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The New Historical Consciousness and the Relativizing of National Socialism

The battle order of conservative thought in the Federal Republic has changed. For decades conservatives insisted on interpreting National Socialism as a singular rupture in the continuity of German history. Germany was seen as the first country occupied by National Socialism. This in turn reflected the tendency to attribute the catastrophe of the Third Reich and its criminal politics to Adolf Hitler and in the last analysis to speak of Hitlerism. This tendency was already setting in after 1945 and it solidified afterward. Supporters of the comparative theory of fascism were rudely met with the reply that to subsume National Socialism under fascism was inconsistent with National Socialism's reputed singularity; indeed, it was argued, this came close to "trivializing" the revolutionary character of the National-Socialist system of domination. This, however, did not keep conservative writers from equating National Socialism with Bolshevism as a central explanatory model, an equation that had been pounded into the Western thought since the Stalinist purges; nor did it prevent them from garnishing it with the theory of "total dictatorship."

For some time, however, things have been different. Suddenly, not only the "singularity" of National Socialism, but also its crimes, are being denied. The debate was ignited by the evaluation of the Holocaust. Ernst Nolte was among the first in this in that he emphasized that the liquidation of millions of European Jews did not represent something unique in world history; instead it needed to be "relativized" in the universal historical perspective. At that time, prominent historians like Peter Gay and Felix Gilbert disagreed strongly with Nolte. The German public was silent; the debate was nothing more than a marginal problem for them. Recently, Ernst Nolte has presented this thesis anew, first in an English-language anthology, then in a contribution to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, originally intended as a lecture at the Römerberg Talks. Unlike before, criticism of Nolte now elicited a defense by prominent historians, among them Joachim C. Fest and Klaus Hildebrand. Characteristically, the defensive polemic was directed against Jürgen Habermas, who in *Die Zeit* came

out against the efforts to present an image of German history completely "equilibrated" as Helmut Kohl would want it, and also against the efforts to help the German people to a new "national pride." (They find in this effort explicit support from the U.S. ambassador in Bonn, Richard Burt.) Hildebrand's partisan shots can be easily deflected; that Habermas is accused of a "loss of reality and Manichaeism" and that his honesty is denied is witness to the self-consciousness of a self-nominated historian elite, which has set itself the task of tracing the outlines of the seemingly badly needed image of history.

More serious is Joachim Fest's anticriticism in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Fest goes to great lengths in the defense of Ernst Nolte and does not hesitate to insinuate that Habermas attempted a "personal character assassination" and made a careless reading of the texts he criticized. One must be impressed by the sensitivity with which Fest reacted to the criticism that this was not at all about isolated articles by serious scholars but rather about the Pandora's box opened up by the politics of the *Wende* [the conservative shift in the government in 1982], which was accompanied by an attempt to drop historical taboos. These accusations in fact fall far short of the point to which West German political culture has progressed. This causes concern. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* has increasingly made itself the platform for advocates of revising the "image of history." This fact is overlooked by Fest's claim that Habermas is obstinately wrong-headed about this "most absurd kind of conspiracy theory," which, according to Fest, "is nothing other than an expression of uncomprehended contexts." Fest's claim also ignores the fact that efforts of this kind are in no way isolated. This is all the more surprising, since Michael Stürmer, the editorial writer of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, has repeatedly announced such a program, and announced it under the slogan that he who is master of history would also have the future for himself. It may be that Joachim C. Fest does not mean what is intended here: that the fixing of the image of history also has the function of consolidating political power. The chancellor has lent his full political support to this reconsolidation of the national image of history in the form of a German Historical Museum. He expounded on the project as a "national task of European rank." Along with him, leading representatives of the CDU/CSU have picked up on Stürmer's ideas exactly in this sense.

At any rate, Fest is correct (and Habermas never did assert this) that there is no conspiracy. The goodwill in German academic circles, on which efforts of this sort can count, is much too great. What is happening is much more like freeing lines of thought that until then had been repressed because they seemed politically questionable. These lines of thought include equating the Holocaust with resettlement; calling into question the purposefulness of the assassination attempt of July 20, 1944, in the face of

the threat by the Red Army; shifting German responsibility for the Second World War and Auschwitz to the British politics of appeasement and its pacifistic practitioners; the notion that Weimar had failed primarily because of the bonds of the peace treaty, the "edict" of Versailles; the notion that the nonexistent national consciousness of the Germans was also a consequence of postwar reeducation; and the notion that in the last analysis it was the Communists who (along with the National Socialists) had buried the republican system. Certainly this last, in its crude form, is not advocated by the scholarly community; implicitly, however, it is being accepted and paid no further attention.

