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An Unnecessary Undertaking? On the Annotated Edition of Mein Kampf

PATRICK BAHNERS

The copyright on Adolf Hitler's literary legacy was held by the Free State of Bavaria until 1 January 2016, when it expired. One week later, on 8 January, the Institute of Contemporary History (IfZ) published a 'critical edition' of *Mein Kampf*. At a press conference held at the Institute's building in Munich, this edition of the work, the first published in Germany since 1945, was presented to the public. Two large-format volumes with a total of almost 2,000 pages provide space for more than 3,500 annotations by the four editors. The Foreword by the Institute's director, Andreas Wirsching, is dated 5 October 2015 and mentions that the project was accompanied by 'substantial public debates'. Wirsching's summing up of these debates merely states what he claims was uncontroversial: 'One thing, however, is undisputed: it would be academically, politically, and morally irresponsible to allow this racist product of inhumanity to make its way in the world freely and without a commentary, and not to counter it by providing a standard critical edition that puts the text and its author in their place.'

This is not true. The need for an annotated edition was, indeed, hotly contested. It was the subject of debates on the expiry of the copyright relating to the IfZ's scholarly plans rather than on the legal question of how to deal with unannotated reprints of *Mein Kampf*. For years, many contemporary historians had been calling for an annotated edition, but the efforts of Wirsching's predecessor, Horst Möller, to gain permission from the Bavarian state as copyright-holder had proved unsuccessful. Individual experts, however, regarded the undertaking as superfluous, including Wolfgang Benz, author and editor of standard works on genocide and antisemitism, who worked at the IfZ from 1969 to 1990. Objections in principle were ex-

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pressed by Holocaust survivors and representatives of those who had been murdered, including Charlotte Knobloch, leader of the Jewish religious community in Munich. In response to these protests, Horst Seehofer, the Bavarian Minister President, withdrew the state funding which had been pledged by the *Landtag*.

It is understandable that, given the objections and resistance to the project, Wirsching wanted to express his conviction of its rightness as clearly as possible. To claim that one's own position is difficult or even impossible to contest is a stock response in a situation like this. But Wirsching turns the Institute directorate's firm opinion that it is difficult to contradict their view into the false assertion that it was not disputed. This is not a good omen for an edition which has made it its aim to correct every false statement by the author. This understanding of the need for comprehensive editorial correction lies behind the grandiloquent claim that the edition intends to put Hitler in his place. And it is in relation to this specific concept of a commentary providing constant contradiction, not just for the project of an annotated edition as such, that Wirsching claims there is no alternative. Not to have produced these two massive tomes, he suggests, would have been academically, politically, and morally irresponsible. Has there ever been another academic work whose publication is dictated by a categorical imperative? In the case of the director of a research institute which, since its employees acted as expert witnesses in the war crimes trials of the 1950s and 1960s, sees its special expertise as measuring the scope for responsibility in extreme situations, such expressions of justification must be placed in the balance and weighed up carefully. These expert witness reports were likewise self-published by the IfZ in book form.

Without Seeing the Object

On 7 January 2016, the day before *Mein Kampf* was published, an article entitled 'Das absolut Böse' appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, questioning the legitimacy of this 'critical edition'.¹ Its author, Jeremy Adler, argued as a literary scholar. The intellectual force of his intervention came from the fact that he did not pull any punches. He log-

¹ See above, Jeremy Adler, 'Absolute Evil', in this issue of the *GHIL Bulletin*.

ically developed his criticism out of one thought, the metaphysical starting point for the craft of editing. The key sentence of Adler's argument reads as follows: 'Scholarly editions by definition serve the author's intentions.' The 'project of printing a book because one rejects it', he says, goes against 'the whole tradition of textual editing since late Antiquity and the Jewish Middle Ages'. Those responsible for the edition who spoke at the press conference did not refute this argument. They complained that Adler had made his judgement without examining the book, of which no advance copies had been distributed. But the point of his piece was precisely that it had been written without seeing its object. Adler wanted to demonstrate the impossibility of an edition of *Mein Kampf*, and the care which was taken with individual annotations was irrelevant.

Adler obviously lacked knowledge of internal institutional working processes, the Institute's director stated in front of the world's press. This critique of the critic was directed at the conclusion of Adler's article, which deals with institutional politics. In fact, it does contain an error: not all four editors are employees of the IfZ. The volumes themselves, however, reveal next to nothing about the internal history of the edition. It will soon be necessary to explain to students that the importance of the 'public debate' was reflected in the withdrawal of public funding.

