



Sabine Gillmann, Hans Mommsen, eds. *Politische Schriften und Briefe Carl Friedrich Goerdelers*. Munich: K.G. Saur, 2003. 1,295 pp. EUR 48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-598-11631-5.



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Goerdeler's Writings

Carl Friedrich Goerdeler was among the leading politicians in the later years of the Weimar Republic. In 1930 he was elected mayor of Leipzig. He was a member of the DNVP but disapproved of its line of uncompromising obstruction and left the party in 1931. He supported Chancellor Heinrich Brüning's system based on presidential authority, served as Reich Prices Commissioner in Brüning's administration in 1931-32 and his name was among those mentioned as possible successors to Brüning (Goerdeler refused to join Franz von Papen's cabinet). In 1934-35 he served once more as Reich Prices Commissioner, trusting his own powers of reasoning and persuasion, if not the motives of those who appointed him, to influence government policy. He acted from fundamental ethical convictions, which made him appear optimistic, even naive, among cynical politicians. He was guided by these convictions in his initially open opposition to many of Hitler's policies and later in his leading role in the underground conspiracy to bring down the dictatorship. He disagreed with conspirators who believed they must kill the dictator, but he was intensely active in the political preparations for a post-Hitler government and in efforts to win British support for the aims

of the German Resistance. On September 8, 1944, the "People's Court" sentenced Goerdeler to death for treason. Goerdeler was hanged on February 2, 1945.

Gillmann's and Mommsen's compilation of writings by Goerdeler includes in its title neither an article nor the word "sämtliche." Indeed, this collection of 1,295 pages is far from complete. The table of contents lists 104 documents in groups ranging from 2 to 14 each. The documents are organized in chronologic sequence under chapter themes: municipal activities; national politics; efforts to influence policy internally and from abroad; breaking with the National Socialist regime (including "attempts to prevent war" and "critique of the National Socialist regime"); coup d'état preparations and plans for constitutional renewal; writings in prison (including autobiographical materials). The documents reproduced in the two volumes do not include the lengthy "Wirtschaftsfibel," but the major programmatic drafts for governing Germany after the removal of the National Socialist regime are there. Although some of them—"Das Ziel" and "Der Weg"—have been published previously in accessible editions, they have been reproduced here in

sider as nationals of a Jewish state yet to be founded those Jews who had not lived within these same borders in 1871, or whose ancestors had not lived there (pp. lx-lxi).

Goerdeler lived in the context of his time. Many post-Auschwitz years had to pass for societies to adjust their thinking and their use of language to the realities of the Holocaust. This process was so thorough in Germany that any expression of reservations or resentment toward another culture became taboo; the doctrines of multiculturalism and of integration have co-existed uneasily. Persons who did not embrace them, and those who had not embraced them before 1945, were denounced as racists, or more specifically as antisemites. But the recent terrorist attacks in New York and London and the riots of October and November 2005 in France have raised doubts about both integration and multiculturalism. They have confronted societies with the contradictions that arise when the ideals of liberty and equality have not been accepted by large groups within a national community. It is evident that integration may mean assimilation to nations, and to cultural groups living in their midst integration may mean that they were entitled to the rights and privileges of citizens while remaining free to live according to their own cultural traditions and preferences.

Goerdeler sought a solution for what was evidently a problem in his time. He searched for a means to secure the status of all Jews. And he searched for a means to persuade the murderers to accept an alternative to murder. What proposal could he have made with any hope of success at that time that would not later have led Mommsen to charge him with “dissimilationist antisemitism”?