This revisionism of the neoconservative stripe is not new as such. It has flourished in neoconservative niches of West German society for some time and is reflected in a widespread literature, whether it is financed by the Siemens Foundation, by Minister President Filbinger's Study Center Weikersheim, or by other tax-sheltered sources. It is not even mentioned in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that the renowned Ullstein Press has recently begun a series like this, although it seems spooky that this previously representative Jewish press today supports publications that cannot and will not deny their affinity to post-Fascist positions. It is all a matter of financial transactions in the publication business. There is the greatest excitement about the "leftist" literature found in the Goethe Institute in Kyoto; however, it bothers no one that this dubious genre of neoconservative and neonationalist provenance is completely indexed in the Goethe Institutes. What is taking place at present is no conspiracy. A better description would be that national sentiments, long dammed up and visible only in marginal literature, are coming together in an unholy alliance and seeking new shores.

It is evident that Joachim Fest, one of the outstanding historians of the Nazi period, is not in agreement with tendencies like this; likewise, the language of U.S. neoconservatives, which is ultimately resentful and characterized by internalized anti-Bolshevism, hardly fits in his vocabulary. But Fest should employ a somewhat more thoughtful approach than to accuse Habermas, the outsider, of intellectual dishonesty and of being a "mandarin of myths," especially since Fest has taken on the role of several "dominant" historians of pressing their opponents into the corner of obscurity. In Hildebrand's reply in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* this happens indirectly: Hildebrand alleges that Habermas divides the German world into "government historians" and Habermas. Implicitly, the Bonn historian claims with this accusation to represent the whole of the German discipline of history. It is consistent with this position, then, to accuse the nonhistorian Habermas of inadequate expertise. There is a reason for employing this technique: fundamental polemics, if they take place outside of the disciplinary journals (where else then?), are labelled "uncollegial," and one's opponent is described as a hopeless outsider, as a "Man-

ichaeon." Whoever believes that this is an isolated case should read the critique by "Dagens Nyher" of Karl Dieter Bracher's work published by the Bundeszentrale [Federal Center], *Nationalsozialistische Diktatur. Eine Bilanz: 1933-45* [National Socialist Dictatorship. A Balance: 1933-45].

In the context of the current debate one must warn against such "Stop! Thief!" phrases. Precisely for this reason, it is regrettable that Joachim C. Fest does not separate his accusation of inadequate expertise from the methodically difficult question of the singularity of the Nazi crimes. That historians like Hildebrand and Stürmer have taken Nolte's position has from the outset deflected the question from the path of straight-and-narrow historical research, because for Hildebrand and Stürmer the question is about direct political conclusions, that is, to quote the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* writer Franz Oppenheimer, it is about dismantling the notorious "German obsession with guilt." The concept of "singularity," raised by Karl Dietrich Bracher in connection with National Socialism, is for the historian first of all a triviality, since historical events hardly demonstrate identical structures and frameworks of causation. "Incomparability" in this sense does not exist methodologically; each comparison has to legitimate itself by its epistemological fruitfulness, while there is no criterion *a limine* for holding it to be illegitimate. It is therefore equally justified to interpret National Socialism as a specific form of fascism as it is to compare it with Communist regimes. The question is rather whether correct or misleading conclusions are drawn from the comparison.

In connection with the politics of "genocide" such a procedure, for understandable reasons, is especially controversial. From the Zionist position that sees anti-Semitism as the sole deciding factor for the implementation of the Holocaust, the murder of Soviet prisoners of war and Gypsies does not seem to be parallel. With justification it can be pointed out that the murder of the Jews corresponded to the unreal projection of a "world enemy" that, however much it played a role in the original anti-Semitism and the persecution of the Jews before 1938, is to be assessed as of completely subordinate importance in contrast to the motives of the politics of interest. In accord with the perspective that mass murder for racial or ethnic reasons was by no means, either then or now, limited to the Holocaust, the policy of genocide must be seen as the most extreme form in history of the cynical and systematic destruction of undesirable peoples and minorities. For this reason, Hannah Arendt, after the experience of the Eichmann trial, pled for the creation of a form of punishment for genocide that would be valid in international law.