According to Adler, the point of preserving a text in an edition is to overcome time. Seen in this way, every edition has an anti-historical tendency. 'The main purpose of critical editions is to preserve an original for all time.' In this case, 'a miserable, bungled piece of work will be granted the same dignity as Homer and Plato, the Bible and the Talmud'. The similarity to the Bible and the Talmud is obvious because the double-page layout with annotations placed not only underneath the text but also in the margins of the page adopts an ordering principle that we first encounter in the manuscripts of these sacred texts. We can read this in the Introduction to the edition, and also that this layout has 'proved itself', and was used in an edition of the Talmud as late as 1979. Nothing more. Adler's divinatory suspicions are confirmed: 'The editors want to "frame" the original, but are unaware of how deeply offensive it is to see an editorial technique developed for the Talmud being used in *Mein Kampf*.'

On the other hand, they tried to avoid giving offence where, except for a few specialists in the history of typography, nobody

could have taken it: in the choice of font. They considered using Trump Antiqua as 'a readable and objective font with a neutral effect'. But after 'further research', it was discovered that in 1934 Georg Trump had been promoted to the headship of the masters' college for book printing in Munich, and had been greeted with a *Sieg-Heil* salute on taking up this office. 'This proximity to the Third Reich was on no account to be created.' In terms of the categories of resistance developed at the IfZ during Martin Broszat's directorship, this esoteric distancing gesture must be classified as 'resistivity' (*Resistenz*).

In their instructions for using the critical apparatus, the editors pose the question: 'To what extent is it appropriate to edit a text like *Mein Kampf* using standards that are usually reserved for literary texts? Does this not confer on Hitler's writing a linguistic, intellectual, or even artistic significance that it never really had?' They reassure themselves by pointing out that the text-critical treatment as such, the documentation of variants, 'ultimately works against the aura of the sacred with which Nazi propaganda tried to surround Hitler's debut as a "writer"'. But as it is sacred texts that are generally handed down with a text-critical treatment, this does not amount to much. Given the Biblical and Talmudic associations of the page layout, we will have to understand the word 'entgegenarbeiten' (to work against) used in the quotation above as meaning the opposite of what the authors intended. Since Ian Kershaw discovered the phrase in a speech by a Nazi agrarian politician who claimed that it was the duty of every German to work towards the Führer ('dem Führer entgegenzuarbeiten'), it has become customary in research on National Socialism to use the term 'entgegenarbeiten' to mean 'to work towards'.

A Unique Edition?

Ian Kershaw, biographer of Hitler and historian of the Hitler effect, that is, the dissemination of belief in the Führer throughout German society, was present in Munich on 8 January 2016 and contested the uniqueness of the edition as asserted by Adler. Texts such as *Mein Kampf*, Kershaw said, were constantly being edited: works by Stalin and Mussolini, and by Hitler, in a multi-volume edition put out by the IfZ of his *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen*, a project now in a way completed by this edition of *Mein Kampf*. There is, however, no other

example of a tyrant's manifesto that is edited like *Mein Kampf*, with the attention to insignificant detail of graphic design worthy of a classic, but in a spirit of inexorable rejection of the contents. The correction of autobiographical myths and other propaganda lies is certainly standard practice when editing the ego documents of dictators. Such corrections are among the necessary information that every scholarly edition of a historical source must provide. But Christian Hartmann and his co-editors also refute statements by Hitler whose ideological nature is obvious. According to Hans Buchheim, it was one of the Institute's first tasks to put right the 'incompletenesses', 'distortions', and 'ambiguities' in the memoirs of old Nazis. Hartmann & Co. now want to add an explanation of the rest of the world to their exposition of the world view. 'The commentary adds everything that Hitler ignores or deliberately conceals.'

In the Introduction, the editors themselves concede that, contrary to what Kershaw said at the press conference, there is 'fundamentally very little that is comparable' to their project. They admit that their polemical commentary may 'seem unusual from the point of view of classical editing techniques'. 'But it is also unusual—and this brings us to the core of the problem—to publish an edition of a source whose historicization is not yet complete.' This cryptic statement forms the final sentence of the Preface, the introduction to the Introduction, and it is not explained further. What does historicization mean here?