Mommsen remarks that Goerdeler was not a political theoretician (p. 1). No doubt Goerdeler’s theoretical suggestions lacked a sense of realism—which is true of his optimistic expectations for the restoration of Poland and Germany in disregard of Allied war aims and is reflected in his unlimited faith in the power of rational argumentation and in his proposals regarding the “Jewish Question.” But all his actions demonstrate his humanity. On April 1, 1933, he appeared in a Jewish quarter of Leipzig together with his deputy mayor, in full formal dress; he confronted the SA troopers who harassed and attacked Jews and businesses belonging to Jews and used his municipal police to free Jews who had been taken prisoners by SA troopers. He protected those Jewish physicians allowed by law to practice against discrimination by officials in his own municipal administration. In 1936 he forbade the removal of the statue of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy from its place in front of

the Leipzig Gewandhaus concert hall, and when it was removed in his absence, he resigned in protest. His new Nazi deputy mayor Rudolf Haake denounced him to the Saxon Gauleiter Martin Mutschmann for not sharing the Party’s view on the Jews; for having resisted from 1933 onward every single re-naming of a street that bore the name of a Jew; and for having obstructed every effort to remove the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy statue. Haake wrote that the matter of the statue was “only the outward occasion of the conflict,” and that “the real cause lay in Dr. Goerdeler’s world-view which was the opposite of National Socialism”; and that “Dr. Goerdeler’s attitude in the Jewish Question had been revealed particularly clearly in the matter of the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy statue.”[1]

On several occasions in 1938 and early 1939, A. P. Young, a British engineer and industrialist, contacted Goerdeler on behalf of the British government’s Chief Diplomatic Advisor, Sir Robert Vansittart, and later on behalf of Sir Frank Ashton-Gwatkin (a member of Lord Runciman’s mission of 1938 to mediate in the Sudeten Crisis and a counselor in the Foreign Office). Goerdeler urged the British government to refuse to discuss issues of interest with the German government; he demanded that the democracies protest against the barbaric deportation of 10,000 Polish Jews into no-man’s-land between Germany and Poland; he urged the British government to break off diplomatic relations with Germany as soon as the planned persecution of the churches or the new persecution of the Jews began; he declared that Hitler had personally ordered the pogrom of November 1938 and that Hitler was determined to conquer the world and to destroy the Jews, Christianity and capitalism. Goerdeler listed three milestones of great historical importance that Hitler had already passed, and named as the first the November 1938 pogrom.[2] Under the laws then in place in Germany, Goerdeler had put a noose around his neck. Had his interventions been discovered, he would have faced a trial for treason and certain execution.

Mommsen writes about Goerdeler’s views in 1937 that he “largely” exempted Hitler from his criticisms (p. xlvi), but he does not record that quite the opposite was the case in 1938, nor does he mention Goerdeler’s interventions on behalf of the Jews from 1933-1938 except for a passing reference to the April 1, 1933, boycott. It is a misleading introduction to Goerdeler, much along Mommsen’s general line regarding the Resistance’s position upon the persecution of the Jews.[3]

Notes

[1]. Acta das Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy-Denkmal

betr., Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Cap. 26A Nr. 39; Goerdeler personnel file, Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Kap. 10 G Nr. 685 Bd. 1 and 2.

[2]. A. P. Young, *The "X" Documents*, ed. Sidney Aster (London: Andr   Deutsch, 1974), pp. 59, 139, 161-162, 177.

[3]. See Hans Mommsen, "Die moralische Wiederherstellung der Nation. Der Widerstand gegen Hitler war von einer antisemitischen Grundhaltung getragen," *S  ddeutsche Zeitung* (July 21, 1999), p. 15; idem, "Der Widerstand gegen Hitler und die nationalsozialistische

Judenverfolgung," in idem, *Alternative zu Hitler. Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Widerstandes* (Munich: Beck, 2000), pp. 384ff. See also Peter Hoffmann, "The German Resistance and the Holocaust," in *Confront! Resistance in Nazi Germany*, ed. John J. Michalczyk (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 105-126; Peter Hoffmann, "The German Resistance to Hitler and the Jews: The Case of Carl Goerdeler," in *The Genocidal Mind: Selected Papers from the 32nd Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches*, ed. Dennis B. Klein, Richard Libowitz, Marcia Sachs Littell and Sharon Steeley (St. Paul, Minn: Paragon House, 2005), pp. 277-290.

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