

Hans Bayer. *A Dog's Life*. Edited and Translated by Ray Miller, Jr. Lanham, NY, and London: University Press of America, 1993. Pp. 164. Cloth, \$48.50; paper, \$26.50.

David Welch. *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993. Pp. xiii, 203. Cloth or paper, \$35.00.

In its own way each of these books seeks to help us understand how and why ordinary Germans supported Hitler and the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. David Welch's book on the propaganda of the Third Reich offers us important insights into these questions. Unfortunately, Hans Bayer does not.

Hans Bayer's *A Dog's Life* is an autobiographical account of a young corporal who served in the Hitler Youth and the Waffen SS. Bayer was prompted to compose his memoirs in part by a sense of guilt after having seen the T.V. film *Holocaust* on German television. Written in 1979, the book found its way into publication through the efforts of two professors at Eastern Washington State, neither of whom are historians.

The editors, Ray Miller and John Toothman, admit that Bayer's account is not a great narrative, but they argue that its importance derives from the fact that it is a first person account by an "ordinary" German who represents one small example of how the Nazis "caught on." In their introduction and concluding "psychological commentary" the editors make much of Bayer's strict, even harsh upbringing. They use this to fit Bayer (and other Germans?) under the concept of "authoritarian personality" made popular in the 1950s as a way of explaining German support for Hitler and Nazism. Whatever the usefulness of this conceptual framework, we learn too little about Bayer to know if he fits.

There is little in Bayer's memories that help us to understand why ordinary people accepted and followed Hitler. He was an ethnic German raised in the politically contested Sudetenland. This was hardly typical of most Germans, but even aside from that, Bayer tells us very little about why he and other ethnic Germans turned against their Czech neighbors and relatives. Similarly, he sheds little light on why he joined the Hitler youth and later the Waffen SS, and even less on his involvement in them. Bayer is so apologetic and sarcastic—the editors more charitably call it ironic—about his entry and service that we get little insight about what he thought or felt at that time.

Nor does the narration of events tell us much. Written over thirty years after the events, the memoirs are a series of disconnected anecdotes put in chronological order. To listen to Bayer, neither he nor his units ever seemed to kill anyone. Only when he speaks about his capture by the Russians at the end of the war does he provide enough detail for us to become interested. Then he discovers that the Russians are not the uncivilized hordes portrayed in Nazi propaganda, but on the other hand he suggests that their POW camps were almost the equal to Nazi concentration camps. The latter he only claims to have become aware of after the American T.V. film *Holocaust* and subsequent visits to two of the Nazi camps. In this case, Bayer's proclaimed ignorance of Nazi atrocities and the holes in his narrative may be more revealing than what he says.

There are some redeeming virtues. We do get a sense of his feeling of powerlessness amid events that are being controlled by his "betters." The editors also provide a useful introduction to the organization of the S.S. and its military role during the war. But there is little else to justify reading this book.

In *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, David Welch analyzes the role of Nazi propaganda to explain how National Socialism was able to maintain a popular consensus over a twelve year period. To what extent, Welch asks, did the German people follow Hitler out of

fear or coercion, to what extent from consent? Welch believes that he can answer these questions in part by studying the nature, function, and effectiveness of Nazi propaganda.

Earlier studies of Nazi propaganda, Welch claims, focused on the nature and purposes of Nazi propaganda, while largely ignoring its reception by the German population. Welch's book intends to correct this void. His main contention is that while propaganda played an important part in mobilizing support for the NSDAP, propaganda alone could not have sustained the Nazi Party and its ideology over twelve years. Rather, when Nazi propaganda reflected the aspirations of the German people, it succeeded. When it did not, or when propaganda strayed too far from the daily realities of the German people, then it ran into indifference or opposition. Nazi propaganda, therefore, was as much about "confirming" as about "converting" public opinion.

This short book is divided into two major parts. The first part looks at the theory and organizational structure of Nazi propaganda. The longer second part intends to examine the differentiated reactions of the public to the major themes and campaigns of Nazi propaganda between 1933-1945. Welch is best at discussing Nazi propaganda from the top, its major themes and changing patterns from the perspective of the propaganda ministry. He is less effective when examining popular reaction to the propaganda campaigns. He frequently cites the two main sources for German public opinion of the period, the various Security Service (SD) reports and the underground reports from the Social Democratic Party, but the book does not make clear when the German population, or some important segment of it, truly consents to Nazi policy and, when it does, whether it is out of indifference, acquiescence, or endorsement.

There is little in this short book that will be new to specialists in the field, but there are several aspects that will be useful to college instructors and their students. Part one contains an excellent section on the nature and role of propaganda in general and of Nazi propaganda in particular. This part contains long quotes from Goebbels that are excerpted from speeches and writings included in full in the back of the book.

I found the chapter on "Propaganda and Public Opinion" in part two to be the most interesting and useful, even if it did not quite live up to its promises. In discussing the main themes of Nazi propaganda—a united national community, racial purity, and charismatic leadership—Welch offers us a clear and penetrating discussion of the bases of Nazi ideology. His notes for this chapter, and for the book's introduction, cite key articles and books on Nazi propaganda and on various other historical debates centering on Nazi Germany. His discussion of these debates and the bibliographical citations will be invaluable for both instructors and advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

The book ends somewhat incongruously with a postscript on the current historians' controversy in Germany that focuses on how to treat the Nazi regime within the context of German history and atrocities perpetrated by other regimes in the twentieth century. Like so much else in this book, it is clear and interesting, but one wonders whether it belongs here.

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Donna Harsch. *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. Pp. xiv, 398. Cloth, \$45.00.

In the 1928 Reichstag elections, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) won 29.8% of the vote and Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party (NSDAP) just 2.6%. But the German economic and political situation rapidly deteriorated, and in three elections between 1930 and 1932, the SPD's share dropped to 20.7%, while that of the NSDAP rose to 37.8%, before