

Introduction

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The period of National Socialist rule continues to preoccupy us. The intensity and focus of the arguments may change, but it must be assumed that they will never reach a conclusion. In the nineties the discussions gained a new quality to the extent that they intensively and persistently concentrated on the exploitative behaviour of industrial concerns, banks and insurance companies towards the victims of the National Socialist regime, and pressed for the opening of the relevant archives.¹ This investigation of hitherto largely neglected aspects of German and European contemporary history, in the face of the oppressive procedures that were revealed, also intensified questions about the behaviour of other groups of people and associations during this period, for instance the question about the involvement of historians in the preparation and legitimisation of the extermination policy of the “Third Reich” or the question about the role of cultural institutions in the setting up, consolidation and extension of National Socialist rule.²

The organised campaign which in 1996 brought to a head criticism of the politico-cultural commitment of the foundation sponsor Alfred Toepfer, who died in 1993, belongs in this context. Although it did not only come subsequently to the renewed interest in the period of National Socialist rule, the wider resonance which this criticism has found in recent years, as well as the willingness of the Alfred Toepfer foundation F.V.S. to respond to the allegations, can be explained by the generally heightened sensitivity to “historical disclosures” of events during the years before 1945.

A summary of the criticism can be found in the 1996 pamphlet “Ombres et lumieres sur les fondations Toepfer”.³ The main allegation is of close ties between Alfred Toepfer and the “Third Reich”. He is said to have supported the National Socialist regime ideologically and materially; to have zealously served the ends of the National Socialists specialising in activities in the “Germanisation” policy; and to have conducted himself as an active and convinced accomplice in the criminal enterprises of the National Socialists.⁴ Among the evidence cited for ideological affinity is the awarding of prizes to mainstays of the National Socialist regime; furthermore the nomination of leading National Socialists in prize controlling boards or their appointment as laudators, as well as the provision of the foundation’s buildings for events staged by National Socialist organisations. With regard to Alsace, Toepfer is even charged with political-military support: Toepfer is said to have got Alsatians who had been evacuated to the French interior to go back, with the consequence that they were recruited into the German army; also to have recruited Alsatians as agents for German counter-intelligence.

Toepfer is also accused of the following:

-That he did not openly declare in favour of the National Socialist regime, but supported it secretly. In spite of this there is talk of “open instigation”⁵, of Toepfer’s double role, and that he wanted to stay in the background out of consideration for business interests. In this connection Toepfer is even criticised for his non-membership of the NSDAP.

-That he was an entrepreneur of dishonest business behaviour. As a skilful businessman he was not averse to illegal dealings. He put his commercial skills at the service of the National Socialist regime, especially in participating in the pillage of France. He also used the war for personal enrichment, in Poland and Czechoslovakia, among other places.

-That after 1945 he did not for a moment make a critical examination of his activities and those of his foundation, and he depicted them as being more harmless than they had been. Toepfer after the war had forgotten his involvement in criminal enterprises.⁶ He had even gone so far as to present himself as a man of the resistance.

-That he was injudicious and took no advice. Not only had he not distanced himself from the National Socialist past; he had actually carried on with it in some methods of dealing. Among the evidence cited for the continuity of his dealings since the Nazi period⁷ is the leaving of former National Socialists on foundation committees, the awarding of prizes to people who were closely connected with National Socialism, the continuing support for separatism in Alsace and the agitation of the German-speaking population there. This last, even if it accorded with the circumstances of the time, was no less irresponsible in that it led to confrontation.⁸

These allegations were continued in a condensed and over-simplified form from 1996 onwards. In the parliament of the canton of Basel-Stadt on the 12 April 1999 there was talk of the “NS perpetrator Alfred Toepfer” and it was claimed that the F.V.S. foundation had financed the foreign cultural policy of the “Third Reich” with its culture prizes.⁹

These interpretations took up sometimes word-for-word what Michael Fahlbusch alleges in his study, published shortly before, on the Volksdeutschen Forschungsgemeinschaften (ethnic German research associations) (VFG): the “scientific aiding and abetting of the Holocaust”.¹⁰ However this charge, strikingly made in the summary, finds no confirmation in the portrayal of the cynical ideology of academic Volkstumsforschung and its dovetailing with state bodies of the German Reich.¹¹ But it becomes relevant for the assessment of Alfred Toepfer to the extent that several VFG members were supporters and curators of his non-independent Johan Wolfgang Goethe foundation at Freiburg im Breisgau. According to Fahlbusch, the F.V.S. foundation made a contribution to the “aestheticisation of the NS culture”.¹²

In order to understand, confirm or refute these allegations, one would have to work through an extensive catalogue of fundamental questions regarding both the preconceptions of the critics and also the contexts on which they base their polemics. One would need to clarify, among other things, what characterises a “Nazi perpetrator” and to what extent one can speak of “support” in a mere functional sense, or a more unequivocally motivated “aiding and abetting” of an undoubtedly criminal regime. One would additionally need to recapitulate the ways the regime functioned, and also discuss the standards by which the behaviour of members of the warring armies of this regime can and should be assessed. All of this cannot be accomplished in the context of this statement.

The independent historians’ commission set up by the Alfred Toepfer foundation F.V.S. therefore initially attempted to gain a comprehensive picture of Alfred Toepfer and his foundations based on all available relevant sources and fit this picture into the contemporary historical context. Toepfer’s relationship to National Socialism as an ideology and to National Socialists as representatives of power in the German Reich from 1933 was given particular attention, as were indications which might provide information on his attitude to the German policy on Jews and to the Holocaust. The commission also pursued the problem of enrichment from various points of view – both personal enrichment and that of the commercial house of Alfred C. Toepfer. Finally it put the history of Alfred Toepfer’s foundations under scrutiny, from the motives of their founder in making his fortune available for charitable purposes to the way the foundations operated. Not least to be established in this process were his individual objectives, which he pursued with his foundations, and the ideas on which they were based. The commission investigated the question of continuity particularly in the case of the Alsace involvement. In the end the following picture emerged of the founder and his foundations¹³: Alfred Toepfer was neither a promoter of the National Socialists before 1933 nor an enthusiastic adherent of the National Socialist regime in the twelve years that followed. He was never moved to become a member of the NSDAP or any of its affiliates. And he never shared the central objectives of the leading National Socialists; he was far from being a racist or anti-Semite. Demonstrative endorsement of the German Reich’s policy towards Jews or even individual joint responsibility for the “Holocaust” cannot be imputed to him; he did not enrich himself with “Aryanised” Jewish property. This explains why his de-Nazification process ended in the categorisation of “not incriminated”, particularly since he was released as a blameless, free man in 1947 after two years of internment with numerous intensive interrogations by British and French security services. Even as a reserve officer of the German army, at first in counter-intelligence, then in special war economy detachments, no misconduct was proven by the Allies – a state of affairs which even with modern hindsight should not be disregarded, since contemporary standards of judgement can be inferred from it. The renewed examination of the life and work of Alfred Toepfer on the basis of sources accessible today gives no reason to criticise these contemporary assessments.

