

Hans Coppi, Sabine Kebir: Ilse Stöbe. Wieder im Amt. Eine Widerstandskämpferin in der Wilhelmstrasse [Ilse Stöbe – Back in the Office. A Resistance Fighter in the Wilhelmstrasse]. Mit einem Vorwort von Juliane Bussemer und Wolfgang Gehrcke, Hamburg, VSA, 2013. 215 pp. – ISBN 9783899655698.¹

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Ilse Stöbe (1911-1942) was until recently considered the most controversial of the German opponents to the Nazi regime. As a journalist, and then as a secretary in the German Foreign Office, she constantly warned, under the code name “Alta”, the Soviet Military Intelligence of the planned German attack against the Soviet Union. She was caught, brought to trial and finally executed. Her mother and half-brother, who also participated in the resistance movement, were likewise killed. The Munich-based Institute for Contemporary History (IfZ) submitted in 2013 a report to the then-foreign minister Guido Westerwelle urging him to honor Ilse Stöbe as a resistance fighter. It took until 2014 before such decision was finally made, since conservative forces insisted that she betrayed secrets to another dictatorial regime, that of Stalin. This must be seen within the context that the German Foreign Office was in the postwar years a hotbed of former Nazi officials. A report that was published in 2010 showed that quite a lot of them had played an important role in assisting war crimes. Only after its publication the Foreign Office expressed its “shame” about the participation of German diplomats in these atrocities. A biography of one of the few officials who resisted the Nazi regime was, therefore, a necessity. Sabine Kebir, sociologist and writer, and historian Hans Coppi, son of two murdered anti-Nazi resistant-fighters, present now a highly readable book that sheds some light on the life of Ilse Stöbe, even though most of the Russian sources were inaccessible to the authors.

Ilse Stöbe was born in Berlin in a working-class family. At the age of nineteen, the idealistic-minded and good-looking woman was recruited for the Soviet Military Intelligence, the GRU (*Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie*) by her then-partner Rudolf Herrstadt. As a journalist she worked for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, was closely associated with its editor-in-chief, Theodor Wolff, and later became a correspondent for various German newspapers in Warsaw. Following the order of her Soviet superiors, she joined the Nazi Party and traveled widely in Eastern Europe in order to investigate the political and economic situation of German minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1936 she fell in love with the Swiss publisher Rudolf Huber who left her most of his fortune after his unexpected death in 1940. She then worked for the Foreign Office and lived in Berlin with her last partner, Carl Helfrich, until the Gestapo caught her on 12 September 1942. She was interrogated for seven weeks and appeared to have been tortured. According to the Gestapo files she was compelled to confess to certain activities of Rudolf von Scheliha, a senior official at the Foreign Office who also worked for the Soviet Union (see pp. 83-84). Together with him, she was executed on 22 December 1942 in Plötzensee.

¹ An online edition is available at https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/sonst_publicationen/VSA_Coppi_Kebir_Stoebe.pdf. A second edition of the book, featuring prefaces by Gregor Gysi and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has been published in 2015.

Ilse Stöbe's clandestine work was, for a long time, overlooked in West Germany, but the East German authorities also kept silence: Rudolf Herrnstadt became, in 1953, Walter Ulbricht's chief opponent within the Party. He pledged for a less dictatorial policy than the harsh line that had evoked the workers' revolt of 17 June 1953 in East Germany. While, even today, voices in the West argue that she started to work for the Soviet dictatorship when Germany was still a democratic republic, the East German regime did not want to mention Herrnstadt's name after he was dismissed from all political positions and fell in disgrace in July 1953. However, without Herrnstadt Ilse Stöbe's life would have been a different one.

Hans Coppi and Sabine Kebir argue that there were only a few out-and-out democrats among those who resisted Hitler, also among the plotters around Count Stauffenberg. But it was Nazi Germany that was responsible for the greatest mass slaughter in history that included the Holocaust. Every kind of resistance to that barbarous regime was justified and necessary, as the Western-Soviet alliance during the war showed. Ilse Stöbe participated in this resistance and paid with her life. Until now, only a vocational school in Berlin is named in her honor.