The book has not yet become completely historical; it is not yet a historical object like any other. If the statement may be paraphrased thus, it relates to the way in which *Mein Kampf* was treated as something clandestine after the war. The fact that there were no reprints came to be seen as a prohibition. There could be no cursory treatment of this vestige of the dictatorship, as would be normal for books, with the familiarity of browsing quickly giving way to indifference. This book, of all books, that has always been described as unreadable, could by no means be boring. If we then understand why *Mein Kampf* has not yet been historicized, it is strange to find that, in the context of source editions, this is seen as something unusual. Most historical sources, after all, are published for the first time when they are edited. Previously these documents, diaries, or household accounts were unknown. Their historicization could only begin once they were published. In this sense, namely, that it could not be printed for seventy years, *Mein Kampf* is not unusual.

The statement about incomplete historicization becomes meaningful only if we compare it exclusively with other sources on the history of Hitler, such as, for example, his speeches in the Reichstag, the Hossbach memorandum on wartime planning, the Nuremberg laws, and Leni Riefenstahl's films. The editors do not specifically mention sources on the Nazi period here because for professional contemporary historians, the terms 'historicization' and 'National Socialism' belong together anyway, especially for employees of the IfZ. These two terms stand for the Institute's theoretical ambitions at the height of its prestige, for the historical and political will expressed in a disciplinary avant-gardism. Over this, however, is a question mark about the ability to deal with criticism. 'Plea for a Historicization of National Socialism' is the title of an essay which Martin Broszat published in *Merkur* in 1985.²

Broszat, who made himself an advocate of historicization, although this was meant to be a natural, inevitable process anyway, presented it as a counter-concept to a moral view or, at least, to the 'blanket' condemnation and 'exclusion' of the Hitler period that was typical of 'political pedagogics'. This antithetical stance provoked Saul Friedländer's criticism. As Ernst Nolte also fought under the banner of historicization in the *Historikerstreit* that broke out in 1986, Broszat, pioneer and organizer of structuralism in research on the Nazi period, had to defend himself against concern that his concept amounted to no more than a relativization of German crimes against humanity. In an exchange of letters, printed in the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, the IfZ's house journal, Broszat and Friedländer tried to clarify their respective positions.³

From today's point of view, what is striking about Broszat's essay is that genocide and the war of extermination are marginal to his overall interpretation of National Socialism. Broszat mainly deals in a highly abstract manner with the motives for the participation of broad social strata, emphasizing the desire for social advancement and downplaying any ideological agreement with the regime's programmes. At the beginning of the essay, to be sure, the murder of

² Martin Broszat, 'Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus', *Merkur*, no. 435 (May 1985), 373–85.

³ Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, 'Um die "Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus": Ein Briefwechsel', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 36 (1988), 339–72.

Jews serves as an explanation for why this past does not want to go away. The 'shock of civilization' persists, as Broszat quotes from the *New York Review of Books*, but he goes on immediately to restrict this statement to the wider readership of this review: 'This applies not only to Israel, but also to the big cities of America's East Coast, where hundreds of thousands of emigrants and survivors from central and eastern Europe found refuge.' Memory of the Holocaust as a local phenomenon?

In his correspondence with Friedländer, more space is devoted to the murder of the Jews. The same applies to an essay in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, the main journal for professional historians, in which Broszat brings together in a collage the most important parts of his side of the correspondence, but without referring to Friedländer, thus making a monologue out of what had been a dialogue.⁴ Here Broszat speaks of the 'centrality of Auschwitz', but considers it to be so only 'in retrospect' because the victims could not leave the subject alone. 'In view of the particularly intense Jewish memory of the Holocaust, it may very well be that, in the memory of the world, it will eventually allow other deeds and misdeeds of the Third Reich increasingly to fade away.' But according to Broszat, 'the historian cannot simply accept' the 'whole history' of the Third Reich being 'placed in the shadow of Auschwitz'. The (non-Jewish) historian makes himself the advocate of the non-Jewish victims, including those 'elements of non-National Socialist German traditions' that, 'because they were "pressed into service", to some extent themselves became victims of National Socialism'.

Broszat explains delayed historicization by pointing out that even the academic literature is still dominated by 'the overwhelming impression of the catastrophic end and final state', 'the idea of the systematic character, calculated succession, and ideological purpose of a machiavellian regime working with divided roles under the predominant leadership figure of Hitler'. The backward state of historical awareness is here demonstrated by the fact that Broszat's own approach has not yet established itself. After all, his functionalism consisted precisely in criticism of this notion of system, succession, purpose, and Hitler's dominance. Broszat saw a 'demonological'

⁴ Martin Broszat, 'Was heißt Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus?', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 247 (1988), 1-14.

view of Hitler that rejected the Nazi period as a whole, but in reality exonerated the posthumous exorcists, as typical of the immediate postwar period. In his study of the Holocaust and West German historians, Nicolas Berg shows that Broszat's narrative of structuralism replacing demonology is a myth.⁵ The doctrine of a chaotic division of labour in the apparatus of the Nazi state, driven by necessity and its own dynamic, was developed early in the existence of the discipline of contemporary history, and its outcome is no less exonerating than blaming the demon Hitler and his clique. And it was part of the founding programme of the IfZ, as the writings of the second director, Hermann Mau, demonstrate.