But Alfred Toepfer never fought against the National Socialist dictatorship. He showed as little solidarity with those marginalised and persecuted by it as he did sympathy with the resistance groups against Hitler. His talks, which he later often mentioned, with the writer Ernst Jünger in Paris in 1943, which stimulated Jünger to write his work “Der Friede” (“Peace”),¹⁴ took place after the turn of the Second World War and seem to have been more moved by a shrewd concern about the situation after the end of the fighting, foreseeable to many contemporaries, than intended to help mobilise any resistance action.

The fact that the British occupying authorities in early 1948 also returned to Alfred Toepfer the foundation assets confiscated after his internment in 1945 indicates that his involvement in the foundations was also seen by the representatives of the Allies as neither warmongering nor even as an ingeniously calculated instrument of German war aims policy. Nevertheless Toepfer, as is frequently documented in this volume, understood precisely the cultural activities of his foundations as always politically motivated and directed, both before and during and after the Second World War. Up until 1945 all the awarding of prizes – the most important activities of the foundations – took place with the knowledge and therefore at least the consent of the highest bodies in the German Reich,

indeed from 1938 to 1942 under the formal, de facto although un-exercised responsibility of a senior SS leader. Even if the leading bodies of the Reich were not always fully united in terms of practical policy, it can be assumed that Alfred Toepfer's foundations did not pursue any objectives which were contrary to the policy of the Reich leadership. Public events could at any rate only convey the impression of harmony, if not of unison between the private foundation and the participating German regime representatives. To the Reich propaganda ministry, which from 1938 claimed to control (foreign) cultural policy, the regionally specified prizes awarded by Alfred Toepfer's foundations were seen from 1942 as "important to the Reich", i.e. of the highest order.¹⁵

The private assets of Alfred Toepfer and his wife, and the limited partnership of the Alfred C. Toepfer import and export company, placed under trust administration by the British authorities in 1945, were also released in 1948. Toepfer's private economic activity before and during the war was thus also seen as unobjectionable by the Allies. The personally liable partner of the company since 1937, Wilhelm Hochgrassl, had since risen to become the leading representative of the grain business in Germany's British occupied zone – a sign of the continuing standing of the firm of Alfred C. Toepfer (ACT) at the time, whose rise from a medium-sized enterprise to an internationally operating conglomerate was still in the future. The orientation of German foreign trade towards eastern and south-eastern Europe which Alfred Toepfer had predicted in the face of the 1933 collapse of the world economic system, and which initially seemed to be confirmed for the company before and during the war, had proved to be unsustainable.

After 1945 it was no secret that in 1940 ACT had founded a domestic subsidiary in Posen (Warthegau), which was once more incorporated in the German Reich, and in 1942 branches in Krakau and Lemberg (General Government), and that ACT Posen had contributed considerably to the company's profits. However ACT had only profited by as much as the state and other bodies of the German Reich allowed the firm to make. All movements of goods, especially beyond the borders, required state contracts and permits under war economy conditions. There was hardly room for an uncontrolled exploitation of occupied or conquered territories by German commercial companies in their own exclusive interest. As far as can be seen, it was principally their logistical competence with which the firm of ACT secured the goodwill of the relevant Reich agencies.

It is thus principally Alfred Toepfer's foundation activities during the "Third Reich" which remain to be explained. Light must be shed on their motives, objectives and form. According to the studies presented here, which cannot replace any biography, the foundation sponsor should be separated from the entrepreneur, and also the sponsor-entrepreneur's family circumstances had a not inconsiderable effect on his work. Alfred Toepfer's behaviour in the "Third Reich" is explained by a course of life characterised in the previous years more by inner dispositions and impulses from outside than by long-term ties to political organisations or involvement in special milieus, even if his sympathies towards middle-class radical nationalistic groups are unmistakable. Nevertheless there were models of behaviour and maxims of political ideology which served Toepfer as guides to a certain extent. He mentions these in his memoirs, and there is no reason not to take them seriously as indicators.

Early intelligence and ambition can already be inferred from his school reports as well as the course of his higher and further education. Hard work and discipline must already have been intensively marked at this time. He completed his commercial apprenticeship brilliantly even though he had begun it against his own career wishes according to the will of his father. His childhood was accompanied by the social rise of his parents' family out of humble circumstances, but with an educated middle class background (his father came from a pastor's family in Thuringia). His membership of a Wandervogel (hiker's) group, which Toepfer often emphasised as an influence, can also be seen as a confirmation of this rise. The "Wandervogel" of 1912, at least outside Berlin, could hardly be seen any longer as a branch of the youth protest movement against the narrowness and stiffness of middle-class life, but as one of the established middle-class socialisation institutions for young people, not least from the "new middle class". The style kept up here of insistent closeness to nature and individually creative simplicity was something Toepfer had already sought to cultivate before he was "invited" to join, as he writes in his memoirs. After the vacations with his mother's country relations in Lower Saxony, the holiday hikes with other "Wandervögel", in 1913 from Saxony through Bohemia to Bavaria, and in 1914 through Alsace, were pinnacles of experience in his youth, which had been rich in work and learning, but otherwise rather uneventful. He was evidently also enriched by the "nest" evenings with communal reading and discussions about "Zeitfragen", or topics of the day. It is uncertain whether by this time he had come across Julius Langbehn's book "Rembrandt als Erzieher" ("Rembrandt as Educator"), published in 1890, to which he later ascribed a great influence on his views.¹⁶ A lasting impression was apparently left on Alfred Toepfer by the Freideutsche Jugendtag, or Free

