit*, Munich 1930.

8 Cf. PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 287.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 196–200.

10 Cf. HARTMANN et al. (eds.), *Hitler, Mein Kampf* (as in n. 4), vol. 1, p. 1196–1197.

11 PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 250: »Inzwischen haben aber die konstruktiven Politiker über die Geister des Chaos den Sieg davongetragen. Inzwischen haben sie Deutschland wieder aufgebaut und sind daran, Europa zu sichern. [...] Die Freunde konstruktiver Politik werden das Buch Hitlers zur Hand nehmen und daraus sehen, wie recht sie mit allem hatten, was sie dachten. Die Zeit ist weiterschritten; Hitler aber ist – vollends nach diesem Selbstbekenntnis – erledigt.«

Adolf Hitler as he is, poor in heart, ignorant, vain, completely unimaginative, and as a mitigating factor it can only be stated that he is apparently an incurable war hysteric¹².

Surprisingly, Jewish magazines only in very exceptional cases dealt with »Mein Kampf«, if we leave aside short notes and some references now and then. This did not change until 1933, apart from only a few texts which went deeper into the book and analysed it. The first and most comprehensive one was an article in a 1925 issue of the »Abwehr-Blätter«, the journal of the »Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus«, a civil society organization for the defence against anti-Semitism. The author discussed and disproved most of Hitler's anti-Semitic defamations in detail. It is until today one of the best analyses of »Mein Kampf«, although it's concluding forecast was tragically wrong. The author Johannes Stanjek wrote in his closing words: »One puts aside Hitler's book with a feeling of satisfaction: As long as the volkisch movement does not succeed to put any other leader at its top, there is going to be a lot of water going to be poured into the sea until it wins in the land of poets and thinkers¹³. Consequently, a shorter follow-up text by Stanjek about the second volume of »Mein Kampf« was entitled: »Hitlers weiterer Feldzug gegen den Verstand«: Hitler's continued campaign against reason¹⁴.

The second more substantial review was published in 1930 in the Berlin »Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung« under the title »Die nationalsozialistische Gefahr« addressing the renewed national socialist danger. In advance of the upcoming Reichstag elections in September 1930 the newspaper did not only analyse Hitler's anti-Semitism but also quoted different passages from »Mein Kampf« which showed his racist reading of politics in Great Britain, France, and the United States. The quotations were followed by the remark: »Different than usual in humans' heads, the world paints itself in this head. Should the world be plunged by such fools into a new, even greater disaster?«¹⁵

Starting with 1930, Hitler's book became an essential part of political and media conflicts in Germany. Numerous leaflets, brochures, pamphlets and books were dealing with »Mein Kampf«, be it argumentative or polemical, approving or refusing. Usually, all of those texts concentrated on a few specific aspects and did not give a comprehensive analysis. In 1931 for example, there was a broad discussion, as to whether Hitler was a Christian and how the relation between Christianity and National Socialism had to be seen. Numerous texts against and in favour of Hitler were published, most of them arguing with different passages of »Mein Kampf«. One of the most influential brochures against Hitler was written by Ingbert Naab, a Catholic priest, who died in 1935 in his French exile¹⁶. He analysed and quoted »Mein Kampf« extensively and came to the conclusion »that important basic ideas and proposals by Hitler are in absolute contradiction with Christianity. That is why he cannot be a leader for Christians either¹⁷. One of Hitler's most active defenders in this discussion was the physicist and Nobel Price laureate Johannes Stark, who – just like Naab – comprehensively quoted »Mein

12 Ibid., p. 242. The review was published in the conservative Austrian newspaper »Neue Freie Presse« and in the left-liberal German magazine »Tage-Buch«: »Dieses Buch zeigt Adolf Hitler, wie er ist, arm an Herz, unwissend, eitel, vollkommen phantasielos, und als Milderungsgrund läßt sich nur anführen, daß er offenbar ein unheilbarer Kriegshystiker ist.«

13 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 238: »Man legt Hitlers Buch mit einem Gefühl der Befriedigung beiseite: Solange die völkische Bewegung keine anderen Führer an ihre Spitze zu stellen weiß, solange werden noch manche Wasser ins Meer fließen, bis sie im Land der Dichter und Denker siegen wird.«

14 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 282.

