

Translated extract from

Friedrich Kellner
Vernebelt, verdunkelt sind alle Hirne.
Tagebücher 1939-1945

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Friedrich Kellner
Darkness and fog have choked their minds
Diaries, 1939-1945

Translated by Steph Morris

Foreword

Even though it is only 25 minutes by car from the small German town of Laubach to the next largest town, Gießen, a distance of 8394 kilometres sometimes separates them – in April 2005 for instance, when an article in *Der Spiegel* on an exhibition in Texas was read in Gießen with considerable surprise.^a It concerned the war-time diary of one Friedrich Kellner, a civil servant at the Laubach district court, which was on show at the ‘George Bush Presidential Library’ in College Station, Texas on the personal initiative of the former US president. According to the article, Kellner had bravely taken a stance against the Nazi dictatorship, and in his speech at the exhibition opening Warren Finch, director of the library, highlighted the particular significance that this secretly written work has for us today, given that we are still confronted with global terror and countless dictatorships.

^a *Der Spiegel* reported at the time: ‘George Bush, 80, former president of the USA, has shown renewed interest in German history. Since last Friday his presidential library in College Station, Texas has been host to the first ever exhibition of the diaries of German justice inspector Friedrich Kellner, who worked during the Nazi period in Laubach, Hesse, although he was an avowed social democrat and opponent of Hitler, and lived till 1970. Kellner’s chronicles, in which he reported as early as 1941 on the mass shooting of Jews in Poland, culminate in the call to fight if necessary for the reinstatement of democracy, whether or not “you love peace and hate war.” This verges on a challenge to America and England who had till then “ignored or failed to do their duty.” George Bush was not only impressed with Kellner’s 753-page diaries because of their courageous stance against the Nazi dictatorship; they also provide, as it says on the library website, “a warning to future generations to take a firm stand against dictatorships and state financed terrorism.”’ (*Spiegel*, 14/2005, 4 April 2005)

Laubach, 26 September 1938

My aim in writing this is to capture immediate impressions of what is going on around me, so that in the future no-one can try to construct 'major events' out of them. (A 'heroic era' or such like.)

First and foremost: there is no enthusiasm whatsoever. Everyone 'hopes', believes, that a miracle will occur, but the world view they are accommodating within their heads is hardly farsighted.

(Anyone who wants to learn about contemporary society, the souls of 'proper Germans', should read my chronicles. My concern, however, is that once events have taken their course there will be few decent men and women left, and the guilty will have no desire to see their disgrace recorded.) On Sunday 25 September 1938 the horses and men for a veterinary division were assembled here. It could not be said that it ran like clockwork. The mood was thoroughly subdued. They were not the youngest of men (35-45). Some had seen service, some had not.

What are people saying? A wide range of opinions. France and England will remain neutral. Poland and Hungary will attack Czechoslovakia. No-one mentions Russia. 'We will attack the Czechs swiftly and decisively and Czechoslovakia will be ours in no time at all (2-3 days).' Hardly anyone has considered the consequences. In conversations I continually express my opinion that you should not underestimate your opponents. But no-one listens. Arrogance has risen to extreme levels.

My opinion: the war must surely bring the whole populace to its senses. Unfortunately the few Germans with any sense or reason will suffer during it; that is fate. Only when everyone has learned what it means to experience war in your own country, will a generation 'perhaps' emerge to put paid to all the cocky, mouthy, belligerent Germans.

Dr Schmitt:¹ 'no foreign plane will cross our borders and live. Everything went smoothly at the Nuremburg Rallies.'^a (The same man once talked about a 'tiny little war' with Russia.)

^a The Nuremburg Rallies, officially the Reichsparteitage (Reich party convention) were the Nazi party's annual propaganda event, held early September each year in Nuremburg, the most recent was subtitled Reichsparteitag Großdeutschlands (Rally of Greater Germany). See. Benz/Graml/Weis 2007, p. 750f.

It distresses me to note that the primitive mentality of the German people has reached unprecedented levels.

That is your achievement, Propaganda Minister! Darkness and fog have choked their minds! I despair of the people. Critical thought is now bad for us. Everything is just fine – we will wait and see. ‘Heavenly joy, deadly sorrow.’² All still to come.

[...]

