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Notes on a Private Meeting: How Time Changes Perspectives on Hitler's Plan

Source: Handwritten notes by General Lieutenant Liebmann, February 3, 1933. Munich, Archive of the Institute for Contemporary History, No. 167/51, fol. 39; reprinted in Thilo Vogelsang, Dokumentation: „Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933“, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 2 (1954), Heft 4, pp. 434-35

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Headnote: The Liebmann Notes are a compilation of notes taken by General Lieutenant Curt Liebmann from a speech by Adolf Hitler on February 3, 1933, three days after he was appointed Chancellor of Germany. His notes are a compilation of notes by Officer Horst von Mellenthin and Officer Martin Baltzer. The speech outlines Hitler's goals in regard to domestic policy, foreign policy, economics, and building up the armed forces. Other significant figures that were present at the speech include Commander-in-Chief General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, and Reich Chancellery Head Hans Heinrich Lammers, as well as other German military leaders. The original document can be found in the Archive of the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich, and is reprinted in Thilo Vogelsang's [Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933](#). The English translation can be found in *Nazism, 1919-1945*, Vol. 3: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, a copy of which can be found in the UCSB library.

Relevant Biographical Information: Curt Liebmann (1881-1960) was a German officer and last General of the Infantry in World War 2. After serving as an officer in the First World War, Liebmann moved to the Reichswehr, where he served as the head of the statistical department of the Reich Ministry of Defense from 1924-1928. After taking command of several different regiments and divisions within the Reichswehr, Liebmann was ultimately promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General, which put him in the inner circle of leaders within the Reichswehr. Horst von Mellenthin (1898-1977) was taken into the Reichswehr in 1921 and was promoted to lieutenant in 1925. In 1932, he was appointed adjutant of the Commander-in-Chief, which is

why he was present to take notes on Hitler's address. His portion of the notes, known as the Mellenthin Dictation, misinterpreted Hitler's plans for German expansion, and thus were not published until 1999 by historians Carl Dirks and Karl-Heinz Janßen.¹ Unfortunately, Vogelsang does not include any information from the Mellenthin Dictation in his book. Martin Baltzer (1898-1971) joined the Imperial Navy as a volunteer in 1916, and remained in the Navy until 1919, when he joined the Reichswehr shooters regiment. He was promoted to lieutenant in 1922, and then captain-lieutenant in 1929. In 1933, he was assigned as adjutant to Admiral Erich Raeder, who was head of the High Command of the Navy, which is why he was present to take notes on Hitler's address.²

The notes taken by General Lieutenant Curt Liebmann during Hitler's speech to the leaders of the Reichswehr on February 3, 1933, contain the ideological changes that the new Chancellor intended to impose on Germany. In regard to domestic policy, the notes reflect a no-tolerance policy toward pacifism, as well as the indoctrination of the youth, strict authoritarian state leadership, and complete opposition to Democracy. In the way of foreign policy, the notes claim that the goal is to fight against the Treaty of Versailles. Economically, the notes outline a settlement policy that fights against an export based economy and aims to serve the working class. The notes claim that radical improvement cannot be expected because there is not enough living space for German people. Lastly, the notes emphasize that, in order to regain political power, it is necessary to build up the German military, or Wehrmacht, and reintroduce National Service. This is the most important and most socialist institution mentioned in the speech according to Liebmann's notes. Through analyzing the Liebmann notes overtime, I came to the conclusion that the perspective of authors that reference the notes changes rhetorically based on the amount of time that has passed since the end of the Third Reich.

The notes, while taken in 1933, were not made public until they were published by the German Institute of Contemporary History in 1954. This being the case, there are no news references or immediate reactions to the speech. All academic reactions to these notes are therefore written in retrospect, knowing the consequences of Hitler's plans that Liebmann documents. The earliest known citation of Liebmann's notes is in the 1954 compilation of significant documents by Thilo Vogelsang, which outline the contextual significance of the

¹ In: Carl Dirks/Karl-Heinz Janßen: *Der Krieg der Generäle. Hitler als Werkzeug der Wehrmacht*. Berlin 1999, S. 232–236

² Deutsche National Bibliothek, [Literatur von und über Curt Liebmann](#)

speech, who was present, and how the speech was received.³ From that point on, Liebmann's notes have been cited frequently in contemporary German historical research. In 1955, German historian and professor Paul Kluge used Liebmann's notes as a source in his book *Nationalsozialistische Europaideologie*.⁴ In this book, Kluge uses the notes to emphasize that, since the speech was held in private, Hitler was not reserved in his use of aggressive rhetoric. Kluge refers to Hitler's attitude in the speech as "brutale Offenheit," or "brutal openness."⁵ This approach by Hitler is significant because he had just been chosen as Chancellor 4 days prior. Later in the 1950s and 60s, the notes were often cited as an example of how Adolf Hitler sold other leaders on his militaristic ideas. In 1959, Gerhard Meinck claimed that the speech needed to be analyzed with the presupposition that it is superficial and propagandistic.⁶ At this point in time, it is significant to recognize that the Third Reich was still in recent memory for most. The Liebmann notes were used to retrospectively show German people how Hitler could have convinced their military leaders that what he envisioned was necessary. In 1963, German diplomat Hans Bernd Gisevius, an undercover opponent of Hitler, described the contents of the speech as monstrous, criminal, and nothing less than a declaration of war.⁷ The language that Gisevius used is an example of how fresh the atrocities of Hitler's administration were in the minds of historical authors at this time.