From this consideration it becomes important to uncover the mechanisms that, motivated by a thorough but not complete ideological indoctrination, made it possible to set into political reality the murderous dreams of the racist anti-Semites. Here, too, the notion of comparability plays an important role, although in a different sense than was applied to

the indictment of the Eichmann trial. That indictment saw in the National-Socialist genocide the end-stage of the anti-Jewish genocide striven for by Christians. Hannah Arendt protests passionately against this concept, because in principle this makes eternal the role of anti-Semitism as a historical factor.

Yet there is a relative singularity of the Holocaust. Fest addresses this indirectly when he recognizes the "arrogance" of the "old master race attitude" in the argument that an old "cultured people" are to be held more strictly accountable for crimes of this order of magnitude than would be the case for "more primitive people." Certainly there is horror over the fact that the nation of "German idealism" had sunk down to a level of contempt for and destruction of humanity that has not been exceeded. The journal of Jochen Klepper, who chose suicide in the face of the unavoidable deportation of his married Jewish daughter, demonstrates this clearly. Previously achieved stages of political and moral culture are not relevant in evaluating of the murder of the Jews, which was made possible by terrorist dictatorship and propagandistic indoctrination. This argument should surely not be foreign to those who speak of the regeneration of German identity arising out of the awareness of a "thousand years of healthy history before National Socialism." To accept with resignation the acts of screaming injustice and to psychologically repress their social prerequisites by calling attention to similar events elsewhere and putting the blame on the Bolshevist world threat recalls the thought patterns that made it possible to implement genocide.

The terrifying thing about the debate continued by Fest, a historian who tortures himself precisely with the question of the reaction of the populace (and not just the German populace) to the Holocaust, is that Hitler's "will to annihilate" suffices as an adequate end cause. The real question is why the many who actively took part in the exclusion of Jews from German everyday life, which stands at the beginning of the Holocaust, did not try to refuse to participate in the technical details of the deportation, the exploitation of Jewish property, and the melting of the gold of Jews' teeth. Why did they not refuse membership in the *Einsatzgruppen*? This is certainly not a problem of the German mentality alone, although a certain form of obedience to authority and a misdirected love of order presented additional factors without which the dimension of moral indifference and human apathy cannot be explained.

If, however, the connection between Bolshevism and National Socialism is going to be the topic of discussion, a connection that, as mentioned, was essentially a social-psychological one, then it has to first be established that the characteristic response was the overreaction in Germany of the political elites, not the October Revolution or the Nazi seizure of the apparatus of power, and that the political culture of Weimar was characterized by unquestioned acceptance of violent force in political debates; and this

violence came, to recall Josef Wirth, predominantly from the Right. The hybrid anti-Bolshevism on whose wave Hitler came to power contributed in great measure to shutting off even the quasi-moral inhibitions of those who assisted the SS hangmen. And this pertains equally to the role of the *Wehrmacht*.

In light of these questions, which thinking people encountered repeatedly, it seems superficial and insincere to narrow the discussion to the question brought up by Ernst Nolte about the extent of the similarities between the National-Socialist mass murder and the Gulag Archipelago. Translated into contemporary consciousness, this would amount to equating Katyn and Auschwitz, but with a similarly reversed point of view from those in the opposition who bravely wrote this equation on the wall. If one puts any stock in the opposition in the Third Reich, then one should not forget its reaction to Goebbel's Katyn propaganda: The opposition refused to accept, considering the murder of the Jews, the regime's justification for playing up the Bolshevik murders as having transparent purposes. Despite all psychological repression and all the will not to perceive, there was in the broad mass of the populace, though certainly not in the relatively small number of fanatical Nazis, a consciousness of guilt about having allowed deportations and violence and about having condoned them for the most part.

The psychological and institutional mechanisms that explain the lack of reaction in the populace must be the object of careful research. The research must be carried out under the criterion of doing all one can to hinder the recurrence of something comparable, even though the scale of the systematic extermination of the European Jews stands as singular, in particular that it was almost completely and perfectly accomplished. Research is in agreement that the actual explanation consists of the tension between the unsuccessful attempts to keep the genocide secret, though the existence of the death camps was perhaps known, and the lack of protest not so much by the general public as by the people occupying the relevant positions. All comparisons with Stalinism do not help in this connection any further, since the conditions were different. In the Russian struggle for power, after all, explainable inimical feelings also played a part, while the abstract "anti-Semitism without Jews" in the Third Reich represents an anomaly.