New Objectivity

To describe the ideal of a historiography that took the history of the Third Reich out from under the shadow of Auschwitz, Broszat in 1985 used a term dating from the period before National Socialism: *neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity). In the IfZ this ideal research aesthetic was anything but new. Berg argues that the demand for objectivity in force from the founding of the Institute to the time when Broszat was director made it possible to refuse positions at the IfZ to private scholars who were Holocaust survivors. One of the authors affected by this was H. G. Adler, Jeremy Adler's father. He had been interned in Theresienstadt in February 1942, and was taken to Auschwitz in 1944. In 1955 he published a book about Theresienstadt. With the historians of the IfZ, Adler shared an anti-modern perspective on the camps as exemplifying an 'administered world' (*verwaltete Welt*). His correspondence with the Institute shows that in contrast to other Jewish private scholars, such as Joseph Wulf, Adler endorsed the *habitus* of objectivity that shaped the IfZ. Thus in 1959, when seeking a research grant for his work on the deportation of the Jews, he undertook to maintain a 'very rigorous and unemotional tone'. Adler received funding for his research, but when he submit-

⁵ Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003). An abridged version has been published in English translation as *The Holocaust and the West German Historians: Historical Interpretation and Autobiographical Memory* (Madison, 2015).

ted the manuscript for publication in 1965, it was rejected by the IfZ. The Institute's referees criticized it for not separating evaluation of the sources from analysis. And they missed an overview of the state of research in what they regarded as a 'highly personal product' by someone who was 'not only a scholar, but also a contemporary and directly involved'.

In 1960 Adler had suggested commissioning Hermann Langbein, co-founder of the International Auschwitz Committee, to carry out research on a 'typology of the camp staff'. The IfZ replied that Langbein would do better to present his 'experiences and insights' in the form of a 'witness report'. They would be delighted, they wrote, to receive 'a detailed report on Auschwitz by someone who experienced it', which could provide 'a counterpart to the memoirs' of the camp commander, Rudolf Höß. The IfZ had edited Höß's prison notes in 1958, although the Institute's Academic Advisory Board had expressed concern 'that the Institute intended to publish the written effusions of a mass murderer'. According to Broszat, Höß had 'a kind of retrospective objective interest (*Sach-Interesse*) in the topic', and although Broszat regarded this kind of 'objectivity' as 'concise and displaying the precision of a book-keeper', he also used such expressions of disgust as 'shameless' and 'overbearing' to describe it.

In his letters to Friedländer, Broszat insisted that there was a conflict between strictly scholarly research and eye witness accounts by the victim, which are not required to be objective, or the collective memory of survivors, which passes such reports on. Broszat posits a contrast between Jewish memory and German research, along the lines of the conflict between *mythos* and *logos*. His predecessor, Mau, had described contemporary historians and eye-witnesses, who in the early years of the IfZ typically came from the circle of the tainted, encountering each other in a feeling of contemporaneity: 'This sometimes produced a surprising and moving human solidarity between the historian and the witness, which could be extremely useful for the work.' Thirty years later Broszat recognized solidarity only with witnesses from among the victims, but now in the knowledge that fate had separated the historian from the witness. 'Among the peculiarities of investigating this past as a scholar is the awareness that it is still occupied by a variety of monuments of mourning and also accusatory memory, occupied by the painful feelings of many, especially Jewish people, who insist on a mythical form of remembering.'

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Although the word 'occupied' is here drawn from psychology, given the spatial metaphor of the memorial landscape, an association with occupation also suggests itself.

Although Broszat himself spoke in images, he was disturbed by the power of images in the 'mythical memory' which might be based on 'the forgetting of details and imponderables of history still familiar to contemporaries'. 'Among the problems faced by a younger generation of German historians who tend more towards rational understanding is certainly that they have to deal with this sort of contrary memory that coarsens history among those damaged and persecuted by the Nazi regime and their descendants.' This opposition between increased rationality and coarsening shocked Friedländer, whose parents had sent the 10 year old to a Catholic boarding school in France before they were murdered. Broszat rejected Friedländer's precise questions about the implications of his constructions based on oppositions as an expression of 'mistrust' and 'suspicion', the 'reasons for which', however, remained 'hidden' from him.