The further in the past Hitler's reign becomes, the milder the rhetoric tends to be about him. German historian Joachim Fest, in his 1973 biography of Hitler, describes the energy of the speech using the word "Ungeduld," meaning impatience, rather than the stronger language from authors of the 50s and 60s.⁸ Another example of this softened language can be seen in a 1975 recollection of the German invasion of Poland. Historian Wolfgang Jacobmeyer refers to the invasion of Poland as a secondary concern in Hitler's overall plan of "Germanization" through expansion.⁹ In contrast with the historians of the 1950s and 60s, who focused largely on the

³ Thilo Vogelsang, Dokumentation: „Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933“, *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte* 2 (1954), Heft 4, pp. 434-35.

⁴ Paul Kluge, *Nationalsozialistische Europaideologie*, in: *VfZ* 3 (1955), S. 240-275, 244.

⁵ Kluge, 1955

⁶ Gerhard Meinck, *Hitler und die deutsche Aufrüstung 1933-1937*, Wiesbaden 1959, S. 18.

⁷ Vgl. Hans Bernd Gisevius, *Adolf Hitler. Versuch einer Deutung*, München 1963, S. 173.

⁸ Joachim Fest, *Hitler. Eine Biographie*, Berlin 1973, S. 535.

⁹ *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939-1945*, hrsg. von Werner Präg und Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, Stuttgart 1975, S. 335 (25. 3. 1941).

atrocities that Hitler committed, authors of the 70s start to use the information in the Liebmann notes to empirically analyze the process by which Hitler approached his agenda.

By the 1980s, and continuing on into present day, there has been enough historical research done about the meeting of February 3, 1933, that there is a general understanding of how it went even though nobody was actually alive that attended it. This is exemplified in Bernd-Jürgen Wendt's 1987 book *Großdeutschland. Außenpolitik und Kriegsvorbereitung des Hitler-Regimes*. This book refers to Curt Liebmann's notes, saying that historical research widely suggests that Hitler would have opposed the prior speech delivered by German Minister of War Werner von Blomberg.¹⁰ This development in the rhetoric about Liebmann's notes shows even further that the speech by Hitler is being viewed in an academic manner, as opposed to the earlier rhetoric that reflected more of an emotional connection to the topic at hand. The most recent example of how the Liebmann notes have been analyzed and documented is in the 2001 article by Andreas Wirsching, titled "'Man kann nur Boden germanisieren:' Eine neue Quelle zu Hitlers Rede vor den Spitzen der Reichswehr am 3. Februar 1933."¹¹ This article combines all documents that stemmed from the publication of the Liebmann notes in 1954 all the way up until its own publication in 2001. Wirsching's book has since been used for academic accounts of Nazi Germany in French, Russian, German, and English, according to Google Scholar. This is significant because it reflects that Wirsching's documentation is accepted as a reputable source by countries that were on both sides of World War 2. Authors that have cited this book include Professor Richard Bessel from the University of York and Times Magazine correspondent Andrew Meier.^{12 13}

In summary, the Liebmann notes, documenting a speech delivered by Adolf Hitler to the top German military officials in February of 1933, were ultimately published in 1954. In the late 1950s and 60s, documents that referenced the contents of the Liebmann notes did so with the memory of World War 2 still fresh in mind, and therefore approached the topic with more emotion-driven rhetoric. In the 1970s, authors were less inclined to write about the atrocities

¹⁰ Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, *Großdeutschland. Außenpolitik und Kriegsvorbereitung des Hitler-Regimes*, München 1987, S. 72.

¹¹ Andreas Wirsching: „Man kann nur Boden germanisieren“. Eine neue Quelle zu Hitlers Rede vor den Spitzen der Reichswehr am 3. Februar 1933. In: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49, 2001, Heft 3, S. 517–550

¹² Meier, Andrew. *The Lost Spy: An American in Stalins Secret Service*. Phoenix, 2010.

¹³ Steber, Martina, Bessel, Richard, and Bernhard Gotto. *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

that Hitler committed, and more focused on analyzing how his actions reflected the goals that he set forth in his speech. Lastly, in the 1980s up until the present day, documents referring to the Liebmann notes do so with much more prior research to lean on, being able to both recognize trends in the discoveries of other historians, and also create a broader picture of the events of February 3, 1933.

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