German Youth Day, on the Hohe Meißner massif in October 1913, in which part of the Youth Movement, whose leaders were now ageing, made a political statement with a declaration in favour of “true Germanity”. Right into old age Toepfer recognised his lifelong leitmotifs in the talks held here and especially in the retrospectives of Hans Breuer. That such declamatory patriotism might strengthen a disposition also to tolerate extreme nationalism Toepfer apparently did not notice. He even found legitimacy in the talks of 1913 for his later European involvement aimed at preserving national and regional cultural diversity. A patriotic mood at least must have accompanied Alfred Toepfer and many other young Germans, who like him volunteered as a soldier, to the front lines of the First World War in August 1914. He soon became a lieutenant and later a company commander. Several wounds and decorations point to a high degree of readiness for action, which characterised him – to the point of restlessness – for his whole life. It was as a front-line officer that he then presumably developed his characteristic patriarchal and at the same time comradely leadership style, which he later also showed in the management of his enterprises. He was still emphasising the “soldierly core” of the enterprises in public in 1959.¹⁸

After the end of the war in 1919 Alfred Toepfer placed himself at the disposal of the volunteer Landesjägerkorps which on behalf of the government of the German republic was to protect the national assembly in Weimar and which put down left-wing radical uprisings in middle Germany. In 1920 he established himself as a grain and feed merchant. In his wartime comrade Carl Trautwein (1885-1936) he found a partner who as a lecturer in political economics was well versed in financial and tax matters.¹⁹ Together they achieved success at a speed they can scarcely have hoped for. In 1922 Toepfer married in keeping with his current circumstances as a successful young businessman. It seems that for several years the family and the firm encompassed the important aspects of life for the now almost thirty year-old man.

A series of evidence then dates from 1925 to 1927, pointing to a new life plan. The death of his first son at the age of two and the taking over of sole management of the company at the end of 1925 might have been reasons for Toepfer to concentrate more on public work than on business and family life. From 1926 he introduced social security benefits such as had hitherto at best been known in large companies like the Zeiss works in Jena. From 1927 he declared in letters and wills that his life’s goal was not the acquisition of family wealth. In retrospect he once spoke of a “new social thinking” that he had wanted to encourage with his attitude. His interest in the culture of the borderland and expatriate Germans is attested from 1928. The first big donation was for the building of a youth hostel in North Schleswig, ceded to Denmark in 1919. That this and other hostels endowed and planned by him reflected a political programme aimed at the revision of the Versailles Treaty as well as a greater Germany that included Austria and Alsace was demonstrated unmistakably by slogans selected by Toepfer and the pictorial decoration paid for by him.

It is still not completely clear what motives moved Alfred Toepfer to become a foundation sponsor. Cecil Rhodes was mentioned repeatedly as an example in his milieu in the thirties: Toepfer had heard of his foundation in 1925.² Only gradually did the preconditions for setting up tax-advantaged charitable foundations apparently become clear to him. In 1930 he took legal advice. Whether the “LMK” or “Langemarck” assets lying in an Amsterdam bank account since the mid-twenties, which were later seen as foundation assets credited to the Johann Wolfgang Goethe (J.W.G.) foundation in Vaduz/Basel, were really deposited as the capital for a foundation is so far beyond precise knowledge. What is verifiable is that Toepfer saw himself faced with many challenges as he came closer to the thought of investing his assets in foundations with legal capacity: in the first place high state tax demands relating to the previous years, in the second increasingly strict controls since 1930 on income earned abroad and deposited there, and in the third the retirement of Carl Trautwein from his remaining post as limited partner in the firm at the end of 1930. Part of the Amsterdam investments were used from the end of 1928 to finance the founding of the firm of Ernst W. C. Toepfer, New York, at the head of which Alfred Toepfer placed his brother. He later, when the question of disposition over the profits arose, showed little interest in the total dependence of his company on foundations.

The manoeuvre of giving up title of ownership to the capital earned, without giving up the right of disposition over it, must have played an important role for Alfred Toepfer. What is striking at any rate is the coincidence of the setting up of the foundations with the transfer of ACT to the sole ownership of Alfred Toepfer. And it is striking that Toepfer acquired large farms and estates for the foundations. They must initially have demanded more investment than any profits they yielded. Toepfer justified their purchase primarily as securing the foundation capital in real estate.²¹

Alfred Toepfer described the objectives of his F.V.S. and J.W.G foundations, set up in 1931, as being the cultural promotion of Germanity beyond the borders. This promotion was at the same time intended to serve the peaceful unification of Europe, which for Toepfer, as he repeatedly emphasised, must be based on the cultural autonomy of the European peoples. The idea of the cultural autonomy of individual peoples in an encompassing political unity seems to have been so important to him that he also made it a standard for his assessment of the Soviet Union. He first visited it in 1925 and until 1932 saw in its economic system a conceivable model for a future Europe, where he considered the triumph of a revolution on the Russian model to be not impossible. At the same time he was also thinking along economic lines in 1931 with the support of the expatriate Germans, as public statements show: In view of the collapse of conventional world economic relations, with reference to slogans of the associations for the support of expatriate Germanity he pointed out the importance of the expatriate Germans in the reorientation of German foreign trade – an astonishing manoeuvre for a successful foreign business entrepreneur, which is what Toepfer had by now become.

From the political viewpoint Toepfer was evidently thinking of modelling his F.V.S. foundation on the associations for the promotion of expatriate Germanity: seats for their members were set aside on the board of the foundation. There was never any more than sporadic collaboration however, with the exception of the ceding of Schloss Kalkhorst to the Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland (people's association for Germanity abroad) (VDA) as a training place in 1935. This was also connected with the restructuring of the associations for the promotion of expatriate Germanity after 1933. In addition, Toepfer had always been interested above all in regions which were not at the centre of the associations' involvement. Toepfer followed Langbehn in having concentrated since 1928 on the "Nether Dutch Germanic" coastal strip from Gent to Königsberg. Silesia and West Prussia apparently never intensively interested him as a sponsor, as Alsace only did faintly at first, whereas Burgenland did so soon. The Austrian NSDAP was able to use Kalkhorst as a training place. Toepfer then built up a special relationship with the chairman of the association of expatriate German associations and of the Sudeten German party in Czechoslovakia, Konrad Henlein, whom he appointed in 1936 as member and chairman in the foundation councils of the F.V.S. and J.W.G.

