

Germany

Publicly funded librarians impose their world view on readers by an index of dangerous books

by Norbert Häring*



Norbert Häring.
(Picture ma)

(CH-S) In Germany, the “addiction” to censor public opinion is still gathering pace, whereas in Switzerland, thank God, it has not been as strong so far. Although there are forces here that want to emulate Germany and the EU in this respect – keyword “Digital Services Act” – they have been somewhat curbed so far. Elon Musk – whatever one may think of him – has already created a strong headwind and stirred up the censorship miasma. However, the trend towards opinion restriction is continuing in Germany, as Norbert Häring shows using the example of public libraries.

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The German librarians have an “expert circle” that lists books that should be provided with warnings. These are intended to ensure that library users do not believe any theses that leave the acceptable opinion corridor for those in government and the zeitgeist. How a professional organisation uses taxpayers’ money to promote its own political preferences is more than questionable.

A user of the Münster City Library and reader of this blog wanted to know from the library why some books have stickers on the first page with the following content:

“This is a work with controversial content. The content of this work may not be compatible with the principles of a democratic society. This copy is provided based on the freedom of expression and information and the freedom of censorship and opinion.”

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Anna Amalia Library in Weimar. It is an incredible presumption to tell citizens what to think about books.
(Picture ma)

You feel you must apologise for having the books in question in your programme and you advise users to take a particularly critical view of the authors’ theses because they are outside the mainstream of the political spectrum. This is expressed by pointing out that the book may be incompatible with unspecified principles of a democratic society.

The written response stated that while libraries also felt “committed to freedom of expression”, this was followed by a big but:

“However, public libraries also have an educational mandate to fulfil, which means that they have to take a stand when sources in books are not verifiably correctly researched, [...] or when books spread fake facts and theories (primarily in the medical field regarding controversial treatment methods).”

The librarians thus hold the unscientific view, popular with censors of all kinds, that there is an objectively ascertainable truth in medical treatments and other scientific controversies; one that even a librarian without relevant scientific training can recognise as such.

When you consider what was once regarded to be medical and scientific consensus, such an anti-scientific attitude is truly alarming. The notion that deviating from the (published) con-

sensus in medical or other scientific matters is “incompatible with the principles of democratic societies” is a very idiosyncratic interpretation of what constitutes a democratic society.

This is all the more worrying given that the main digital information media, *Google*¹ and *Wikipedia*,² as well as the main social media platforms, have been going down this slippery slope for some time, giving massive preference to officially approved opinions and information over those that differ, with the result that the latter can often hardly be found on Google and only in a one-sided, discrediting context on Wikipedia.

The case of Jacques Baud

The reader also asked specifically why the sticker was attached to the book “Putin: Herr des Geschehens?” (“Putin: Game Master?”) by *Jacques Baud*. Indeed, one wonders why this analysis of the Russia-Ukraine conflict should be incompatible with the principles of a democratic society. The description of the German translation of the book by the *Verlag Westend* states:

“Based on documents originating mainly from the US, Ukraine, the Russian opposition and international organisations, this book presents a factual look at reality and opens the door to a more reasonable and balanced assessment of the war in Ukraine.”

The library responded by saying that several employees were involved in classifying books and deciding whether to add warnings. In the case of Baud, they followed “the recommendation of the library discussion service”. So, there is a central service that recommends that librarians warn readers against uncritical reading of certain books. The following quote is taken from this recommendation:

“J. Baud analyses media from different countries in relation to their coverage of the war in Ukraine. He checks quotes, compares sources and cites evidence that points to dubious journalism. His objective view differs from many other publications.” (Source: *EKZ Medienwelten*, as of 9 December 2024)

Because Jacques Baud’s “objective view” differs from that of many other publications, the BIB feels called upon and justified in publicly suspecting the author and book of being anti-democratic. This is – with respect – totalitarian and no longer far removed from the Catholic Church’s list of banned books, the *Index Lib-*

rorum Prohibitorum,³ or the GDR’s poison cabinets for books from the class enemy.

The chief inquisitor of the BIB

The body that feels called upon and presumes to decide what is scientific truth and correct political attitude is called the *Professional Association of Information Libraries* (BIB) and is based in Hamburg. Apparently, this professional association of librarians sees it as part of its statutory service⁴ “to develop the library and information system” to create an index of books with undesirable theses.

Perhaps members have an opinion on this. Perhaps some municipalities will also develop an opinion when they learn that librarians are using taxpayers’ money to finance their work to impose their (non-right-wing) political and ideological opinion on readers. The website of the relevant BIB project, *Media on the Margins*, provides an email address⁵ where you can send suggestions to the BIB.

The kind of people who belong to the group that makes nationwide recommendations to librarians about which books the interested public should be warned about is striking. The BIB has a *circle of experts on “media on the margins”* who look at potentially inopportune books and make recommendations if necessary. One of the six members introduces himself as follows:⁶

“*Christian Meskó* is interested in this from a library, information and political science perspective, as well as from a historical and literary point of view. He aims to deconstruct the facades of late capitalist societies, which are often presented as having no alternative, into their individual parts in a self-deprecating recitation contest of coolness, sex, violence and narcissistic demonstrations of power.”

