

WOLFGANG C. GOEDE



THE TWENTIES — EXCITING TIMES IN GERMANY

Although the original founders of EUSJA were feeling they were breaking new ground in creating such a large science journalists' group, the Germans had a group in existence almost 50 years earlier. It was during the "roaring twenties" that TELI was created in Berlin in 1929. With the political and economic problems it has faced it is a commendable feat that TELI has managed to both survive and thrive. As a microcosm of the fluctuating state of the world, Germany is an ideal candidate for examination.

Wolfgang Goede, a journalist and political and communications scientist, takes an in depth look at TELI's history. His intelligent and well-researched comments focus on:

A MIRROR OF THE TURMOIL IN THE 20TH CENTURY

During the past hundred years Europe has witnessed tremendous changes. Technological boosts occurred throughout the century. Radical political movements like fascism and communism swept the continent, setting the stage for World War II which led to its separation. Cold War, capitalism and socialism and various market systems competed with each other, eventually bringing about globalization and its challenges. A major role in all these developments can be attributed to science and technology, so the question arises: how does scientific and technical journalism reflect the historical tides, developments and upheavals – how did the community of writers and editors cope with them and possibly help to create them? Germany being in the centre of Europe and

an essential contributor to the breakthroughs of the past century owes much of its wealth to science and technology, thus the history of the “Technical Literary Society” (TELI) during roughly the past 80 years gives important clues and can provide guidelines as well as ethical standards for the time to come.

TELI was founded on January 11, 1929, in Berlin. The German organisation of technical writers, which was later changed to also include scientific writers, is the oldest of its kind in the world. The capital of Germany at that time was a highly concentrated centre of political and economic power as well as culture. All the important companies and banking institutions had their headquarters there. New industries like electrical engineering were booming. The wireless media, radio and later television, expanded swiftly and promised new exciting ways of communication. More than 130 newspapers competed with each other in Berlin, searching for news everywhere and continually needed ever faster printing machines. In the beginning of 1929 journalists, writers, and editors of the key media met with representatives of the press offices of the major industrial enterprises to found TELI. In those golden years, the public relation departments had a very distinguished name and were called Literary Departments, leading to the naming of TELI as a literary association. One of the principal facilitators of the TELI was the author of best-selling science fiction novels **Hans Dominik**, the “German

Jules Verne” as he was respectfully called. According to him, the newly founded organization was to ensure “perfect and correct reports on technical matters in the daily newspapers”.

UNDER HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1871 a long time dream came true: Germany, until then a patchwork of countless little princedoms, became a nation, the empire was founded and finally the country could compete with more advanced nations like England and France. During these founding years or Wilhelminian period (“Gründerzeit”) the economy, industry, and natural sciences received a tremendous boost. Researchers and inventors produced a record of breakthrough discoveries, railroads were built all over the nation, Siemens was founded and the first cars emerged on the streets. This technical revolution came about so rapidly and changed so thoroughly

Founding document: “TELI wants to promote technical reports in daily newspapers as well as popular magazines and abolish the deficiencies which exist in technical publications.” The pictures underneath show the founders, among them (top left) Siegfried Hartmann, TELI's first president, and Hans Dominik, the “German Jules Verne”.



TECHNISCH LITERARISCHE GESELLSCHAFT

Gründungsanzeige

Berlin, Januar 1929
ANSCHRIFT: REDAKTEUR HURT JOEL
BERLIN SW 68, HOCHSTR. 11

Am 11. Januar dieses Jahres ist in Berlin die Gründung einer Technisch Literarischen Gesellschaft vollzogen worden zum Zweck der planmäßigen Förderung der technischen Berichterstattung in Tageszeitungen und populären Zeitschriften und zur Bekämpfung der in diesem Zweige des technischen Schrifttums bestehenden Unzuträglichkeiten. Wir geben uns der Hoffnung hin, für unsere Bestrebungen auch Ihr Verständnis und gegebenenfalls Ihre Unterstützung zu finden, zumal es sich um eine Aufgabe handelt, an der letzten Endes jeder in der Technik Tätige interessiert sein muß. Ein Verzeichnis der Gründer und des von ihnen gewählten Vorstandes ist auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite abgedruckt.

Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung

Technisch Literarische Gesellschaft

H. Hartmann

Lempelius
Dr. Möbus - Vorstand
Dr. - Ing. W. Mayewitz
F. Weppe *F. Weir*
H. Meißner *Brand*



H. Dominik

Fräulein Schulz

K. Skowronnek

J. Schmauser

G. Sinner

E. Lasswitz

S. Hartmann

Ihr Text

K. Borsdorff

H. Gesell - H. Kluth

H. Grossmann

J. Böhmer

F. Wiener

Gesellschaftsabend
der
Technisch-Literarischen-Gesellschaft

zu Berlin im Harnack-Haus
am 11. Dezember 1930

Speisenfolge:

Fleischbrühe

Königin-Pastetchen

Spießerkule mit Salat

Haselnusscrème

K. Ammon

F. Olk

H.P. Vollschwitz

F. Heintzenberg

H. Baumann

W. Möbus

R. Jonas

K. Lempelius

M. Rogatzky

H. Glebsattel

daily life that it alienated and uprooted many people. This resulted in the promoters of all this change – the engineers – were perceived as being outright dangerous. The German Museum in Munich, for example, was founded to smooth this commotion or, even, to turn it around and get people excited about the new breathtaking techniques. In fact, for a culture which had been famous for producing outstanding poets and thinkers like Goethe, Schiller and Kant this new spirit was an affront, especially for the traditional elites. However, politically this was a highly desirable development, so no wonder the emperor himself backed it. He helped to found URANIA, the first science centre in the world, which put science on the stage as a musical, a play, or some other kind of entertainment. Towards the end of the century, these performances became so popular and successful that URANIA received invitations to visit the United States where the public and the press essentially rolled out a red carpet for the science artists.

By the turn of century modern technology had been so enthusiastically accepted that the first newspapers added special sections or supplements to their editions in which they reported on new machines and developments. The writers were not regular journalists however, but rather engineers and members of the new technical professions who were very much enthused about what they were doing. Despite the fact that technology had become the basis of economic growth

as well as political and military power, technicians remained a small minority without much influence.

WHO CALLS THE SHOTS?

On the decision making levels, in the military as well as ministries, non-experts ruled and called the shots. So engineers and technicians started to organize themselves after the end of the First World War One in order to gain more political clout and have their own people elected into parliament. One of the organizers of this movement was **Siegfried Hartmann** who became in 1919 the first technical editor in Germany. He worked for the “Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung” which ambitiously tried to reach the editorial standards the “London Times”. Ten years later this pioneer was elected TELI’s first president. At that time journalists were not very keen to distinguish between news and comments, so Hartmann’s self-imposed mission sounded surprisingly modern and farsighted: he wanted to educate the masses by principally presenting and explaining facts. Therefore, he saw to it that the constitution of the organisation explicitly dedicated itself to raising the quality of technical reports. Moreover, he was an early advocate to strictly separate the editorial from the advertisement section in the print media.

By the early thirties a network of dedicated technical journalists had started to operate in the bustling

metropolis of Berlin. From their fellow colleagues in the press offices of the German industry, concentrated in the capital, they received exclusive information. The philosopher and historian **Hans Christian Förster**, who recorded the TELI history for its 70th anniversary in 1999, characterized the organization with the following words: “a gentlemen’s club with an elitist attitude, or at least a relatively closed circle based on paternalistic structures which presented itself to the public as a special society with special relations”. That’s one side of the coin, on the other side the chronicler gives the first generation of technical writers credit for “free and truthful reporting, focussed on clarifications”.