1 October 1938

Now that Germany’s behaviour has brought us to the brink of war and the Reich Propaganda Minister’s rabble rousing has risen to a pitch scarcely to be exceeded, an ‘agreement’ on the Czech problem has been reached through the initiative of the English prime minister in Munich.^b

Even now, Göbbels has retained the upper hand and has the audacity to claim that ‘peace has only been preserved thanks to Hitler’s peaceful conduct.’ And the worst thing is: the people are repeating it as if it were gospel. ‘Against stupidity, the gods themselves contend in vain!’³

August 1939

We are living through a period of immense tension. Unmistakable signs of secret mobilisation have been making even the greatest optimists wary. The various military activities taking place are an indication of how serious the situation is.

^b In the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 the leaders of Germany, Italy, Britain and France agreed to the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany. The agreement followed intense anti-Czech propaganda, particularly focussing on alleged Czech attacks on Germans in the Sudetenland. Hitler torpedoed British attempts at mediation by steadily increasing his demands. He was hoping the Sudeten crisis would provide him with the pretext to begin the war. See Benz/Graml/Weis 2007, p. 647.

How do things look from our perspective?

At 4 in the morning of the night of the 25/26 August 1939 there was a knock on our bedroom window. The court clerk Franz Sch[...] informed me that he had just received call-up papers with immediate effect, summoning him to Gießen. 120 such orders were posted that night. Dr Schmidt the magistrate was also among the recipients.

There is no consensus of opinion on the situation (yet) amongst the public of course. There are all sorts of views, depending on people's circumstances. It should certainly be noted that the overwhelming majority are of the belief, nurtured by newspaper articles and such-like, that our army possesses an (almost) magical strength and clout and will instantly snap up Poland in its entirety. There is no sense to be heard at all when it comes to things which are there for the 'taking'. What a sorry side of humanity is revealed: rapacious greed! No-one gives a thought to the fact that according to this 'right' they too could be thrown out of their homes at a moment's notice.

No-one really believes that France and England will stand by Poland.^c When the dark pact^d with Russia was then signed, shares in the coalition of the 'takers' rose. There was (nevertheless) something strange about the reality of an 'alliance' with this state given that for years a verbal crusade had been fought against Russia and its 'sub-human'^e population, and that the victory of National Socialism can surely be credited solely to its vicious campaign against communism. No sitting of the Reichstag, no Nuremberg Rally has passed without battle cries against the 'world

^c Following Germany's breach of the Munich Agreement in mid March 1939, Poland was concerned it would become the next victim of Germany's desire for expansion, and sought a guarantee from France and Britain of support in the case of a German invasion. Britain made this guarantee on 25 March 1939, France on 31 March 1939. Germany used this as an excuse to revoke the 1934 German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact. Following the German invasion of Poland, Britain and France declared war on Germany but did not begin hostilities. See Wendt 1987, pp. 172-182.

^d The Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union, better known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact or Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was signed on 23 August 1939. In the official section both parties committed themselves to refrain from attacking the other and to neutrality in the case of a conflict between the other party and a third state. In an additional secret protocol, the Soviet Union and Germany divided the territory of Poland between them. Following the German invasion of Poland, Soviet troops marched into eastern Poland on 17 September 1939 and occupied the agreed areas. The pact was a great surprise to the German people given that for years the Soviet Union and Bolshevism had been portrayed as the arch enemies of National Socialist Germany. See Benz/Graml/Weis 2007, p. 475.

^e *Untermenschen* or 'sub-humans' was a derogatory Nazi term for Jews, Poles, Russians and also Communists, declared 'racially' and morally inferior. (Schmitz-Berning 2000, pp. 618-622).

enemy' Stalin emitted in monstrous tones. It is not surprising as such, although even some less-than-sensitive souls have been thrown off balance briefly by this u-turn in the assessment of the dangers of the 'blood-smeared, base criminals and dregs of humanity' (Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 750).⁴ Few people, however, are giving any thought to the motives behind Russia's behaviour. What if a wily Russia uses its neutrality towards Germany to seduce this Germany into a war with Poland, but decides later where it will finally throw its full weight?

The mills of God grind slowly, but surely – is probably the answer to these and other questions.

In his book Adolf Hitler wrote, 'the fact of forming an alliance with Russia would be the signal for a new war. And the result of that would be the end of Germany.'⁵

What should an ordinary person say to this, and what should the National Socialist believers think? Is Hitler the prophet wrong and Hitler the chancellor right – or the other way round? Time will tell.