There is no talk about all this in Fest's defense of Ernst Nolte's arguments. To some extent he does take up arguments propagated by Martin Broszat and me when he concedes that Hitler himself became a prisoner to a complex context of actions that he himself had launched. But he builds into his argumentation a proposal that a "causal nexus" was probable between the Bolshevik crimes and the Holocaust. The latter is well known to be Nolte's position; he interprets Hitler's radical anti-Semitism as a misguided counterreaction to the "Asiatic deed" of Bolshevism. Causality in this sense, however, still cannot be claimed; at most it would allow

indicating the historically necessary psychological constraints on action. The stipulation of a causal connection between the Gulag Archipelago and Auschwitz is, however, not simply methodologically untenable but also absurd in its premises and conclusions. Now Hitler's anti-Bolshevism preceded, as is well known, the Stalinist measures against the kulaks; it is difficult to see how this anti-Bolshevism could have derived from the violence of the Russian civil war. Nevertheless, if one accepts Nolte's hypothesis, one arrives at the following determination: the hybrid anti-Bolshevism, whose "victim" Hitler appears to be in such a view, forced Hitler subjectively to use the same methods (that is, the methods of which he accused the Jews); he succumbed thus to the self-deception of taking Bolshevism as a Jewish invention. Subjectively, it could thus be reasoned that Hitler's anti-Semitism was comprehensible, even if for other reasons his methods were not justified. It is best not to continue working with such constructs.

The anti-Bolshevism of the German Right, but also of the German bourgeoisie, in 1918 was already making use of the equation of Bolshevism and Jewry. The Pan-German Union [*alldeutscher Verband*] in the First World War had already decided to use anti-Semitism for the purpose of anti-socialist mobilization of the masses. These facts suffice to explain why Hitler, in the immediate postwar years in a Munich shaken by civil war, took up anti-Semitism with its typical anti-Bolshevist trappings. In this respect he was anything other than a special case. In contrast to these irrefutable conditioning factors, Nolte's derivation based on personalities and the history of ideas seems artificial, even for the explanation of Hitler's anti-Semitism. It is beyond dispute that fascism and thus both National Socialism and the folkish movement were able to reach broader acceptance only as a reaction to the October Revolution, as the beneficiaries of the hybrid anti-communist resentments unleashed by the Fascist movement. Acceptance of this anti-Semitism also extended well into the SPD. Other factors, however, were ultimately necessary to make the NSDAP into a mass movement.

If one emphasizes the indisputably important connection in isolation, one should not then force a connection with Hitler's *weltanschauung*, which was in no ways original itself, in order to derive from it the existence of Auschwitz. The battle line between the political Right in Germany and the Bolsheviks had achieved its aggressive contour before Stalinism employed political methods that led to death of millions of people. Thoughts about the extermination of the Jews had long been current, and not only for Hitler and his satraps. Many of these found their way to the NSDAP from the *Deutschvölkisch Schutz- und Trutzbund* [German Racial Union for Protection and Defiance], which itself had been called into life by the Pan-German Union. Hitler's step from verbal anti-Semitism to practical implementation would then have happened with knowledge of and in

reaction to the atrocities of the Stalinists. And thus one would have to overturn Nolte's construct, for which he cannot bring biographical evidence to bear. As a Hitler biographer, Fest distances himself from this kind of one-sidedness by making reference to "the Austrian-German Hitler's earlier fears and phantasies of being overwhelmed." It is not completely consistent that he admits that the reports of the terrorist methods of the Bolsheviks had given Hitler's "extermination complexes" a "real background."

Basically, Nolte's proposal in its one-sidedness is not very helpful for explaining or evaluating what happened. The anti-Bolshevism garnished with anti-Semitism had the effect, in particular for the dominant elites, and certainly not just for the National Socialists, that Hitler's program of racial annihilation met with no serious resistance. The leadership of the *Wehrmacht* rather willingly made themselves into accomplices in the policy of extermination. It did this by generating the "criminal orders" and implementing them. By no means did they merely passively support the implementation of their concept, although there was a certain reluctance for reasons of military discipline and a few isolated protests. To construct a "causal nexus" over all this amounts in fact to steering away from the decisive responsibility of the military leadership and the bureaucratic elites.