15 Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung, 10 (1939), n° 34, 20 August 1930: »Anders als sonst in Menschenköpfen malt sich in diesem Kopf die Welt. Soll von solchen Narren die Welt in neues, noch größeres Unheil gestürzt werden?«

16 Cf. Klaus SCHOLDER, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, vol. 1: Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918–1934, Frankfurt/Main, Berlin, Vienna 1977, p. 170.

17 PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 379: »[...] daß wichtige Grundideen

Kampf« to prove that Hitler would respect the Christian confessions and refuse to interfere in religious matters¹⁸.

Finally, Hitler's foreign policy concepts in »Mein Kampf« were analysed, for example in 1931 by the social democrat Helmuth Klotz, a former participant of the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 who became a fierce opponent of National Socialism later on, exiled in France since 1933 and executed in 1943 in Berlin-Plötzensee¹⁹. In his brochure he collected dozens of statements of leading National Socialists regarding foreign politics in general and their attitude towards different European countries. »Mein Kampf« was one of his central sources. Klotz emphasised Hitler's hostility and aggression against France. That was why he hoped his text would also be read outside Germany and closed it with the following words: »And for this very reason a Hitler-Germany would be the downfall of the new Germany, the catastrophe of Europe and the world!«²⁰

In 1932, another article with wide circulation in the international communist press described the threat to France and the Soviet Union in the same terms expressed by Hitler in »Mein Kampf«. But its author, the communist Reichstag deputy Theodor Neubauer, who was executed in Berlin in spring 1945²¹, developed an opposing view at the end of his article and concluded that Hitler might be willing to cooperate with France for a certain period only to destroy the Soviet Union: »Anti-Bolshevik German foreign policy ends in submission to French imperialism, means renunciation of national liberation, betrayal of the masses sacrificed to tribute politics«²².

Hitler's anti-Semitism was not discussed on a broader basis in any of those texts: It was ignored mostly or mentioned only incidentally, and sometimes it was seen as a minor matter. In several texts his anti-Semitism even was judged only a bit too radical, but all in all quite reasonable²³.

Reception by State Authorities 1925–1933

If we look at the reception of »Mein Kampf« on state level we generally find a similarly broad debate. Only a few months after the first volume was published, the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior wrote a study of »Mein Kampf« and analysed in detail Hitler's political attitudes. It stated that Hitler had not changed since 1923 and still was speaking in favour of a violent form of politics. Therefore it refused to lift the ban against Hitler, who was not allowed to speak publicly in Bavaria until 1927²⁴.

und Vorschläge Hitlers mit dem Christentum in absolutem Widerspruch stehen. Darum kann er eben für Christen auch nicht Führer sein.«

18 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 356–358.

19 Cf. Herbert LINDER, *Von der NSDAP zur SPD. Der politische Lebensweg des Dr. Helmuth Klotz (1894–1943)*. Konstanz 1998 (Karlsruher Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus, 3), p. 333–334.

20 PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 442: »Und eben deshalb wäre ein Deutschland Hitlers der Untergang des neuen Deutschlands, die Katastrophe Europas und der Welt.«

21 Cf. Hermann WEBER, Andreas HERBST, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch. 1918 bis 1945*, Berlin 2008, p. 630–631.

22 PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 528: »Antibolschewistische deutsche Außenpolitik endet in der Unterwerfung vor dem französischen Imperialismus, bedeutet Verzicht auf die nationale Befreiung, Verrat an den Volksmassen, die der Tributpolitik geopfert werden.«

23 Cf. e.g. *ibid.*, p. 447.

24 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 307–308. Hitler's ban on speaking was extended afterwards to a great number of other German states including Prussia; cf. Othmar PLÖCKINGER, *Der Redner Hitler im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen*, in: Josef KOPPERSCHMIDT (ed.), *Hitler der Redner*. Munich 2003, p. 217–241, here p. 221–224.

The violence aspect was the main topic of a lot of other studies dealing with the political aims and the structure of Hitler's party – and Hitler's book always was a main reference point. Yet until 1930 already five different state-studies had been written and circulated on different governmental levels, including the Reich Ministry of the Interior, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior²⁵, the office of the Berlin Police President, and the Reichswehr Ministry²⁶. One of them was written in 1930 by Theodor Heuss, the later first West-German Bundespräsident after the Second World War. Heuss, then a member of the Reichstag for the liberal Deutsche Demokratische Partei, dealt more and more intensively with the NSDAP since 1930²⁷. His first study about the NSDAP was written for several parliamentary groups and for the Reich Chancellery. Heuss described and analysed the structure and the ideology of National Socialism, mainly its economic aspects. And he complained about Hitler's arbitrary abuse of »science« which had to bow to Hitler's volition »to arrange a world view, a course of history, which necessarily ends with the proclaimer of a new insight. There is no room at all any more for an argumentation, which checks theses and data for their weight«²⁸.