NAZI PERIOD

Then in 1933, Hitler and his Nazi party came to power. Within a few months he consolidated his position by bringing all important institutions and decision makers into line (“Gleichschaltung”) and thus implementing his ideology. Under its second president Heinrich Kluth (1932 – 1962) the TELI had to disband the memberships of its Jewish members and accept two loyal members of the Nazi party on its board which changed its name to “Führerrat” (Leader’s Council). How much of this decision was imposed or whether it was taken voluntarily has not been documented yet, however, there is a high probability



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that Kluth did this on his own, because he did not want to jeopardize the work of TELI. Apparently, this strategy worked out and Förster reports that the Nazis did not interfere very much. World War II began and the TELI could continue its operations until 1944. “Technical journalists were recruited as soldiers or they were part of the war propaganda machine and had to keep up the hope for an ultimate victory (“Endsieg”)”, reports Förster, “writing about new airplanes from

Dornier, Heinkel, Junkers, Messerschmitt and other “Wunderwaffen”.

These are some sparse facts about the holocaust years – what’s the analysis? The fact is that there is still very little known as far as TELI’s history goes. However, most of the material stemming from that time has not been reviewed and needs to be looked into. Therefore, Förster has proposed to dig into the archives and thoroughly document the Nazi period, which he has received a green light for by the TELI board. At this point in time he can’t do much more than ask questions and guess: “How come that excellent media experts who wanted to defend the freedom of journalism became instruments of the armament race; the persecution of opponents of the regime and the elimination of so called inferior fellow citizens? By accepting this as inevitable destiny they became involuntary accomplices”, Förster concludes. Why didn’t or couldn’t they resist? Förster attributes it to the skilful Nazi propaganda which stated that technique and culture were closely interwoven and resting in the great tradition of humanism, thus appealing to engineers, technicians, and “techno-afficionados” of all sorts to help bolster German culture. Simultaneously, Goebbel’s propagandists understood how to administer a powerful anaesthesia and distract the media people from the obvious dark sides of the regime. In light of all this Förster dismisses a long standing thesis of exculpation as legend, that TELI members just were

concerned with technique and didn’t pay tribute to politics – which means: neither during the Nazi regime nor in any other political system of the past, the present or the future can we separate technology and science from the overall sociological and political context and makeup, they are both intertwined.

While Förster’s further investigations are pending we might want to take a look at the technological and scientific community during the Nazi period to firm up our preliminary assessment. Driven by high ambitions, Wernher von Braun, the pioneer of rocket science and later head of the Apollo programme, “made a pact” with the brown regime, estimates sociologist Johannes Weyer. “He was an opportunist with so much enthusiasm for his field of research that he convinced Hitler to allot funds to develop the V2.” When in 1944 the rocket was used against London, the member of the Nazi party and SS commented: “But I wanted to fly to the moon.” Thousands of prisoners worked in underground installations to enhance the flying “Wunderwaffe”. The ones who weren’t healthy enough were deported to the concentration camps – 3000 died during the first three months of 1944.

NAZI PARTY NUMBERS BOOSTED BY SCIENTISTS

In 2005 the Max Planck Gesellschaft (MPG), a major German research organization, published the results

of an investigation of historians who had looked into the question of how scientists had cooperated with the Third Reich. The findings are disastrous and match with the ones other commissions had come up with when they had dug through the archives of industrial enterprises and banks: nobody had been forced, everybody went along voluntarily. More than 50 percent of the biologists employed by the imperial research institutions (Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute) joined the Nazi party. The leading protagonist for eugenics was Konrad Lorenz who in 1973 was honoured with the Nobel prize in ethology. One of the principal reasons that scientists played along to the regime's tune, was that if they could make it believe that their projects contributed to the racial policy or, later, could help to win the war (Braun) they were given access to all kinds of resources and funds. Actually, Nazi Germany was a paradise for many scientists and they certainly knew how to use the ideology. Moreover, the exodus of the Jewish scientists opened many vacancies which many of their Aryan colleagues were anxious to fill and got them off to nice careers. Dr. Susanne Heim, head of the MPG commission, concluded that scientists are highly vulnerable to intellectual and moral corruption. "Opportunities will be used if they promise more influence and success."