Another member is Professor *Tom Becker*, who trains librarians at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences and is thus able to instill an understanding in the next generation for their future task of protecting readers with limited powers of judgement from the temptations of ideologically questionable theses. The inquisitor project team describes the objectives of their project as follows:⁷

“Media on the margins’ not only deals with (political) literature at the right margin but also takes up media that can be controversial in terms of their acquisition, from picture books to medical non-fiction, from music CDs to religious-esoteric publications. The contributors

hope to be able to provide their colleagues with the much-requested orientation in the controversial discussion of ‘media on the margins’ and to contribute to a well-founded judgement of controversial works.”

Even though my heart beats on the left, I am convinced that it is incompatible with democratic principles for an association of tax-financed librarians to single-handedly examine political literature from the “right wing” for “ideological justifiability”, i.e. compatibility with their ideology, and to impose a pejorative judgement on library users.

The website contains a “specialist debate⁸ on how to deal with right-wing works”, but nothing about how to deal with left-wing works. The further literature,⁹ which is cited, mentions “right-wing populist”, “right”, “right-wing publishers” and other terms with the political position “right” 14 times in the title. “Left” does not appear as such. And yet the world has also had very bad experiences with inhuman left-wing totalitarianism. *Stalin, Pol Pot* and *Mao* come to mind.

A student’s recommendation of censor as a role model

On the project’s website,¹⁰ a review of “Corona Fehlalarm?” (“Corona False Alarm?”) by biochemistry professor *Karina Reiss* and medical microbiology professor *Sucharit Bhakdi* is highlighted as an example of the services provided by the expert circle to librarians seeking advice – in fact, it is the first and most prominent example.¹¹ The book was at the top of the non-fiction bestseller list for a long time.

The reviewers are two students of Professor Tom Becker at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences. The fact that he believes that a review of this quality and content can be published as a recommendation to all German librarians, and even be highlighted as exemplary, says a great deal about the project: namely, that it is only about the right attitude and that freedom of expression is secondary to this. The two students’ concluding recommendation is:

“For the reasons mentioned and the opinions of other authors listed, the book can be categorised as ‘media on the margins’; a purchase from a library should be thoroughly checked. It is advisable to provide a detailed contextualisation here. In doing so, you could include references in the book, e.g. consisting of a QR code or reliable sources that refer to scientifically sound reviews or statements from medical institutions.”

This is justified by the fact that:

- the government is blamed for “a large part of the blame for the pandemic” and it is claimed that it is a “media epidemic”, which the medical student body of the University of Kiel criticised in a statement;
- the effectiveness of the mask requirement is being questioned, to which a hygienist responded very critically in an article on *t-online*;
- a well-respected and well-known Charité researcher is demoted to the simple “Mr Drossten” in the book;
- “various and probably also legitimate aspects of the pandemic are usually only treated from one perspective”, which leads to criticism of the government and various scientists, which the biochemistry student council at the University of Kiel has criticized;
- the number of sources listed is so large that they cannot be properly viewed and checked for quality by the reader – that is, the reviewer;
- that “the general public could place their trust in the authors as scientists with a doctorate”, but that it was “more of a critical treatise”;
- “the title should arouse curiosity and attract a wide audience.”

It is far from my intention to criticise or expose the two student reviewers. They have certainly worked in the way their professor taught them. Otherwise, Professor Tom Becker would not publish their work as an example on the BIB project website *Media at the Margins*. My criticism is directed more at Professor Becker and his self-important colleagues in the expert circle and an association that set up and allowed this circle to take its course.

My suggestion: discuss this with the BIB, especially if you are a member there, with the person in charge of your local city library, insofar as similar events take place there, and with the committees and politicians responsible for the city library in the local authorities. If someone were to provide me with a list of books recommended by the BIB for warning or non-acquisition, I would be happy to publish it.

Source: <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/berufsverband-information-biblio/>, 15 December 2024

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

¹ <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/youtube-medical-misinformation/>

² <https://norberthaering.de/propaganda-zensur/wikipedia-klimawandel/>

³ <https://www.proverbia-iuris.de/index-librorum-prohibitorum/>

⁴ https://www.bib-info.de/fileadmin/public/Dokumente_und_Bilder/BIB-Der_Verband/AGBs_Satzung_GO-etc/BIB_Satzung_NOV_2024_BL_2.pdf

⁵ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern>

⁶ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern>

⁷ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern>

raendern

⁸ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern/fachdebatte/umgang-mit-rechten-werken>

⁹ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern/weiterfuehrende-literatur>

¹⁰ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern>

¹¹ <https://www.bib-info.de/berufspraxis/medien-an-den-raendern>