The activities of the foundations, which only began on a wider scale in 1934, were substantially influenced by the professors (Gustav) Adolf Rein, vice-chancellor of Hamburg University from 1934 to 1938, and Friedrich Metz, vice-chancellor of Freiburg University from 1936 to 1938. Rein was, as it were, responsible for the "Nether Dutch Germanic" area and furthermore strengthened the F.V.S. foundation in the cultivation of German-English cultural relations. Metz, who had been dismissed from his professorship in Innsbruck in 1934 because of his activities for the NSDAP, recommended the cross-border Alemanic cultural area to Toepfer for promotion and ensured that Toepfer's foundations became more widely anchored than before in academic circles.²²

If one measures the foundation activities from 1935 against Toepfer's initial objectives, which he associated with the idea of his own foundations, some discrepancies arise which cannot so far be explained. Before he devoted himself to the promotion of expatriate German culture in the European context, he had among other things wanted to set up an "adult education college" for the training of a leadership elite – certainly not a strange idea given memories of the Youth Movement at the end of the twenties.²³ During the "Third Reich" after all he unmistakably supported its "home to the Reich" policy; there is even an extant initiative by him for the reclaiming of Alsace. However he evidently avoided the "corridor" problem and with it the German-Polish points of conflict, although when the problem became acute in 1938/39, his opportunities for action were limited due to an investigation procedure against him. But even the return of the Baltic and Bessarabian Germans in 1939, as well as that of the Volga Germans in 1941/42 did not apparently interest him, and the National Socialist extended area planning for Eastern Europe also was recognisably neither pursued by him nor even promoted.²⁴

To interpret these involvements, of which some complemented foreign policy moves of the "Third Reich", others only followed such moves and others again ultimately sought to set their own emphasis, one can first of all turn to motives Toepfer himself gives at the time. "I myself will perhaps find time soon for political things", he wrote to his partner Trautwein on 3 April 1930²⁵. Two months later, for the first time in eight years, "market reports" from ACT appeared again, which Toepfer now used to disseminate his views, which extended far beyond farming and the agricultural market, among his customers and business partners. He also published four pamphlets, of which only one, "Zur sozialen Frage. Ein Versuch" ("On the Social Question. An Attempt") (1932) has survived.²⁶ In 1933 Toepfer quickly realised that under Hitler's rule and especially in view of the Reichsnährstand (Reich nutrition level) (RNS) rapidly organised by Walther Darré, he could no longer permit himself ways of operating that the despised republic had allowed him. Not least the receipt of his company assigned to the RNS must have

persuaded him to come round, after he had exposed himself politically towards the new regime with an economically founded intercession in favour of the election of Jews to the board of the grain merchants' association in the Hamburg stock exchange in early 1933. It was in the agrarian sector that the centrally planned economy (Walter Eucken) dispensed most rapidly and perhaps most clearly with the liberal market economy, and Toepfer, who had until then been fond of extolling the economic liberalism of the Kaiser's Reich before 1914, explicitly bowed to the conditions that he could not influence. From 1949 he then again vehemently advocated the facilitation of grain imports from the USA under market conditions.²⁷

Attempts by Toepfer to make the new Reich leadership notice him through effusive public praise of their policies, so as to give him a leading involvement in the "national revolution", came to nothing. The same went for the offer, initiated by Ernst Toepfer, of a "plane donation" towards the clandestine setting up of a German air force, which Alfred Toepfer passed on via the Hamburg Gauleiter Karl Kaufmann in 1933. But not even in Hamburg, where Toepfer had not yet been admitted to the traditional businessmen's circles, was he able to establish a connection with the new political leadership. Only the chairman of the Hamburg branch of the VDA, the deputy mayor Wilhelm Burchard-Motz who came from the DVP and went over to the NSDAP in 1933, represented Hamburg politics in the foundation committees until 1942. Although in 1933 Toepfer was appointed chairman of the supervisory board of the state-owned Hamburger Freihafen- und Lagerhaus AG, he held the position with only small success until 1935, so later he almost never mentioned it.²⁸

A second attempt to succeed at Reich level also went back to an initiative of Ernst Toepfer's. At the end of 1936 he offered to endow 1 million Reichsmarks for the announcement of a German alternative to the Nobel Peace Prize, which had been awarded in 1935 to the Gestapo prisoner Carl von Ossietzky. Dealing with the practical implementation of this offer at the Reich propaganda ministry, although Alfred Toepfer did not support the initiative with his full efforts, shortly thereafter when he was detained he did use it as an argument to try and underline his loyalty to the National Socialist Reich leadership.

As Alfred Toepfer was negotiating this offer – ultimately without success – it was already known to him that his entrepreneurial and foundation activities were regarded with suspicion in various Reich and party bodies. Gestures of loyalty aimed at reducing this, among them the invitation to the "Führer's deputy", Rudolf Hess, to take on the patronage of the F.V.S. foundation, remained unsuccessful. This suspicion of National Socialist bodies towards him, and also a looming quarrel with his brother Ernst about the right of disposition over the assets earned in New York, must have induced Alfred Toepfer to reorganise his property. With effect from 1 January 1937 ACT was converted into a limited partnership in whose management Alfred Toepfer was not formally involved. As founder of the F.V.S. foundation, which became a limited partner, he was in fact granted fairly extensive rights in practical terms. In June 1937 Alfred Toepfer was then arrested on suspicion of infringement of currency laws. In detention he was then also investigated for treason in connection with the ("resistance") group around Ernst Niekitsch, who he had sponsored and with whom he had often had contact until 1933/34.²⁹

The detention ended in Alfred Toepfer ceding his "founder's rights" in May 1938 to the SS Obergruppenführer Werner Lorenz as head of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi), which now controlled the VDA. The "currency proceedings" were quashed in October 1939, but not until 1942 could Toepfer come into his founder's rights again, after Lorenz had declared that he had not exercised these in practice since 1938.