Hitler's fanatical battle against the alleged "conspiracy of the world Jewry" was furthermore an ideological construct that in no way needed support from concrete historical events such as the Stalinist crimes. The process, described by no one better than J. Fest, that caused Hitler to drop all inhibitions in pursuing his real and imagined enemies cannot be explained by his perception of Lenin's "Asiatic methods," despite the fact that Hitler's ideology was rooted more in the folkish anti-Semitic thinking of the prewar period than most biographers assume. The complex process that led from the deprivation of social rights, through forced migration and ghettoization to, finally in 1941, systematic liquidation can simply not be explained ideologically, as Fest admits. It is connected with the self-unleashed dynamic that was necessarily initiated by the total exclusion of the Jews from the everyday life of their fellow citizens, together with Himmler's resettlement policy.

It is not appropriate here to elaborate in detail the fundamental difference between Communist systems and the Nazi regime, nor between Bolshevik and Fascist parties. The specific form of politics that characterizes fascism, that is, the reduction of politics to the mobilization of power and the application of violent force, is very difficult to tar with the same brush as the political concept of communism, despite all the external affinities. For example, the similarity of the Stalin cult with the Hitler cult is misleading. The inner boundlessness that allowed no compromises was especially characteristic of National Socialism (and therefore a necessary condition for the annihilation of the Jews). This form of inner boundlessness is not typical for Communist systems of domination, as tyrannical

as they were at times. This explains also why the Third Reich reverted with internal logic to self-destruction while the Communist regimes as a rule observed the relation between available resources and political ambitions. The analogy between Bolshevism and National Socialism is much better suited for tempting one to mistake its merely external similarities for constitutive ones.

Fest's retort, which occasionally becomes polemical, arouses the impression that to let the crimes of National Socialism stand as an eternal moral warning would amount to justifying the crimes of Stalinism. Now the latter have never been disputed; it begs the question, nevertheless, whether it is appropriate to judge the communism of today on the moral standard of the events of the 1920s and 1930s. However, it is dangerous to connect this reflection with Nolte's construct that Hitler borrowed the idea of the Holocaust from Bolshevik writings and at the same time acted out of a psychopathological compulsion, without at least posing these questions: Which social-psychological, institutional, and political-interest factors made it possible for Hitler to make himself the enforcer of the resentments, not merely of the "masses" but also of the ruling elites? What made it possible for the elites to practically adore him in this role?

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published Nolte's planned contribution to the Römerberg Talks with polemical intent. In so doing it has made itself the tool of those with an interest in linking the derivation of the Holocaust from the instinctive fear of the "Asiatic hordes" to a debate that took on its political character primarily because of Michael Stürmer's resonances. On first glance the derivation seems esoteric; the reference to Asia, however, reflects a syndrome still laden with sentiment in Germany, clearly a product of racism. It is significant that Fest refers to the concept of "*conditio humana*," so happily overused by Stürmer, in order to classify as unrealistic "optimists" those who draw out of the National-Socialist experience the obligation to alter the societal foundations that contributed to making the Holocaust possible. Realistic thinkers are satisfied with the insight "that the genocide which he (Hitler) set in motion was not the first and will not be the last" as if, after the experience of incomprehensible horror, a transition could be made to the international world-historical agenda.

In this it is not, as Fest suggests, so much a matter of the "perfectibility" of human beings and their educability. It is a matter of preserving institutions that can stop a process like that of the Third Reich in its beginnings. It is a matter of sharpening the sensibility for individual responsibility in a political and moral sense so that constellations in which terroristic force extinguishes possible resistance do not even arise. In Germany, particularly, it involves fighting the tendency of accommodation to authority as a norm of social behavior. "Holocaust" is a constant warning flag for that because it signifies the renunciation of the civic virtues in all decisive

moments. Precisely this experience teaches one to tread cautiously with the syndrome of anti-Bolshevism. This experience explains the sensitivity encountered by Nolte's derivation of Auschwitz from the Gulag Archipelago, not only in the survivors of the victims but also in those who see their life's mission in destroying the seeds of similar developments.