As a lone voice I feel obliged to note down the thoughts which are preoccupying me at this nerve-wracking time, so that later – if it is still possible – I can give my descendents a picture of the true reality.

30 August 1939

F Kellner

Early September 1939

The (stupid) public are intoxicated by the trumped up initial successes of the German army in Poland. Fairy-tale atrocities of the most revolting kind^f are floating through the ether and through the heads of the armchair soldiers. The victorious optimism is somewhat depressed, however, by the legal restraints being imposed, in particular the introduction of ration cards. They are an awkward damper! The childish belief in the infallibility of the gods and half-gods has still not been shaken however. And what

^f After a faked Polish attack on a German radio station in Gleiwitz was staged, German troops marched into Poland on 1 September 1939 and made rapid gains. On 27 September Warsaw capitulated and the final Polish soldiers surrendered on 6 October 1939. See Benz/Graml/Weis 2007, p. 707. With 'fairy-tale atrocities' Kellner is referring to Polish attacks on the German minority population before and after the start of the war, which were exaggerated out of all proportion in the Nazi propaganda.

is left to say, when even people whose life experiences must surely have equipped them to form their own opinions, are swallowing all the idle chit-chat and every deliberately circulated rumour with a voracious hunger and building their shaky hero-figure on it.

The things written and waffled about the 'Axis Powers'^g don't bear thinking about: a circus of trying to please both sides! Despite the experiences of 1915, many Germans have continued to believe in the colossal power of the legendary 'Axis'. Whenever, while discussing the Comintern Pact^h in intimate circles, I have expressed the opinion that Italy will never enter a war on Germany's side, I am met with silence at best, and never approbation. How did I arrive at this opinion on Italy? At the outbreak of war in 1914 there was a three-fold alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Bulgaria and Turkey were on Germany's side. Today: Turkey is allied with England and France. Greece and Romania too. In the light of this situation it would be genuinely suicidal for Italy to enter a war against England and its allies. Why? Italy would be a prisoner in the Mediterranean. Cut off from the rest of the world, particularly its suppliers (natural resources (oil!)). Not only that, it would also have to write off Abyssinia, Libya, Albania and the Dodecanese.ⁱ The Mediterranean would be ruled by France, England and Turkey. Italy's entire shipping would be doomed. Does anyone really believe Italy would be crazy enough to destroy itself? Another issue is of course whether it might not receive a little slice of the cake when the war is over, due to its continued power and assuming it has behaved very well towards England. This could reasonably be maintained – or surmised: time will tell.

^g The term 'Axis Powers' initially referred to the understanding and foreign-policy co-operation between National Socialist Germany and fascist Italy, the 'Rome-Berlin Axis'. See Schmitz-Berning 2000, p. 7ff. and Benz/Graml/Weis 2007, p. 387.

^h The 'Anti-Comintern Pact' is meant. On 25 November 1936 Japan and the German Reich signed an agreement which ostensibly aimed to combat the Communist International. The key element of the document was a secret pact, however, in which both states agreed to remain neutral in the event of an unprovoked attack by the Soviet Union. Italy entered the agreement in 1937, Hungary and Spain in 1939. Other states joined later. See Benz/Graml/Weis 2007, p. 404ff.

ⁱ Fascist Italy had attacked Abyssinia (today Ethiopia) on 3 October 1935, then captured it in its entirety in July 1936. Although the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy as a result, Abyssinia received no international support. Parts of Libya had been under Italian control since 1911 and under Mussolini there were many military conflicts till, in 1934, Libya was declared an Italian colony. The Dodecanese, a group of islands in the southern Aegean, came into Italian possession in 1912 during the Italian-Turkish war. The Italian expansion drive in the Mediterranean region was continued with the occupation of Albania on 12 April 1939. See Brogini Kunzi 2006.

¹ According to information from Else G, former maid and nanny for the Schmidt household, Dr. Ludwig Schmitt, a magistrate born 1898, was sent to the eastern front where he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. Schmitt allegedly spent six years in a Soviet prisoner of war camp before he died (letter from Else G to Scott Kellner, 17 November 2003, privately owned). In January 1942, still in Germany and now an official at a military court, Schmidt gave a strongly anti-communist talk on his experiences in the Soviet Union. See. 'Erlebnisse im Osten' in: *Heimatzeitung*, 13 January 1942, p. 5.