Alfred Toepfer was then apparently called up via personal contacts to the counter-espionage section of the German army – a situation which he also recorded as an act of reinstatement of his honour.³⁰ At about the time he took up his new job on the western front, a leaflet entitled "Westschau 1940" appeared, distributed anonymously but contemporarily attributed to him.³¹ His idea of "Nether Dutch Germanic" ties, held over many years, was outlined here as a programme for German policy after the possible military conquest of Flanders, the Netherlands and finally northern France. Toepfer's missions and tasks as a counter-intelligence officer in Paris, initially in the department of "sabotage and subversion in enemy states" and then in a department also dealing with clandestine arms procurement for the German Reich, still require further illumination. Hardly anything is known of any long-term effects of his occupation, which brought with it some contact with collaborators and autonomists. In contrast, Toepfer's subsequent occupation is exhaustively described in this volume. After some preparation, he worked as the head of "Stahlberg & Co. OHG", a state-owned trading enterprise disguised as a private company, with offices in Hamburg (in the ACT building) and in Paris. The company had the job of obtaining foreign currency for the Reich through exports from occupied France. Toepfer performed this task with initiative from the autumn of 1943 until it was passed on to a unit of a military organisation from May 1944. The share in the pillage of

France that thus fell to Toepfer through the German occupation policy can however hardly be calculated. That he knew of this pillage and that in support of the German war economy he still endorsed it until after the withdrawal from Paris is proven. On the other hand personal enrichment or advantages for the firm of ACT cannot be verified. Nor can long-term consequences be discerned for ACT resulting from connections established during the occupation period in particular with French, Spanish or Portuguese companies that Toepfer dealt with in 1943/44. After 1948/49 new partners were sought and found for the French business. Spain and Portugal remained outside ACT's preferred sphere of action. Even membership of the top managers' round of the "Europe group" in the armaments ministry, where "a European post-war programme under German leadership" was discussed in May 1944, later brought no verifiable profit for Toepfer and ACT.

His service in counter-espionage and special war economy detachments nevertheless took Alfred Toepfer on many journeys and thus provided him with both detailed information on the management at ACT – he sometimes even took a hand himself – and also an active involvement in the foundation activities, especially the prize giving ceremonies. He did always remain the "unnamed Hanseatic businessman" in this, as he had usually appeared in the thirties. Sometimes he also had his say as "Captain Toepfer".

Alfred Toepfer seldom said anything in public retrospectives about his behaviour in the "Third Reich", and as good as nothing about his activities in the Second World War. His remarks thus often did not go to the core of the proceedings he was describing. This applies in particular to his involvement in Alsace. Although he did not completely blank out his unsuccessful attempts to gain a favourable response from the National Socialist Reich leadership, he referred mainly to situations whose outcome could put him in a favourable light. In 1947 for example he told his employees that Reich propaganda minister Goebbels refused in 1943 to talk to him about his new concept of European culture prizes, using the argument that in 1937 the Gestapo had found "Das Kapital" by Karl Marx in the staff bookshop at ACT.³² With regard to the reasons and circumstances of his detention Toepfer often mentioned the "resistance" group around Niekisch.³³ That the painter A. Paul Weber, who belonged to this group, had decorated the youth hostels endowed by Toepfer as well as Kalkhorst with symbols of German nationalist revisionism according to his wishes only became known in the course of research for this volume. He also repeatedly emphasised the efforts of NSDAP bodies to take possession of the foundations³⁴, without addressing the persistence of the tax and customs search authorities who evidently performed their duty independently of party influence, so that in the end and after the intervention of the highest political bodies the proceeding was only quashed and did not end with the *nolle prosequi*.

Although Toepfer often gave information about the motives and circumstances of his practical foundation work, on the whole it was only fragmentary. He never addressed the above mentioned early project of the "adult education college" for "leadership" recruitment³⁵, and he mentioned his closeness to the VDA only once in 1947, trying to justify it with the remark that it had been a democratic and respectable republican association.³⁶ The fundamental role in establishing the first prizes played by his confidant Hans Friedrich Blunck as president of the Reichsschrifttumskammer, the state writers' organisation, remained unelucidated. The "plane donations" and anti-Nobel Peace Prize episodes were never mentioned, nor were the efforts to win the "Führer's deputy" Rudolf Hess, as "patron" of the foundation. If the courtship of Hess was motivated primarily by the endeavour to keep the foundation in Toepfer's disposition, the strange request formed part of a series of attempts to establish contact with prominent people in the NSDAP, among them in 1936 Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. Toepfer also usually left it unsaid that the foundation activities, at least in terms of the prize giving ceremonies during the war, were tolerated by the propaganda ministry when not actually coordinated with it, and stayed within the bounds of culture promotion which was seen there as opportune and generally controlled separately. To point this out however would have detracted from the aura of the unique, latently resistant private foundation which the F.V.S. increasingly acquired after 1945.³⁷

The critical inventory of prize-winners up to 1945 only began towards the end of Toepfer's life, as political criticism of current prize awards became louder.³⁸ That the foreign prize-winners before and during the war at least harboured no antipathy towards Germany was obvious given the conflictive international situation.

This integration of the Toepfer foundations in the National Socialist regime on the one hand, and their effects in the international conflict configuration on the other, turns the question of exactly when Alfred Toepfer transformed his national political, tendentially culturally imperialistic culture prize concept into a programme that unquestionably focused on European cultural diversity into a primary biographical problem. His evident attempts since the turn of the war in 1943 at orientation towards Europe, following maxims of keeping the "alien" powers

of the Soviet Union and the USA away from this territory, were not original but corresponded to a variation of public foreign policy thinking tolerated by the German regime. Toepfer recognised early on the bridge into the future in the niche of “unpolitical” politics to some extent conceded to him, a bridge over which after 1945 both the vanquished and the victors then went. Nevertheless the foundation staff concerned with awarding prizes were after 1945 not infrequently reminded of the fact that the prizes distributed by them were German prizes. Particularly in the deliberations on the awarding of the Hanseatic Goethe prize related to German reorientation, which after 1949 was also awarded to non-Germans, the German past was present to some extent.³⁹ As during the war the constant consideration was who might be prepared to accept a German prize without fostering anti-German reservations in their country.