Emotionally, one finds oneself on the side of those whom Fest wants to exclude. Hildebrand's polemic clearly suggests that he barely considered the consequences of making Nolte's constructs the centerpiece of a modern German conservatism that is very anxious to relativize the National-Socialist experience and to find the way back to a putative historically "normal situation." For everyone who assesses the epoch of the Third Reich in its political and moral consequences, this "normal situation" cannot be achieved without violating the facts. The spreading spirit of intolerance is reflected in the accusations that, by arguing sharply in this matter, Habermas had committed personal slander. Now suddenly, the accusation of "revisionism" is derogatory; when the accusation was coined against the structuralist interpreters of National Socialism, with conscious political intent and in analogy to David Hoggan's position, there were no such sensibilities evident in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In fact, for the self-nominated ideologues of the *Wende* like Michael Stürmer and Klaus Hildebrand, this is all about shutting out competitors. They sense that they have the support of the majority of their colleagues, who tend to conservative positions, who in other daily political matters are indifferent, and who find arguments of this kind disruptive.

With regard to the historical treatment of National Socialism, Joachim C. Fest speaks, not without grounds, of rituals of a "fake obsequiousness." The idea about the knowledge that is undesirable for reasons of "national pedagogy" clearly does not stem from the camp of those who sympathize with Habermas. Habermas had offered a fundamental warning against a historical neorevisionism that presses for national good conduct. The Hitlerist fixation of the Nazi image, to which Fest contributed less as an author than as an editor, belongs likewise to the conformism that he denounced and that still today earns me the popular criticism of "trivializing" National Socialism. To these rituals belongs, however, the extensive psychological repression of the fatal coresponsibility of German society: it was possible in the span of a year and a half to let the Holocaust become a reality.

To write about this dimension of the Holocaust and to let the impression arise that the course of events was decided by Hitler's image of Bolshevism and that the rest was terroristically realized compulsion reflects a particular conceptualization in which one period of psychological repression is followed by another, broader one. The first repression of the National-Socialist experience, described by Hermann Lübke, employed the slogans of the singularity of what Hitler brought about. Beginning

in the late 1960s, the second, broader period of repression has been letting the reality of the persecution of Jews disappear in universalist consideration about "totalitarianism, genocide, and mass displacements as the signature of the twentieth century" (Hildebrand). This second displacement follows on the attempts at genuinely clarifying this most difficult chapter of German, certainly also of European, history. It covers the "shame" about what happened by suggesting that every people had its Hitler and then returned to normalcy. Although the anti-Bolshevism and anti-Semitism always appeared as Dioscuri, this form of "coming to grips with the past" [*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*] sees its justification in having sought out the Soviet Union as the root of all evil. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the National-Socialist catastrophe, then it is this, to free oneself from all "collective" hostile images.

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Where the Roads Part: History Is Not a Suitable Substitute for a Religion of Nationalism

In view of the considerate and collegial style that historians maintain not only for reasons of opportunism, it was obvious that the reckless aggression of Habermas's July 11 polemic should not only be welcomed as a breath of fresh air that might purify the atmosphere but should also be rejected as an unwelcome denunciation by an outsider. If one of the weakest points of the attack by the Frankfurt philosopher was that he lumped together politically agile professors such as Michael Stürmer and Klaus Hildebrand with the phlegmatic Andreas Hillgruber and that grand eccentric of contemporary history, Ernst Nolte, then this "most absurd kind of conspiracy theory" (Joachim Fest) seems to have been at least partially validated. Recently an ideologically conformist group of historians, inconspicuously sponsored by the Schleyer Foundation, has been meeting in a symposium ("To Whom Does German History Belong?") under the leadership of Klaus Hildebrand, with Stürmer and Hillgruber as additional speakers.

The selection of active participants and the timing of the symposium, one week before the beginning of the Historical Convention in Trier, suggests the programmatic intention with which the voices of only one partisan group are holding court about the troublemaker Habermas.

It is no less important to keep in mind that the controversy set in motion by Habermas must be seen in the context of an older discussion about several key questions: In what way is the fashionable lament about the loss of history and the desire for a new sense of identity that might be posited by historians related to the critical and Enlightenment-oriented trend, which after 1945 took shape in the discipline of history in the Federal Republic? After all, this discipline had been the product of sad experiences of history being used as political theater. When we consider the Nazi period, what new relationship between historicization and political sensitization is produced for the historian forty years after Hitler? And aren't we running the danger that the ever-overworked national question and the desire not to abdicate to the GDR responsibility for the cultivation of our national history might gradually make us blind to the postulate of West