Until 1932 several more reports by government officials were made, including the Foreign Ministry in Berlin²⁹. The last and most comprehensive one was produced by the Prussian Ministry of the Interior consisting of almost 400 pages. It was circulated in the highest ranks of the German government, but Chancellor Heinrich Brüning and his ministers ignored it on purpose. Using »Mein Kampf« and numerous additional materials authored by Hitler and other leading National Socialists the ministry tried to prove that the NSDAP still was trying to violently overthrow the Weimar Republic³⁰. Ironically the possibility that the NSDAP could seize power in Germany on a legal way never was discussed in all these papers. In one of the most spectacular cases, at the trial against Hitler (and others) for preparation of high treason before the Reichsgericht, the Supreme Court in Leipzig in 1931, the violent character of the NSDAP was even denied. Besides other sources the court analysed Hitler's book, but finally dropped the charges. The right-wing prosecutor (Reichsanwalt) could not find evidence in »Mein Kampf« that Hitler would propose a violent breach of the constitution – in overt contradiction to most of the other analyses made by state institutions in the previous years³¹.

25 Cf. Robert M. W. KEMPNER (ed.), *Der verpaßte Nazi-Stopp. Die NSDAP als staats- und republikfeindliche, hochverräterische Verbindung. Preußische Denkschrift von 1930*, Frankfurt/Main et. al. 1983.

26 Cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 214–221.

27 In 1932 he published the wide-spread and influential book »Hitlers Weg« in which he tried to give an overall analysis of Hitler and the NSDAP; cf. Theodor HEUSS, *Hitlers Weg. Eine historisch-politische Studie über den Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig 1932, reprint: Hildesheim et. al. 2008.

28 PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 344: »um ein Weltbild, einen Geschichtsablauf zu ordnen, der notwendig bei dem Verkünder einer neuen Einsicht endigt. Für eine Argumentation, die Thesen und Daten auf ihr Gewicht prüft, ist da gar kein Raum mehr«. Heuss saw Hitler's description of Jewish history as a » most grotesque flattery in the central assessment of their historical role« (»groteskeste Schmeichelei in der zentralen Bewertung ihrer historischen Rolle«, *ibid*).

29 Especially when analysing topics like »Lebensraum« (the geopolitical concept of a living space), alliance-system, Bolshevism or France, the Foreign Ministry referred to »Mein Kampf«; cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 222.

30 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 222–224.

31 Cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 460–465.

Reception 1933–1945

In 1933, the situation changed completely. On the one hand, the book achieved unprecedented circulation. In 1933 almost a million copies were sold without any political pressure or state-driven distribution. Many Germans were eager to find out in detail what the new chancellor stood for beyond his propaganda speeches³². During the following years the sales figures dropped noticeably leading Eher publishers to push sales with different campaigns – one of the most famous was to make communal authorities handing it over to couples on the occasion of their marriage. This campaign was not nearly as successful as Hitler's publishers had hoped. After 1945 it became nonetheless a common argument that nobody had read the book and that it was forced upon the German people. Both parts of this legend are false³³.

On the other hand, both public and state analysis came to an end. The »Parteiämliche Prüfungskommission zum Schutze des NS-Schrifttums« (PPK), the party's review commission for the protection of nazi literature, strictly controlled the usage of »Mein Kampf« and in 1937 again made clear that analysing or interpreting Hitler's work was not allowed: »But where would we go if the *Führer's* book, his speeches or the party's program were made the subject of investigation, comparison or even discussion everywhere?«³⁴ Even the initially very popular collections of various quotes from »Mein Kampf« had to cease. Since 1936 the PPK intensified its control of this kind of publications until Hitler himself stopped them completely in 1939. The Staff of the Deputy Führer announced: »The Führer does not wish his work to be disassembled into parts and published in a variety of different perspectives«³⁵. In this way »Mein Kampf« became »Das Buch der Deutschen«, the book of the Germans, alongside with the Song of the Nibelungs and Luther's translation of the Bible. In school-readers three authors were quoted most: Goethe, Schiller, and Hitler³⁶. »Mein Kampf« was omnipresent in books, newspapers, magazines and the radio; it was training material for officers in the Wehrmacht and for members of the SS who, for example, had to deal with different sections of »Mein Kampf« in training courses every week³⁷.

