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Second Leg

ZDF historian Guido Knopp teaches journalism at an ultra-right college

by Thomas Schuler

Guido Knopp will enjoy himself at the great television festival in Cannes in April. That is where the ZDF will be presenting his new series "Hitler's Children" to program purchasers from all over the world, and Knopp believes that he has an ace in the hole. He presumes, in any case, that "Hitler's Children" - and the introductory program - will be running in the USA, England, France, Australia and in 50 other countries. Specifically, his films are said to be the first German productions on the theme of Hitler that have been generally distributed out of country, said the director of the ZDF historical department.

In Germany, the 51 year old academically degreed historian can look for places to broadcast and he can broadcast from Arte and on ZDF any time on prime time. His success lies in the fact that each of his films will be seen by from four to seven million people. The millions of copies of his accompanying books will advance him to the most-sold German language technical book author.

To lay people, his work may appear credible solely by virtue of his title as professor [There are high requirements for the title of "Professor" in Germany. - trans.] The presumed seal of technical professionalism, however, does not apply to the historical research work, but to the job of teaching, which appears respectable only at first glance. Since 1994, Guido Knopp has regularly been driving to the Gustav Siewerth Academy, to Weilheim in the Black Forest, to tell students there how one "familiarizes a large TV public with historical aspects."

For a historian who presumes to deal critically with the National Socialist (NS) past and with the Vatican though, the Academy is a questionable setting. A majority of the leading senate, to which Knopp belongs, consists of ultra-right members who support secret organizations like *Opus Dei* (Work of God), *Engelswerk* [Angel's Work] and the VPM psycho-sect ("Verein zur Foerderung der psychologischen Menschenkenntnis" / [Association for the Advancement of Psychological Understanding]).

Colleague Filbinger

The senior class of the small college is led by Hans Filbinger, who had to resign from his office as Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister President in 1978. It was revealed at that time, that during the NS era, he, as a Navy judge, had handed down a death sentence on a soldier who had wanted to desert, and had personally supervised the execution. Since his resignation, Filbinger has been gathering German nationally inclined comrades together in the Weikersheim Study Center, not far from Weilheim. In the late hours, former business manager Albrecht Jebens has called to his guests, "Now we'll sing the German National Anthem, this time all three verses."

The Academy was founded in the mid-1950s by Heidegger student Gustav Siewerth as a conservative answer to the Frankfurt School - in his own words, to lay the foundation for the conquest of neo-Marxism and Darwinism, and to deal critically with the '68 student revolution. Knopp's senate colleagues are conspicuous by their sympathies for secretive organizations: two of the eight members of the senate support the *Opus Dei*, three support the VPM psychosect and have appeared at their congresses - among them the Wuerzburg Professor Lothar Bossle, who thinks Hitler was "a leftist" and who sees Filbinger as a victim of a campaign of slander. Dogmatist Leo Scheffczyk has honored the *Opus Dei*. The Rector, Graf von Brandenstein-Zeppelin, supports *Engelswerk*. Deacon Alma

von Stockhausen has publicly supported the VPM, which campaigns against information on AIDS ("pornographic propaganda") and the "new Left."

Critics accuse the fundamentalist *Opus Dei* of brainwashing and psychic and physical exploitation, Scientology style. Books by Luther, Lessing, Kant, Hegel, Pasternak and Brecht are to be ignored by *Opus Dei* members as "trash," says one of its publications. The organization works extensively undercover, on which account it is described in its Spanish homeland and the "Holy Mafia." The founder of the secret society, Escrivá de Balaguer, has demonstrated much understanding for fascism, and is said to have succeeded in Franco's takeover of power with Hitler's help, whereby Christianity was said to have been saved from communism.

When asked about the sentiments of his colleagues, Knopp play down his involvement at the Black Forest university. Certainly he has heard of the connections, he said, "but I have no contact with others who lecture there." He said he was only there twice a year for block seminars. Besides that he has only a guest professorship. In one remarks sheet of his subject area of journalism it says that its goal is "the communication of the insights gained from dealing with philosophy and sociology to the public." Therefore Knopp intends to support the distribution of his colleague's teachings.

Class schedules show that he teaches more often than "only twice" a year; documents show that he belongs to the Academy's Circle of Friends, and that he has appeared as moderator at event discussions. He went past the lecture description that he is director of one of only four subject areas and that he sits on the senate, and spoke instead of the "freedom of science" and that he does not accept any money for his teaching activities - as if the business connection alone were a problem. "Everything is very pluralistic there," said Knopp. "That is shown in the bandwidth and in my teaching there."

One could just as well ask whether some glossing over had not been meant in Knopp's TV broadcasts: was it really coincidence that, in his Vatican documentary, he had disposed of the inner church conflicts surrounding *Opus Dei* and the controversial, singularly rapid beatification of its founder with a few flourishes? Knopp made only brief mention that the reigning Pope had withdrawn fundamentalist groups from the legal church grip of critical local bishops and had helped them to great power in the Vatican. In his 370 page book on "The Power of the Pope," he dedicated only two paragraphs to *Opus Dei*.

Knopp, the sole liberal social scientist among hard-liners? The Academy continues to advertise itself as "Germany's smallest Uni" in which there is a docent for every student. In such a small university, can one have nothing to do with the others? Especially when the Academy possesses a high sense of broadcast-consciousness and Knopp's subject area, according to a brochure, is to "enable the placement of the endangered human dignity at the center of attention by using the alternatives of modern mass media."

Loyalty, Honor, Faith

The Academy propagates an understanding of journalism by which journalists do not describe reality or seek the truth, but are supposed to report on a prepared opinion. They are "urgently" offered an "ethic which ensues from an absolute truth and which presents a clear philosophical position of eternal value in opposition to a valueless indifference," says a brochure. This position is said to be "catholic in the original sense," and to "determinedly take up the dispute with dialectical philosophies, 'enlightened reason,' and the resultant scientific blind alleys."

Why is Guido Knopp teaching in this counter-enlightenment environment? Because of the title of an honorary professor? It was suggested in an interview by the conservative Catholic magazine, "Pur," that his involvement on site could also

be rated as one of an ardent sympathizer. Actually he is said to be at a loss at ZDF when the question of why is brought up. Knopp said that he had always viewed the exchange of journalism "as a second leg" to scientifically reflect his own standpoint. "Good journalism is also stamped with morals which are constructed upon values. Values which have fallen into discredit - they include morals, loyalty, honesty and faith - I personally want to create more regard for them. Properly understood journalistic work cannot be produced without these virtues." He said he always gives "good, young journalism students the chance to work in television themselves."

It is surprising that Knopp portends to have nothing to do with the Academy's spiritual alignment; he stressed to "Pur," while he said he was creating more regard for virtue, that "my intentions coincide with those of the Academy." He said he "teaches here because the humanistic image science has for humanity is modelled in everyday life at the school." The rector, Graf von Brandenstein-Zeppelin, puts it more succinctly: whoever teaches here without pay "has a fire burning in his heart."

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