It may be irritating today not only that the foundation took up its work again immediately the assets placed under trust administration in 1945 were released, without recognisably answering for its work done up to 1945⁴⁰; according to Toepfer he was also urged by diplomats he met during his internment to carry on his prize-giving foundations, now including those for the promotion of peaceful European unity⁴¹. It is also above all remarkable that he did this with a foundation only slightly changed in its core personnel. Although in 1948 he deleted from the rules for internal use the passage concerning the promotion of Germanity abroad, he took advice on the new accentuation from Adolf Rein, his confidant since the mid-thirties, who at the time had been relieved of all his academic posts and honours. Rein remained active in central posts of the F.V.S. foundation until 1976.

In the case of the Goethe prizes awarded by Hamburg university, however, in the prize controlling board with the National Socialist past the representatives that came to the fore as members were non-incriminated or less incriminated.

At the same time however people came into Toepfer’s milieu who had associated themselves so strongly with the National Socialist regime that they were condemned by the Allies and on the German side categorised as “incriminated” in the de-Nazification process. Among them was Hans-Joachim Riecke, before the end of the war ultimately state secretary in the Reich food ministry and involved in the network of German military administrations jointly responsible for the starvation policy in the areas of former East Poland, Lithuania and White Russia.⁴² Riecke, who Toepfer first met in 1950 and who he initially employed in an executive post at the firm of ACT, rose in the sixties to the highest representative positions in the foundations.

At the firm of ACT at about the same time as Riecke several new employees were taken on who Toepfer knew from his service in counter-intelligence and who like himself had been through internment – for Toepfer in his 1956 public retrospective a stay in the “British concentration camp”.⁴³ In one case Toepfer mentioned their common past as “news officers” actually in the company newspaper.⁴⁴

Such statements make it clear that Toepfer very well remembered past situations and also his own politically relevant activities. However he avoided detailed self-critical analyses of the past. As a businessman and foundation sponsor, the present and the future were important to him above all, and shaping them required dealing with burdens from the past. When in early 1961 Adolf Eichmann was brought to court in Jerusalem, Toepfer wrote in the ACT in-house newspaper: “The Alsatian Albert Schweitzer and the Austrian Adolf Eichmann today stand as exponents of our people before the world. One of them deserves worldwide respect, the other the deepest disgust, which to a certain extent reflects on our whole people.” One might occasionally say that the “Versailles peace dictate of 1919 [...] conjured up the disruptions and consequences of the thirties down to monstrosities from hell like Adolf Eichmann”. This could, “if that is how it is, be a gruesome warning to future politicians, but in no way a justification for us before history. Let us thank fate doubly in these weeks of renewed deep mortification before the world that it gave us an Albert Schweitzer as a shining torch, showing the way to the future, by which we can orientate and straighten ourselves.”⁴⁵ Toepfer himself has tried to promote the working of Schweitzer’s example with the means at his disposal: The purchase of Schloss Klingenthal and its conversion to an international meeting place also goes back to this impulse.

His long-term intercession on behalf of the Alsatian “malgré nous” could be explained in a similar way, who from 1940 after the German occupation were resettled out of unoccupied France back to Alsace and forcibly recruited into the German army. They remained uncompensated after 1945 and in addition not infrequently discredited in their milieu. Whether his collaboration in the resettlement motivated him in this operation cannot be clarified; the Second World War for him was a non-repeatable German chance to unite Europe which was thrown away by the Reich leadership. In the case of the “malgré nous” he argued above all with the “justice gap” faced by these people, who apart from him have no influential advocate. The fact that in giving reasons for his compensation claims for them he also made use of historical images of Alsace familiar to him may have derived from

considerations of expediency; but as an argument or even motive for the settlement of the problem the historical images took second place.

If one is looking for purely personal motives for such work, it will be found not least in the desire for public recognition which Alfred Toepfer has found since the end of the forties not only in the Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg but also in the Federal German Republic as well as in prominent west European political circles. He repaid his home town for this with spectacular endowments. If in the increasing public allegations against him since the seventies especially from France he saw tendencies towards a “chauvinism” being brought to bear which was believed to have been overcome, although this was not wholly inaccurate, it did not go far enough to categorise the allegations as also being an expression of a new political culture with manifold reflexive connotations. Toepfer, now 80, and the advisers he surrounded himself with had hardly kept abreast of the pluralism of political value systems asserting itself even in the academic-scientific field. This situation points to another fundamental problem in the cultural involvement of Toepfer’s foundations: the high degree of personnel continuity in the foundation committees, built up from Toepfer’s usually unchanging assessment of the people called in to serve on them. With this continuity Toepfer secured not only his dominant position in the foundation structure as laid down in the rules, but also the permanent profiling of the foundation activities according to his sometimes no longer contemporary ideas and wishes. That Toepfer was capable of learning within the scope of his experience, education and values has been proved above all by his renunciation of his extreme nationalism of the thirties. This outstandingly successful businessman and charitable donor was never publicly called upon to revise his views further during his lifetime – a fact which should be taken into account in the political-historical assessment of his achievements after his demise.