Thus the book became an important part of the self-dramatization of the Nazi-regime and of its claim to total power on all levels. Consequently, we have to note that after 1933 the question, by whom and for which purpose »Mein Kampf« was read, is difficult to answer. We have to combine several sources to get an impression of the relevance of the book besides propaganda and compulsion.

32 Many libraries as well bought one or even more copies of the book as the demand was quite strong. But nevertheless this explains only a small part of the high sales-figures in 1933. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 137–160; PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 184–188, 420–429.

33 Cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 432–440.

34 Cit. in: *ibid.*, p. 417: »Wohin aber würden wir kommen, wenn allerorts das Buch des Führers, seine Reden oder das Programm der Partei zum Gegenstand von Untersuchungen, Vergleichen oder gar der Diskussion gemacht würden?« The PPK furthermore deplored the fact that about 80 per cent of the quotations from »Mein Kampf« and Hitler's speeches were wrong.

35 Cit. in: *ibid.*, p. 414: »Der Führer wünscht nicht, dass sein Werk in Teile zerlegt und nach verschiedensten Gesichtspunkten geordnet herausgebracht wird.«

36 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 418; Karin LAUF-IMMESBERGER, *Literatur, Schule und Nationalsozialismus*, St. Ingbert 1987, p. 83.

37 Cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 407–411; SS-Leithefte, 2 (1936), n° 1, 22 February 1936, and in the following issues. For the use in police and SS training cf. Hans-Christian HARTEN, *Himmlers Lehrer. Die weltanschauliche Schulung in der SS 1933–1945*, Paderborn 2014, p. 74–75, 86–104, 422–424, 442; for regular police forces cf. *id.*, *Die weltanschauliche Schulung der Polizei im Nationalsozialismus*, Paderborn 2018, p. 83, 168, 173, 210.

If we look at the sales-figures, we see that there were two main periods before the war, during which the book was bought by the Germans in large numbers. As mentioned above, the first occasion was in 1933, the second one in 1938/39. This is not a coincidence, as it is underlined by the loan-figures of public libraries in Germany: in 1933 and in 1938/39 those figures increased just like the sales figures. The Germans had a look at the book mainly during periods of severe crises: In 1933 many of them wanted to learn about Hitler's »real« political goals beyond his countless campaign speeches. And in 1938/39 many Germans were worried about the international confrontation and wanted to learn about the ideological basis of Hitler's foreign policy. Even a report by the exiled board of the Social Democratic Party (SoPaDe) stated in 1939 that Hitler's book played an important role in discussions between German citizens: »The same about the goals themselves can be heard from circles of opponents of Hitler as well as from convinced National Socialists. It is said that Hitler's ›Kampf‹ would be clear enough about these goals, so that one need not be in conjectures about them«³⁸.

After the war the American occupation authorities in Bavaria wanted to know more exactly how many Germans had read the book. Their survey evaluated the share of readers at about 20 per cent of the population, around 12 million people among the German general population, and that was a conservative estimate³⁹. For good reasons one can assume that the real number was larger⁴⁰.

The number of prominent readers, for whom we have evidence that they dealt with the book, was large as well. There are not only leading Nazis like Alfred Rosenberg, Joseph Goebbels, Gregor Straßer, and Rudolf Heß or followers like Carl Schmitt, Adolf Bartels, Fritz Lenz, Hjalmar Schacht, and Ernst von Weizsäcker, but also critics and opponents like Arnold Zweig, Albert Einstein, Karl August Wittfogel and Theodor Wolff. Even victims of the NS-regime dealt with the book. Victor Klemperer was mentioned above. In Prague the German-Czech historian and feminist Käthe Spiegel in 1940/41 was working on a comprehensive analysis of »Mein Kampf«. She analysed several keywords of the National Socialist ideology in Hitler's book and studied specifically the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche and Niccolò Machiavelli. She defined Hitler as a utopian who differed from other utopians by trying to realise his utopia, which would be much more ambitious as for example the Marxist utopia: »For the author [Hitler], however, it is not about human things alone, i. e. about the [social] order among humans. He is also concerned with promoting the upbringing of the human race in a biological sense, with fulfilling the will of nature, and with steering God's work in the right direction!«⁴¹ Käthe Spiegel was not able to finish her study as she was deported as a Jew in October 1941 to the ghetto in Litzmannstadt (at Łódź). She was murdered later on⁴².