POST-WAR PERIOD

After the war it took TELI eight years to spring back to life. Finally, in 1953, a new board was elected and the technical journalists' organization was back in business. However, the media in the fifties was changing dramatically, new special interest publications and magazines entered the market, TV conquered the living rooms. Technical writing lost its domain since radio and television created new acoustic and visual formats; furthermore, science began to play a more dominant role in the public domain and gave rise to a new genre: scientific writing. To top it off, Berlin was a divided city and no longer a hub.

So TELI members had to reorganize and make adjustments, if the organization was to survive. **Robert Gerwin**, the 4th president (1963 – 1970) implemented the reforms by forming regional chapters throughout West Germany which decentralized the activities, pulled in new members throughout the country and made up for the loss of Berlin. Gerwin modernized the organization's name by inventing a subtitle: "Journalists' Association for technical-scientific publicity" and went out to recruit science writers. Gerwin's successor to the chair, **Heinz Rieger** (1970 – 1977), as we have read earlier, picked up and carried on the idea to establish an international umbrella organization of science journalists. EUSJA soon attracted new members and renowned names.

One of them was **Werner Büdeler**, a space expert and TV reporter. He had commented on the first landing on the moon from Houston. Büdeler served as the 8th TELI president (1983 – 1989).

REUNIFICATION AND GLOBALISATION

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989, the end of the Cold War, and the reunification of East and West Germany imposed new challenges. TELI's 9th president, **Klaus Goschmann** (1989 – 2001), managed to establish early contacts with colleagues in the eastern parts, many of which joined the organization. A great asset for a smooth integration was **Gerhard Kirsch**, formerly president of science journalists of the German Democratic Republic, who since 1995 has been running TELI's new headquarter in Berlin. An interesting investigation, not done yet, would aim at the question of how technical and science journalism developed under communist rule. When TELI got back on its feet in the Fifties, colleagues in the East refrained from co-operation with the argument that the organisation was "bourgeois". Rather they wanted to continue along the more progressive traditions of the German labour movement and the Soviet Union. Whatever this meant – there has been very little research. Journalism was controlled tightly by the Communists, although scientific writers were granted

more freedom than political writers. On the other hand, as Katrin Schulze observed in a research paper at the Free University of Berlin, science was a key element of the communist ideology and responsible for the progress of society – so criticising science would have been necessarily a critique against communism. **Maybe EUSJA members of Eastern Europe will look one day more thoroughly into this and come up with more facts, examples, and analysis.**

The end of the confrontation between East and West led to globalisation. A positive fringe benefit of this has been the foundation of the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) which fosters a close co-operation and exchange of colleagues in the entire world to further enhance professionalism. TELI members have helped to kick off the Federation idea, Wolfgang C. Goede went on record as a co-founder. **Hanns-Joachim (Hajo) Neubert**, TELI's 10th president (since 2001), and EUSJA's vice president is a mentor in a unique peer-to-peer mentoring program which will help African journalists to become more proficient in science journalism. On the occasion of EUSJA's 35th anniversary, long time delegate and TELI "elder statesmen", **Dietmar Schmidt** expressed his hope that bilateral visits of members to research projects and scientific laboratories throughout Europe will further increase and sustain networking with the goal of a strong European identity. Finally, he explicitly welcomes the EUSJA constitutional amendment that

allows various science writers' organisations of one country to become EUSJA members and is looking forward in the hope that this will help to unite and consolidate respective groups in Germany.

recording anything our scientists – gods – tell us. Never does it occur to us that these guys too may have motives that are less than noble.”

OUTLOOK

Germany has been respected as well as ridiculed, but it is my opinion that Germany, more than any other country, has confronted its history. This teaches science journalists a basic lesson. Science's truth seeking mission is embedded all over the world in ideologies, ambitions, big money and religious beliefs. So we would be well advised to keep our distance and to question the motives, methods and results of scientists, especially in the 21st century in which science and technology have become increasingly the driving force of the economy. **Henry Pierce**, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, has put this difficult relationship into some memorable phrases:

“Science journalists are a bunch of patsies prone to uncritical acceptance of anything we are told by our authorities – our authorities being doctors and scientists.” He observed that other journalists maintained a more healthy scepticism toward news sources and continued: “But we, bless us, go in with our bright baby-blue pencils poised, faithfully