

*Engelbert Schwarzenbeck, Nationalsozialistische Pressepolitik und die Sudetenkrise 1938.*

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As its title suggests, this book, a 1979 dissertation from the University of Munich, is a two-part study. The first part is an in-depth description and analysis of NS *Pressepolitik*, its conception, organization and techniques. The objects of scrutiny include the Reichspropagandaministerium, the „Presseabteilung der Reichsregierung“, the „pressepolitische Apparat des Auswärtigen Amtes“, the „Reichspressestelle der NSDAP“ and, as a transition to the second part of the study, the Sudeten German press as well.

The author notes quite correctly, that, although the same jurisdictional and personal rivalries which beset the Nazi regime as a whole were present among the

various agencies dealing with propaganda and public enlightenment as well, these agencies had to remain under far stricter central control in order that the contradictions within the regime would not be mirrored in its organs of public expression and thus betrayed to domestic and foreign publics alike. The price that had to be paid for this strict control, however, was a uniformity and a lack of spontaneity that ultimately deprived *Pressepolitik* of much of its credibility both within and outside of the Reich, as part two of the study amply illustrates.

The second part of the study traces in great detail the ebb and flow of NS official propaganda at home and abroad with respect to the Sudeten problem, noting when and under what circumstances sharp attack would give way to mild disapprobation and cool distance to heated vituperation. The author's sound periodization follows the story in six chapters: from 1933 to 1937; from the Teplitz-Schönau incident to March 1938; from the Anschluß to May 1938; from the *Maikrise* to August 1938; from the Runciman mission to the Munich accord; and a concluding chapter on the post-Munich period.

His conclusion is that NS *Pressepolitik* had strict limits on its success, both at home and abroad. Initially it was successful in winning sympathy from the German people for the Sudeten German Autonomy movement, and to a more limited degree, for a Sudeten Anschluß later on. But *Pressepolitik* failed completely, except for some of the more fanatic party members and a large segment of the youth, to convince the German people that either of these goals was worth the price of war. Indeed, Nazi propaganda inadvertently managed during 1938 to create a war psychosis which turned many Germans against the regime. Ironically, the combination of demonstrable lies, lack of credibility and an information gap created a vacuum into which the foreign media, especially radio broadcasts, could move with some success, thus in part neutralizing Nazi propaganda among the German people.

Abroad, although NS *Pressepolitik* did register some early successes, particularly through skillful techniques such as lancing articles in the foreign press, in the end its vituperative nature, its excesses and its dual track approach — one for domestic, one for foreign consumption — deprived it of believability and helped to turn foreign public opinion against what gradually appeared to be Hitler's expansionist policies.

Schwarzenbeck's conclusions are, I think, basically sound and thoroughly documented. His research was exhaustive, encompassing virtually all of the available archival sources, a detailed scrutiny of the contemporary press as well as interviews with surviving Sudeten German journalists who were active at the time.

One critical observation might well be that the author has really written two studies, each of which could stand virtually alone and which are not as closely integrated as they might have been. His highly detailed description of the various agencies, their personnel and policies; his detailed chronicling of the Sudeten German press, including staff, circulation, readership, among other things, is very useful information to be sure, but not really necessary to the second half of the book where many of the characters do not again appear or do so only briefly in peripheral roles as the story of Nazi press manipulation and propaganda against

Czechoslovakia unfolds. Had the rivalries among the various party and governmental agencies involved with generating information been given the same free rein as was the case with other elements of the Nazi regime and had these rivalries played a major (instead of minor) role in the formulation of *Pressepolitik*, then the preconditions for a more integrated study would have been present. I also find that occasionally the author is not critical enough of his sources, particularly the interviewers, whose comments he tends to take at face value; that he often cites orders or directives without identifying the person who issued them, and that he makes too simple and brief the process by which the Sudeten German press became an unwitting tool of the Reich.

But these reservations aside, I find this study to be a valuable case study of the successes and limitations of NS *Pressepolitik* during one of the most crucial pre-war crises.