² Goethe, *Egmont*, Act III, Scene ii.

³ Schiller, *The Maid of Orleans*, Act II, Scene vii.

⁴ In *Mein Kampf* Hitler writes, 'It must never be forgotten that the present rulers of Russia are blood-stained criminals, that here we have the dregs of humanity which, favoured by the circumstances of a tragic moment, overran a great state, degraded and extirpated millions of educated people out of sheer blood-lust, and that now for nearly ten years they have ruled with such a savage tyranny as was never known before.' (Hitler 1930, p. 504). Kellner refers to the first one-volume edition of *Mein Kampf* published in 1930. For the publication history of *Mein Kampf* see Plöckinger 2006, pp. 173-202.

⁵ Hitler 1930, p. 504.

1 May 1945

It appears that Adolf Hitler is dead.

The contradictory reports make it impossible to determine how he has died. We will have to wait a little longer to be sure Hitler's death is an incontrovertible fact. Nothing has been said about the body yet.

Grand Admiral Dönitz, allegedly named by Hitler as his successor, announced in the radio that Hitler was killed in action at his command post in Berlin.

So the myths are already being fabricated.¹

It is quite extraordinary that someone has volunteered to continue the madness as successor. It demonstrates that there is little prospect that the madmen and criminals will ever die out.

The tyrants are strange kings. Someone like Hitler thinks he can just sign power over to someone without considering the wishes of the people.

In any case, Adolf Hitler, 'the most ingenious general of all time,' the all-powerful ruler of the 1000 year Reich, which fell after 12 years, is now out of the picture.

The Nazi party has collapsed ignominiously!

Providence, which Hitler was so fond of invoking, has decided against him. The craziest of all political systems, a state ruled for all time by a single leader, has met the end it deserves. History will record for eternity that the German people were unable to throw off the Nazi yoke under their own initiative. The American, English and Russian victory was needed to end the Nazi madness and world-domination plans.

5 May 1945

Sensation after sensation!

Momentous events are piling on top of each other!

Berlin conquered by the Russians!

Hamburg in the hands of the English!

The German troops in Italy and west Austria have capitulated.

This morning the capitulation of the German army in Holland, Denmark and north-west Germany also came into effect.

Disintegration on all fronts.

Only in Bohemia, Moravia and the Danube area have the troops not yet given in. But that can only be a matter of hours. Then there will be ceasefire throughout Europe. The once so proud German army has been thoroughly routed on all fronts. No excuses can help them

now. The spectacular defeat in this war will hopefully drive this ghastly military mentality from the whole German population. I certainly wish that from the bottom of my heart. A peace-loving Germany would be able to make friends again, and anyone who has good friends need never live in fear of attack.

In memory of the National Socialist propaganda, after going through my entire material I would like to focus once more on the *Parole der Woche* (official bulletin of the Nazi party)² from 17 – 29 January 1943, as it is of particular relevance today:

The military genius of our Führer,
the bravery of our soldiers
and our superior weapons
will decide this war!³

These three key points (military genius, bravery and superior weapons) generally determine the outcome of a war. It is just a question of which side had the upper hand in each of these points in this war.

The party members and propagandists have made massive error of judgment. This error was nurtured by the innate Prussian arrogance and national haughtiness.

The ‘military genius’ credited to the ‘Führer’ was not even sufficient to recognise the critical situations during the individual development stages of this war, to envisage the possible scenarios, assess the implications and make logical decisions.

The ‘bravery of our soldiers’ relied largely on stolidly following orders while deactivating their brains.

The weapons were only temporarily ‘superior’ and the nation’s potential was overestimated. At the start of the war a head start was achieved through massive, excessive re-armament, however the opponents still managed to catch up then overtake.

The Nazis’ entire theses have crumbled into nothing, because they were not founded on reason.

6 May 1945

Family G[...] visited us and complained that Herr G[...] has been ordered to participate in retribution work because he had been an official in a position of authority. The officials have to restore the Jewish cemetery, demolished by the Nazis. Frau G[...] explained that she and her husband in particular were opposed to the actions against the Jews and find it unfair that they have to contribute to the rectification. It is true that G[...], a teacher, was one of the

harmless party members and not a Nazi at heart. But he was a member of the Nazi party and held office in an official capacity (radio station administrator).