Pandora's Box

A documentation of sources on the activities of the Warsaw ghetto's chief medical officer, who had become head of the Federal German Health Authority in Bonn, put together by Joseph Wulf, gave Broszat an 'impression of carelessness or coarsening' in 1964. In one of his letters to Wulf, Broszat assured him: 'I understand the motives behind your work.' In the same way, the editors of *Mein Kampf*, in their Introduction declare that Charlotte Knobloch's 'judgement' that the book is a Pandora's box which can never be closed again is 'psychologically comprehensible' and must be 'taken seriously'. This expression of understanding alone can be regarded as condescending; the psychological is not far from the pathological. The assumption that Knobloch is judging out of personal concern rather than articulating a general point of view is misplaced because it was only after speaking to other survivors that she, as their spokeswoman, came out in opposing the editorial project. Jeremy Adler warns: 'This new edition may have been produced with the best will in the world, but the reprinting of any questionable text can have only one outcome: to disseminate the author's views. No editor can determine whether

these will meet with public approval or rejection—and responsible editors may not direct their readers.’ Rather than leaving it to the future to decide whether Knobloch’s fears would prove to be unfounded, the editors discuss whether the image of a Pandora’s box is ‘appropriate’. ‘Does this not completely overestimate, mystify all over again, and ultimately suppress the potential of a book whose first volume appeared ninety years ago and which, in many respects, is quite simply old, stale, and incomprehensible to today’s readers?’ Mystification is a polite synonym for coarsening.

Take note: this book is so dangerous that it cannot be allowed to make its way in the world unaccompanied, although the annotated edition is on sale freely and can be passed on by one reader to another. But the annotations, at a stroke, can make it harmless. Belief in the powers of scholarship to combat magic is the red thread running through the work of the IfZ. The editors say that the main guideline of the editorial work is the ‘principle of objectification’ (*Versachlichung*). Under the proviso of ‘rationality, verifiability, and universality’, they are seeking an ‘enlightening debate’ with *Mein Kampf*, ‘which will put an end to the potential power of this symbol once and for all’. It cannot be claimed that, unlike Höß, Hitler made even the smallest attempt to simulate objectivity. In a book of essays attempting a diagnosis of Adolf Hitler, to which H. G. Adler contributed, Hans Buchheim wrote in 1960: ‘When he said Germany, he was not serving the cause (*Sache*), but trying to force it into his service.’ What Hitler lays out in his work is, from the first to the last page, the opposite of rational and universal, and it is verifiable only against the author’s will. Thus in the view of the editors, Hitler’s history of the Nazi Party is ‘anything but an objective, true-to-life account’. He lacked ‘any systematic schooling in either writing or logical thinking’. To be sure, Hitler called the Landsberg fortress, where he had written the first volume of *Mein Kampf*, his ‘university at government expense’. But ‘this had nothing at all to do with scholarship’.

In the history of the IfZ, the publication of this edition marks the end of the dominance of structuralism. This method is no longer surrounded by an aura of progressiveness, as it was during Broszat’s time. The commentary in the edition juxtaposes Hitler’s pronouncements with his later actions, allowing the impression to arise that there was a great deal of systematic planning and direction in his policies, whose primacy Friedländer defended against the social dy-

namic invoked by Broszat. This revision is not official Institute policy; it would go against the rules governing a research institute. The current director, Wirsching, takes every opportunity to stress that *Mein Kampf* must not be read as a 'blueprint'. To do otherwise would be to revert to the 'Hitlerism' of the demonological phase. The editor in charge, Christian Hartmann, a student of Andreas Hillgruber, on the other hand, intimates that in his opinion a blueprint is not a bad image.

