

IN THIS ISSUE

As this edition was being prepared for publication in late January 2017, we received a message from Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, member of the ›Studies in Contemporary History‹ advisory board: ›As you can imagine, I am watching the new Polish politics of the past with great concern. It is an inherent part of Polish politics. Everything we have gained will very quickly be lost. [...] I can only hope that the old contacts and friendships will not be broken – »Poland has not perished yet!«‹ But even beyond the Polish case, where fundamental elements of the democratic order established after 1989/90 are under threat, recent months have been dominated by an unexpected accumulation of turbulent events. This has engendered among contemporary historians and in the general political public sphere a strange melange of concern and anger, resignation and optimism, head-scratching and attempts to analyse the situation. When academics, journalists and officials in Turkey are persecuted in their thousands, forced out of their jobs and often arbitrarily detained, the question is raised of analogies to the German situation in 1933,¹ and indeed historical references are currently very quickly, sometimes perhaps too quickly, at hand.

Whether the comparison between Trump and Hitler² and the skyrocketing sales of Orwell's *1984* in the US³ are instructive or perhaps obey an overly mechanical impulse that may have outlived its usefulness, is another matter. Whatever the case, it is evident that *science/humanities as usual* is scarcely practicable under the current circumstances, yet also more essential than ever. Democracy and free science depend on conditions that they themselves can only establish and guarantee to a certain extent, but which those involved in the academic system and in the media absolutely must work to uphold. Up until a very short time ago, such a statement could have been thought trivial. Perhaps the current global situation shows us that the ›value‹ of the humanities and indeed all scholarship must be legitimised anew,⁴ but also that

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- 1 Cf. from the summer of 2016, e.g.: Türkei-Debatte. Vom Sinn und Unsinn historischer Vergleiche. Jörn Leonhard im Gespräch mit Korbinian Frenzel, in: Deutschlandradio Kultur, 9 August 2016. Now, after developments in Turkey have continued to escalate, Leonhard might perhaps rethink his replies.
 - 2 Is Donald Trump a Fascist? Yes and no, in: Slate, 10 February 2016; Too Close for Comfort. How much do the early days of the Trump administration look like the Third Reich? Historian Richard Evans weighs in, in: Slate, 10 February 2017 (interviews by Isaac Chotiner with Robert Paxton and Richard Evans – before and after the American elections – who both mention parallels and differences, without oversimplifying). See also Timothy Snyder, Him. His election that November came as a surprise..., in: Slate, 18 November 2016.
 - 3 Adrian Daub, Orwell ist eine praktische Allzweckwaffe. Kann uns der Klassiker ›1984‹ beim Versuch helfen, Trumps Amerika besser zu verstehen?, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 3 February 2017.
 - 4 Michael Hagner, Trump offenbart den Nutzen der Geisteswissenschaften. Im Kampf gegen den politischen Irrationalismus sollten Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften stärker zusammenhalten. Sonst droht der Rückfall in die Ignoranz, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11 February 2017; Bernhard Pörksen, Sind wir an allem schuld? Neuerdings heißt es, mit Donald Trump und Wladimir Putin regiere die Beliebigkeit der Postmoderne, für die neue, autoritäre Weltordnung seien die Kultur- und Geisteswissenschaften verantwortlich. Das ist eine Verdrehung der Tatsachen, in: *ZEIT*, 2 February 2017.

political intervention can be necessary if a situation arises in which the detached role of the scientific observer is no longer enough. Contemporary historians are of course not per se smarter than other people, and the function of historical experience as a guide for dealing with the present and future is contentious at least. But trusting in ›our historical sensitivity‹⁵ offers a glimmer of hope, one which has a sound basis in knowledge and expertise.