- ¹ E.g. Mommsen, Hans/Grieger, Manfred: *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (The Volkswagen Works and Its Workers in the Third Reich). Düsseldorf 1996; Gregor, Neu: *Stern und Hakenkreuz. Daimler-Benz im Dritten Reich* (Star and Swastika. Daimler-Benz in the Third Reich). Berlin 1997.
- ² Schulze, Winfried/Oexle, Otto G. (Ed.): *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Historians in National Socialism). Frankfurt/M. 1999; Hohls, Rüdiger/Jarausch, Konrad H. (Ed.): *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Neglected Questions. German Historians in the Shadow of National Socialism). Stuttgart/Munich 2000.
- ³ *Ombres et lumières sur les fondations Toepfer* (Shadows and Lights on the Toepfer Foundations) (with contributions by Pierre Ayicoberry, Georges Bischoff, Lionel Boissou, Philippe Breton, Hans Rüdiger Minow, Leon Strauss, Alfred Wahl). Strasburg 1996 (MS).
- ⁴ Wahl, Alfred: *Des alliés actifs des nazis: Les nationaux-allemands. L’environnement politique et idéologique de Toepfer avant-guerre* (On the Active Allies of the Nazis: the Ethnic Germans. The Pre-War Political and Ideological Environment of Toepfer). In: *ibid.*, p. 13f.
- ⁵ Boissou, Lionel: *Le revers de la médaille. Commentaire critique de la biographie officielle d’Alfred Toepfer* (The Other Side of the Coin. Critical Commentary on the Official Biography of Alfred Toepfer). In: *ibid.*, p. 7-10, p. 7.
- ⁶ Wahl: *Toepfer* (as in Note 4), p. 14.
- ⁷ Breton, Philippe: *Le mécanisme d’influence des réseaux Toepfer: La Stratégie du précédent* (The Mechanisms of Influence of the Toepfer Networks: The Strategy of Precedent). In: *ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁸ Wahl, Alfred: *Nul ne pourra invoquer l’ignorance* (Nothing Can Invoke Ignorance). In: *ibid.*, p. 57.
- ⁹ Interpellation Ueli Mäder of 12 April 1999. Mäder, a private lecturer in sociology at the University of Basel, also addressed the fact that Alfred Toepfer had received an honorary doctorate from the University of Basel in 1973. Mäder referred to a programme on Basel local television on 17 March 1999 which took Lionel Boissou’s allegations as its starting point.
- ¹⁰ Fahlbusch, Michael: *Wissenschaft im Dienst der nationalsozialistischen Politik? Die “Volksdeutschen Forschungsgemeinschaften” von 1931-1945* (Science in the Service of National Socialist Policy? The “Ethnic German Research Associations” from 1931-1945). Baden-Baden 1999, p. 788. Critically on this Peter Schöttler’s collective discussion under the title “Einsatzkommando Wissenschaft” (Science Task Force) in *Die ZEIT*, 12 August 1999.
- ¹¹ All that is described is that after the mass shootings of Jewish populations in the Ukraine, inventories were taken of resettlements and these had been processed in Berlin. This supplied the proof, as is cautiously stated, “that the *Volksforscher* (ethnic researchers) were directly [sic] informed about the development of Jewish annihilation in the Ukraine even if they were not involved themselves” (p. 609). In the summary this becomes an “indirect involvement in the Holocaust” (p. 795).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

- ¹³ The following text is based principally on studies collected in this volume. Individual evidence is therefore largely dispensed with.
- ¹⁴ The work was first published in 1945 under the title “Der Friede. Ein Wort an die Jugend Europas und an die Jugend der Welt” (Peace. A Word to the Youth of Europe and the Youth of the World); further individual publications followed in 1948, 1965, 1985 (distributed by Alfred Toepfer); Toepfer also included the work in the appendix to his “Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben 1894 bis 1991” (Recollections from My Life 1894 to 1991) (privately printed). Hamburg 1991, p. 164-178. On the creation and the context in which Jünger categorised his work, see Jünger, Ernst: Ausgehend vom Brümmerhof. (From the Brümmerhof) In: Ideen und Taten. Alfred Toepfer zum 80. Geburtstag (Ideas and Actions. To Alfred Toepfer on His 80th Birthday). Hamburg 1974, p. 71-88, esp. p. 80ff.
- ¹⁵ Zimmermann, Jan: Die Kulturpreise der Stiftung F.V.S. von 1935 bis 1945. Darstellung und Dokumentation. (The Culture Prizes of the F.V.S. Foundation from 1935 to 1945. Presentation and Documentation) Hamburg 2000, Introduction.
- ¹⁶ In his recollections (as in Note 14, p. 14f.) Alfred Toepfer does not mention a Langbehn lecture during his Wandervogel period, but in passing in an interview with the daily paper Die WELT of 10 July 1989 entitled “Ich bin kein Weltverbesserer – ich lebe bewußt” (I’m not a do-gooder – I live deliberately).
- ¹⁷ Toepfer: Erinnerungen (Recollections) (as in Note 14), p. 14f., as well as in the appendix: Breuer, Hans: Herbstschau 1913 (Autumn View 1913) (p. 159-161) and Toepfer’s foreword to a publication about the Youth Movement from 1977 (p. 161f.).
- ¹⁸ Toepfer, Alfred: Erinnerungen zum 10. November 1959 (Recollections on the 10 November 1959). In: Alfred C. Toepfer, Hamburg, Hauszeitung (In-House Magazine), Yr. 8, No. 7, October 1959, p. 119-121, quot. p. 120.
- ¹⁹ Carl Friedrich Georg Trautwein, born in 1885 in Hornberg i. Baden, gained his doctorate in political science in 1912 with a study “Über Ferdinand Lassalle und sein Verhältnis zur Fichteschen Sozialphilosophie” (On Ferdinand Lassalle and His Relationship to Fichte’s Social Philosophy) (Jena 1913). From 1 September 1912 to 30 April 1914 he worked as a “Wissenschaftlicher Hilfsarbeiter” (scientific assistant) in the Hamburg Kolonialinstitut (colonial institute) and in the summer semester of 1913 gave a course on “Financial Science with Particular Reference to Taxing”. From 1 May 1914 to 31 July 1914 he was an employee of the Hamburger Gesellschaft für Wohltätigkeit (Hamburg Charity Society). From 1 May 1919 until 30 September 1920 he worked again in the Kolonialinstitut and Hamburg University and gave courses in the areas of economics, public finance, money and credit (StA Hamburg, 361-6 Hochschulwesen, Dozenten-und Personalakten, IV 1705, und Dozenten- und Personalakten, II 458: Akten betr. Die Vorlesungen von Dr. Trautwein).
- ²⁰ On Cecil Rhodes’ foundations see Rotberg, Robert L: The Founder. Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power. New York 1988.
- ²¹ The assumption that the Toepfer concern had “procured itself a crisis-free base for its grain and feed business” – thus Roth, Karl Heinz: Alfred Toepfer, Großkaufmann, Kulturimperialist und Kriegstreiber (Alfred Toepfer, Big Businessman, Cultural Imperialist and Warmonger). A document from 1937. In: 1999. Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts (Periodical for the Social History of the 20th and 21st Centuries) 14 (1999), V. 2, p. 110-129, quot. p. 118 – at the time of the deepest agrarian depression is not substantiated or substantiable by anything.
- ²² See the biographical information in the article “Mitglieder der Leitungsgremien der Stiftung F. V. S.” (Members of the Management Committees of the F.V.S.).
- ²³ On the discussion on the Youth Movement leader of these years see Gründel, E. Günther: Die Sendung der jungen Generation. (The Mission of the Young Generation) Munich 1932.
- ²⁴ A note from Roth, Karl Heinz: “Generalplan Ost” – “Gesamtplan Ost”. Forschungsstand, Quellenprobleme, neue Ergebnisse (“General Plan East” – “Total Plan East”. State of Research, Root Problems, New Results). In: Rössler, Mechthild i.a. (Ed.): Der “Generalplan Ost”. Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik (The „General Plan East“. Main Lines of National Socialist Planning and Extermination Policy). Berlin 1993, p. 25-117, here p. 89, Note 163, is misleading.
- ²⁵ ATArch, VIII, 11 a: Alfred Toepfer to Carl Trautwein, 3 April 1930.
- ²⁶ The titles of the others were Chaos – Economic Reflections on Recent Times (1931); Crisis and Enterprise (year of publication unknown); On the Question of Guilt (year of publication unknown).
- ²⁷ Documents in ATArch, VI, 3a.
- ²⁸ ATArch, VIII, 3a: Alfred Toepfer to prosecutor August Jauch, 2 July 1937 (transcription)
- ²⁹ Zimmermann, Jan: Die Kulturpreise der Stiftung F.V.S. bis 1945 (The Culture Prizes of the F.V.S. Foundation to 1945). Thesis. Hamburg 1995, p. 80