Every party member shares co-responsibility for the party's actions and business. It is not acceptable to lay the entire blame on the leader, Adolf Hitler, and the Nazi high command. Anyone who did not reject the benefits of party membership over the last 12 years is a beneficiary of the National Socialist system and should bear the brunt of its collapse.

Anyone who did not fight the mentality which led to war, has no right to complain about the consequences of defeat.

There will be differences between the judgements on the crimes of individual Nazis depending on the severity of the acts committed, but in terms of the overall penance there can be only one rule: you went along with the others? You will be punished along with the others!

Today everyone is claiming they were never a real Nazi of course. Everyone is ducking out of the responsibility. Justice will always consist of demanding recompense and punishing the guilty. That is also the epitome of divine justice, because God is not only loving, he also punishes.

In 1933 people's behaviour was the exact reverse. Back then the same people were using the flimsiest of arguments to prove they had always been National Socialists. There are heroes and 'heroes'. Humanity is in a sorry state!

7 May 1945

In the allies' radio broadcasts over recent days there have been reports on the conditions in the German concentration camps which can only be described as bestial and unforgiveable. The mere existence of a concentration camp was a blight on civilisation. People were tortured and killed solely because, in the view of some sadist or criminal, they had failed to be true Nazis. Even vindictive denunciators could get their victims sent to the notorious camps.

The excesses of Adolf Hitler and his circle of bandits' tyranny will remain as vivid warnings in history books of humankind for years to come. What an achievement!!

In the radio I heard the opinions of foreign speakers who lay blame on the entire German population for the conditions in the concentration camps.⁴

I should like to protest against such an unfair judgement. That would mean that any German person involved in either active or passive resistance would be equally guilty. The accusers are not being logical.

When negroes were lynched in the USA this kind of justice was viewed by civilised people as abhorrent. But it would not occur to any sensible person to make every citizen of the United States of America responsible for these acts of violence.

In the case of 'concentration camps' too, only the genuinely guilty can be held to account. The guilt lies with those who provided the intellectual initiative, and with everyone who incarcerated people in the camps, tortured them and participated in causing their deaths.

The moral guilt for the crimes committed in the concentration camps is shared by a very large group of German people however. First and foremost all Nazi party members as well as all advocates of the National Socialist system.

No-one could deny that they were not aware of the nature of the secret police (Gestapo) and their violent activities. The 'Gestapo' as an institution will remain a disgrace for all eternity. The Gestapo was able to carry out any act of violence it wanted. There was no legal protection for personal freedom and property. Innocent people were imprisoned without investigation or court judgements solely because they adhered to other world views. The brutality and ruthlessness of the Gestapo remain unpunished; there was nowhere for complaints to be submitted. The Gestapo's reign of terror was unimpeachable. Anyone who ended up in their claws, who was out of favour or had been defamed for whatever reason, was subjected to merciless despotism and injustice. They represent the greatest blight on civilisation that has ever occurred.

¹ Hitler had ended his life on 30 April 1945 in the bunker beneath his Reich Chancellery. His body was burned. His death was announced in the evening of 1 May 1945 on the radio. In the announcement Hitler's death was dated 1 May and embellished with the legend that he died in combat, in order not to damage the troops' morale. See Kershaw 2000, p. 1062-1072.

² The *Parole der Woche* (literally 'slogan of the week') was a newsletter in poster form hung in institutions, workplaces and other public areas. The subjects related to current events and issues (for instance Nazi holidays and days of remembrance), but after the war began it was mostly used for war propaganda. Over 400 issues were printed, of which 100 were reproduced in facsimile in Heyen 1983; for contemporary descriptions see also Schmitz-Berning 1998, p. 464.

³ *Parole der Woche* 1943, No. 1-2 (17-29 January 1943); also reproduced in Heyen 1983, p. 114.

⁴ Accusations of collective German guilt for the Nazi crimes occasionally surfaced in public opinion among the western allies, above all in connection with media reports on the concentration camps. Such notions did not influence the allies' policies however. Individuals such as Karl Jaspers, Karl Barth and Theodor Heuss opposed the idea of a collective German guilt but certainly identified a collective responsibility in terms of a moral challenge. Heuss spoke of collective shame. See Benz 1996b, pp. 117-119; Jaspers 1946; Frei 2000.