The articles in the present issue are of course not direct commentaries on current events, but they do pertain and respond to them. *Habbo Knoch* and *Benjamin Möckel* adumbrate a ›moral history‹ for the 20th/21st century. Combining epistemological, systematic and genuinely historical perspectives, their essay explores moral premises, standards and practices and looks at continuities and transformations. The aim is not a ›moralisation through history‹ but a ›historicisation of the moral‹. Though the articles were written independently of one another, *Frank Bösch's* essay about support for Vietnamese ›boat people‹ in the Federal Republic of Germany around 1980 in a sense provides a case study in this connection. At the same time, it places the current question of the willingness of German society to accept refugees in a historical perspective, revealing a number of parallels to the present time. Civil society, media and state action complemented one another and created new forms of humanitarian aid. But the period of widespread public empathy was short-lived, and the reception of the Vietnamese ›quota refugees‹ remained in some respects an exception that did not lead to any overall transformation of political and moral standards in terms of a universalisation of aid.

The action of the ›DIY home improvers‹ in West Berlin in the 1980s is the subject of *Reinhild Kreis's* investigation. It can likewise be seen in the greater context of the search for a new ›moral economy‹, but it also pursued very practical objectives. Although this manual self-help – as an independent segment of the politically motivated squatter scene – suffered a number of failures and frustrations, it contributed to the development of a more flexible housing policy. It may be tempting to look for inspiration here for current problems in the property market. But the circumstances are too different to be able to derive historically founded ›prescriptions‹ from the protest practices of that time. The article sheds light on other facets of the specific history of West Berlin (cf. *ZF* 2/2014); it also foregrounds debates about forms of housing, living and working whose significance extends beyond West Berlin. These debates have often drawn on existing, or generated new, sociological knowledge, and attempts to historicise social science theorems and stakeholders have been a focal point of contemporary history research for a number of years. In our ›Sources‹ section, *Kerstin Brückweh* discusses case studies in the sociology of work undertaken since 1968 by the *Soziologisches Forschungsinstitut Göttingen* (Göttingen Sociological Research Institute, SOFI). Anyone wanting to use the material there for secondary historical analyses (a worthwhile enterprise) needs an appreciation of the SOFI methods and institutional constellations.

5 ›Uns bleibt nur unser Tastsinn‹, in: *Welt*, 4 February 2017 (interview by Andrea Seibel with Dan Diner).

With her look at the Göttingen studies of the 1980s in particular, Brückweh makes a contribution both to the history of work in the 20th century and to the history of sociology.

As always, only a few aspects of the contents of this issue can be spotlighted here. One subject that has received particular attention in recent months and has a special connection to the profile of our journal (cf. also ZF 1/2004 and 3/2004) is the question of the state of the European Union and the European project – a question that is by no means new, but has been brought into sharper focus with the result of the British referendum on the EU in June 2016. *Kiran Klaus Patel* discusses comparable earlier cases in the light of Brexit, namely the ›Algexit‹ of the 1960s and the ›Greenxit‹ of the 1980s. A look at the examples of Algeria and Greenland, which may seem somewhat exotic but are important from a historical analytical point of view, makes it clear that the question of ›in‹ or ›out‹ is ultimately less critical than the specific level of cooperation of the various countries. For European historiography, this leads Patel to make the further-reaching plea for more extensive research on the ›correlation between integration and disintegration‹. Astute observers of everyday life in Europe are sometimes ahead of historical scholarship, as *Christoph Cornelißen* shows in the ›Rereadings‹ section with reference to Hans Magnus Enzensberger's incisive 1987 book *Ach Europa!*.

Another leading exponent of ›intervening thought‹ in the tradition of Hannah Arendt and Ralf Dahrendorf, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, died in January 2017 at the age of 91. *Thomas Etzemüller* has undertaken a critical rereading of Bauman's influential book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (first published in English in 1989). It is an expression of intellectual respect towards figures like Bauman not to place them on a pedestal as ›classics‹, but, by noting omissions and inconsistencies in their writings, to encourage today's readers to engage in further independent reflection.

Jan-Holger Kirsch for the editorial team
(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)