- ³⁰ See i.a. ATArch, II, 1 a: (Notarised declaration by) Alfred Toepfer, To Whom It May Concern, 10 January 1942. In September 1939 he had received written confirmation that the investigative procedure “has shown no circumstances which would stand in the way of your employment as an officer of the Wehrmacht”.
- ³¹ Thus in the Katalog der Deutschen Bücherei (Catalogue of the German Library) in Leipzig.
- ³² ATArch, VI, 2j: Fragment of the manuscript for Alfred Toepfer’s speech on the company birthday, 10 November 1947.
- ³³ Cf. Toepfer: Erinnerungen (Recollections) (as in Note 14), p. 48.
- ³⁴ Cf. e.g. the Urkunden zur Verleihung der Freiherr-vom-Stein-Medaille in Gold an Gustav Adolf Rein und Friedrich Metz in Preisträger-Treffen 1965 (Records on the Awarding of the Freiherr-vom-Stein Gold Medal to Gustav Adolf Rein and Friedrich Metz). Ed. by the Hamburg F.V.S. foundation. [Hamburg 1965], p. 13f.
- ³⁵ In a report possibly distributed in the USA since the end of 1948 the plan of setting up a “‘Volkshochschule’ (Public School for Higher Education)” was mentioned (ATArch, VIII, 11a: An Abbreviated Report about Mr. Alfred Toepfer, his commercial enterprises and his foundations, p. 2).
- ³⁶ As in Note 32.
- ³⁷ As in Note 34.
- ³⁸ E.g. Michelides, Christian (Ed.): Memorandum über die Stiftungen des Alfred C. Toepfer und deren Zusammenarbeit mit der Universität Wien (Memorandum on the Foundations of Alfred C. Toepfer and their Collaboration with the University of Vienna). 3rd edition Vienna 1991 (Komitee zur Rettung des Grillparzer-Preises (Committee for the Saving of the Grillparzer Prize) 20).
- ³⁹ Hornfeck, Susanne: Der Hansische Goethe-Preis 1949-1999 (The Hanseatic Goethe Prize 1949-1999), Hamburg 1999 (Akzente für Europa (Accents for Europe)).
- ⁴⁰ In 1951 Alfred Toepfer did not consider a representation suggested by Oscar Toepfer of the history of the F.V.S. foundation to be appropriate. ATArch, VIII, 9f, Reg. a: Bericht über die Jahressitzung des Stiftungsrates am 6. Dezember 1951 im Gästehaus der Stiftung (Report on the Annual Meeting of the Foundation Board on 6 December 1951 in the Foundation Guest House), 11. December 1951. In the sixties Gabrielle Müllhäusler, a member of the foundation staff, put together a record of the prizes awarded and prize winners up to 1945.
- ⁴¹ Alfred Toepfer in an interview, Hauszeitung, Sonderausgabe zum 90. Geburtstag von Alfred Toepfer (In-House Magazine, Special Edition on the 90th Birthday of Alfred Toepfer), 13 July 1984, quot. after copy in Toepfer: Erinnerungen (Recollections) (as in Note 14), p. 269.
- ⁴² For biographical information see article “Mitglieder der Leitungsgremien der Stiftung F.V.S.” (Members of the Management Committees of the F.V.S. Foundation).
- ⁴³ Toepfer, Alfred: Wilhelm Haartje zum Gedächtnis.(In Memoriam) In: Alfred C. Toepfer, Hamburg, Firmenzeitung (Company Magazine), Yr. 5, No. 5, August 1956, p. 78. Haartje was, as Toepfer wrote, “interned as a former member of the SS”.
- ⁴⁴ Toepfer, Alfred: Kurt Haller. In: Alfred C. Toepfer, Hamburg, Hauszeitung (In-House Magazine), Yr. 9, No. 12, March 1961, p. 234f. The employment of Edmund Veesenmayer at ACT (1953-1955), who played an important part in the deportation of Hungarian Jews, did not as far as can be determined stem from acquaintance with Alfred Toepfer since his **counterintelligence** or internment days.
- ⁴⁵ Toepfer, Alfred: Erinnerungen an Albert Schweitzer (Memories of Albert Schweitzer). In: Alfred C. Toepfer, Hamburg, Hauszeitung (In-House Magazine), Yr. 10, No. 1, April 1961, p. 3. Eichmann was actually born in Solingen, but grew up in Austria.