The notion of 'error' runs through Broszat's letters to Friedländer. He wanted to understand 'why such large parts of a civilized nation erroneously fell so strongly under the influence of National Socialism and Hitler'. He believed that the research on everyday life in Bavaria which he had conducted had 'made the motives of erring, petty bourgeois Nazi supporters understandable'. But in what had the 'erring petty bourgeois of the Nazi period' been mistaken? Wasn't it in the assumption that the path indicated by *Mein Kampf* did not lead to Auschwitz? In his first comprehensive overview of National Socialism (1960), Broszat spoke of the 'extraordinary self-delusion' of the Germans who had ceded responsibility for their lives to the 'monstrous Nazi ideology'. According to Broszat, Hitler's autobiographical manifesto, 12 million copies of which had been distributed, played no part in this monstrous outcome. In an essay about Hitler's 'second book', a foreign policy work of 1928 which was printed in the IfZ's publication series in 1961, Broszat called it 'methodologically unfortunate' that contemporary historiography 'draws so strongly on *Mein Kampf* as evidence of Hitler's political maxims'. 'It is part of the history of *Mein Kampf* that it was hardly read or taken seriously by believers, critics, and opponents until 1945'.⁶ This textbook view, dating from the post-war period, has today been refuted thanks to the research of Othmar Plöckinger, one of the four editors of the edition.⁷

For Jeremy Adler, the fact that 'the IfZ sees its work as paying homage to the victims' is 'pure mockery: they are calling on the defenceless dead to justify their own work'. The relevant part of the Introduction speaks of respect: 'And, finally, there is another reason

⁶ Martin Broszat, 'Betrachtungen zu "Hitlers Zweitem Buch"', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 9 (1961), 417–29.

⁷ Othmar Plöckinger, *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers 'Mein Kampf' 1922–1945* (Munich, 2011); id. (ed.), *Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte von 'Mein Kampf' 1924–1945* (Stuttgart, 2016).

for a close and critical commentary on *Mein Kampf*: to show respect for those who fell victim to the ideology expressed here.' At the press conference, Wirsching said that they had respect for criticism from the perspective of the victims, and he repeated this when he was asked about Adler. 'Respect for the victims of the Nazi crimes', Broszat wrote on 29 September 1987 in the first of his three letters to Friedländer, requires us 'to leave space for their mythical memory.' Wirsching accused Adler of restoring the negative myth of the book that had been locked away. The editors sum up their work by pointing out that 'Hitler's work represents something like a monster in terms of content, language, and structure', so that 'they had no choice but to look as closely as possible at its shape'. Like a monster: the editors respond to the 'continuing mythologization of the book' in the language of ancient mythology.

A book by Hitler was the very first edition of sources published by the IfZ in 1951: a posthumous compilation of table talk (*Tischgespräche*) in the Führer headquarters. Federal President Heuss had personally signalled his approval in the meeting of the Council and Advisory Board that took this decision. Nevertheless, this edition also created a scandal. The Cabinet of the Federal Republic of Germany resolved to review the Institute's activities and attempted to prevent the publication, especially a preview which was to appear in the illustrated magazine *Quick*. The Bavarian Minister President, Ehard, condemned the publication in a parliamentary speech to the *Landtag*. The Institute's director, Mau, had rather imprudently told *Spiegel* magazine that the IfZ was bringing out an 'international publishing sensation'. In the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* we read: 'We must ask whether it was sensible and right to publish this book. To answer yes would be to leave oneself open to the reproach of having overlooked the potentially dangerous impact of sentences written by this man who, it seems, had something to say on every subject. To answer no would mean giving a bad report to a liberal way of life, or rather, to the degree to which it is perfected in Germany.' On 8 January 2016 Ian Kershaw endorsed the sentiment expressed in the last sentence.

The editor of the *Tischgespräche*, the influential and eloquent historian Gerhard Ritter, who had been arrested after 20 July 1944, had to leave the IfZ's Advisory Board. He had dispensed with a commentary, accepting the danger that 'ignorant readers would take

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Hitler's most extreme statements at face value merely because they were made so confidently'. The Advisory Board expressed its astonishment at the extent to which Ritter had 'underestimated the importance of a scholarly commentary'. With her unflinching talent for cutting to the chase, Hannah Arendt wrote in her review in *Monat*: 'As there was no commentary of any sort, Hitler was given the word, freely and without contradiction, just as when he was alive.' Broszat called Arendt's criticism 'naive' and 'wrong'. The table talks, he went on, were 'unquestionably one of the best sources for getting close to Hitler's unadorned nature', now outdone by *Mein Kampf*, which is, for the editors, 'the most comprehensive and, in some respects, the most intimate testimony of a dictator whose policies and crimes completely changed the world'.

Faced with Hitler the politician and the criminal, Wirsching and his editors are not lost for words. But as at Broszat's time, they lack words for critics whose points of view the editors explain in terms of personal history. The premiss on which Nicolas Berg's work is based is confirmed: it is worth 'paying particular attention to failed communication in historiographical debates as a crucial point in the effort to gain knowledge'.

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