38 Cf. PLÖCKINGER, *Geschichte eines Buches* (as in n. 4), p. 440: »Über die Ziele an sich kann man aus Kreisen der Hitlergegner Ähnliches hören wie von überzeugten Nationalsozialisten. Man sagt, dass Hitlers ›Kampf‹ über diese Ziele deutlich genug spräche, so dass man sich nicht in Vermutungen darüber zu ergehen brauche.«

39 Cf. Sven Felix KELLERHOFF, »Mein Kampf«. Die Karriere eines Buches, Stuttgart 2015, p. 226–229.

40 On the one hand, the data was based on purely voluntary declarations; on the other hand, the survey was made in majority catholic Bavaria, whereas in protestant parts of Germany approval of National Socialism tended to be higher.

41 Käthe SPIEGEL, *Studien zum Werke des Agathokles* [cover title], manuscript, [1940/41], in: Wiener Library London, 521/1, p. 203: »Dem Verfasser [i. e. Hitler] ist es aber nicht um die menschlichen Dinge alleine zu tun, d. h. um die Ordnung unter Menschen. Ihm geht es darüber hinaus darum, die Aufzucht des Menschengeschlechts im biologischen Sinne zu fördern, den Willen der Natur zu erfüllen, das Werk Gottes wiederum in richtige Bahnen zu lenken!«

42 Cf. Gerhard OBERKOFER, Spiegel, Käthe, in: Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon, vol. 13,

In a few exceptional cases we get insight in the very heart of the perception of the book. Around the world, personal copies of »Mein Kampf« survived, including those of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Soviet head of state Michail I. Kalinin. For Germany Heinrich Himmler's and Gerhard Hauptmann's copies are still accessible. Hauptmann worked through his copy in 1933 underlining both affirmative and refusing passages and making short comments on various pages. His copy proves that intellectuals by far did not refuse to read the book⁴³. Even more interesting are Heinrich Himmler's copies from 1925/26. He read both volumes immediately after their publication, underlined important parts, and made numerous notes. Besides other topics Himmler had special interest in Hitler's remarks on »Volksundheit« and »Rasse«, on public health and race⁴⁴. But nevertheless Himmler was not an uncritical reader in these years. In his diary he summarized his impressions of the first volume of »Mein Kampf«: »There is an awful lot of truth in it. The first chapters on his own youth contain some weaknesses«⁴⁵.

Conclusion

We have to leave the legend behind that Hitler's book was an »unread bestseller«. This legend was part of the German post-war defence-strategy that the German people were seduced by Hitler. Prototypical for this strategy is Martin Heidegger, who already in 1931 strongly advised his brother to read »Mein Kampf« as the book of a man with an extraordinary political instinct. After the war Heidegger claimed never to have read the book⁴⁶.

Dealing with the reception of »Mein Kampf« does not only mean dealing with a historical source, but with a current and on-going challenge. This urges academics to act carefully and precisely, but also persistently and consequently. It is necessary to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses of the book's reception, which are complementary to each other. Furthermore, we always should have a close look at the particular motives, chronological sequence, and circumstances of the reception (and non-reception!) of »Mein Kampf« to avoid a limited and restricted view, which easily could be rejected as selective and incomplete. Thus the investigation of the reception of »Mein Kampf« has become an important contribution and extension to the overall study of National Socialism and its aftermath until today.

Vienna 2007–2010, p. 19, URL: https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_S/Spiegel_Kaethe_1898_1941.xml (accessed 26 February 2019).

43 Cf. Hans SARKOWICZ, Alf MENTZER, *Literatur in Nazi-Deutschland. Ein biografisches Lexikon*, Hamburg, Vienna 2000, p. 181–183.

44 Cf. Othmar PLÖCKINGER, *Heinrich Himmlers Privatexemplar von »Mein Kampf« als zeitgeschichtliche Quelle*, in: *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 61/2 (2009), p. 171–178, here p. 174–175.

45 Cit. in: *ibid.*, p. 171: »Es stehen unheimlich viele Wahrheiten darin. Die ersten Kapitel über die eigene Jugend enthalten manche Schwäche.«

46 Cf. PLÖCKINGER (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente* (as in n. 6), p. 465–467.