

Johannes Hürter, **The German Foreign Office, the Nazi Dictatorship and the Holocaust. Critical Remarks about a Commission Report**

The Commission of Historians dealing with the German Foreign Office's Nazi Past has caused quite a stir with the book "Das Amt und die Vergangenheit" [The Foreign Office and the Past]. The substantive gain is however limited, for there has long been agreement among researchers that the Foreign Office was not "alien" to the Nazi system of government, instead contributing to the implementation of a racist policy of violence just like other state institutions. The supposed spectacular dimension of the book stems from the fact that it oversimplifies and exaggerates the role of the Foreign Service during the Nazi dictatorship, especially with regard to the persecution and extermination of the European Jews. The reduction in complexity mostly concerns three areas: 1. The diplomatic elite is described as an overwhelmingly homogeneous block of perpetrators without taking its transformation processes and inner differentiations into account (especially those after 1938). 2. The Foreign Office is ascribed with a major, sometimes even leading role in the Holocaust without consideration for the complex interrelationships and processes of the "Final Solution" as well as the responsibility of the main perpetrators. 3. Nazi persecution policy and the share of the Foreign Office in it is mostly limited to the Holocaust, while other mass crimes are neglected and actual foreign policy and its negative consequences remain excluded. On the whole the blanket and generalising interpretations of the commission report represent a clear setback for the efforts of research to accomplish a differentiated view of the National Socialist dictatorship and policy of violence. The fact that such simplifying accounts of Nazi history are so successful should not only worry researchers of contemporary history.

Kurt Bauer, **Hitler and the July 1934 Putsch in Austria. A Case Study on National Socialist Foreign Policy during the Early Phase of the Regime**

The coup attempt of the Austrian National Socialists on 25 July 1934 has so far mostly received attention in Austrian contemporary historiography, but not so much in German and international research. One of the main reasons is that the role of Hitler could not be clarified. The respective passages in the Goebbels diaries (published in 2005) together with reassessed previously known sources now allow for a new perspective on the background of the July Putsch. It is now apparent that it is highly likely that Hitler gave the order personally. He decided to strike at the Dollfuß regime at the same time that he decided to strike at the supreme SA leadership. On the domestic front Hitler wanted to open the path to taking over the office of Reich President after Hindenburg's foreseeable demise by using the *Röhm Putsch*; on the foreign policy front he hoped to disarm the "Austrian Question" by way of a Nazi Seizure of power, thus immediately drawing Italy to his side and avoiding the acute danger of France's "encirclement offensive".

Patrick Bernhard, **Concerted Action against Enemies in the Axis Alliance. The Police during the Third Reich and in Fascist Italy 1933 to 1943**

Repression and policing were among the main fields of Axis cooperation between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Based on the police treaty of 1936, this collaboration not only encompassed a large-scale exchange of information on political and “racial” adversaries and their persecution even far beyond the national confines of the two dictatorships. It also led to learning and radicalisation processes on both sides of the Alps in terms of political violence, militarization, and controlling the “imperial spaces” the two dictatorships conquered in Europe and Africa. This holds true especially for the German SA, the SS, and the Fascist militia, whose respective developments were in many ways intertwined with one another. Such convergences between both dictatorships demonstrate that the Nazi regime was not as independent, different or even “unique” as historiography has claimed so far. Rather in future the history of the Third Reich has to be seen and analysed to a far greater extent in terms of Italian Fascism. Only in this way will its true significance for the European history in the first half of the 20th century be properly established.

Bastian Hein, **Himmler’s Order. The Selection- and Entry Procedure of the General SS**

The Nazi Party’s *Schutzstaffel* called itself the “elite forces” of the “Führer” and considered themselves a “sworn community” of the most fanatic National Socialists. But it was also a mass organization to which more than 200.000 volunteers from all classes of German society belonged even prior to the Second World War. More than 90 percent of them were members of the so-called General SS, which in contrast to the SS security service (SD), the concentration camp guards and the combat units of the *Waffen-SS* has attracted only little scholarly attention. How did its elite pretensions and its social heterogeneity coexist? Bastian Hein offers a detailed description of the “Black Corps” application, selection and introduction process. He investigates to what extent the SS leadership was successful in enforcing its own racist criteria during this process and analyses the connection between these complex entry procedures and the fact that, in many of the Nazi’s mass crimes, Hitler’s willing executioners came from the ranks of the SS.

Andreas Malycha, **Unvarnished Truths. A Confidential Conversation between Gerhard Schürer, Chief Planner of the GDR, and the Stasi about the Economic Policy of the SED in April 1978**

The document provides testimony of a central conflict within the SED politburo during the 1970s. During a conversation between the chief planner of the GDR, Gerhard Schürer, and a Stasi officer in April 1978 the key problems of the economy of the GDR are discussed openly. So far such an internal perspective of the inner controversies regarding the macroeconomic and socio-political conditions of the GDR has only rarely been possible. The repercussions of the economic policy

changes of the VIII. party conference become apparent – as well as the discussions which subsequently arose in the politburo and among leading economic experts. Schürer was one of the politburo members advocating a revocation or correction of the expansive social policies and a curbing of the private consumption of the population in favour of productive investments. Despite the observable limits of economic performance and the deficiencies of the command economy, Honecker in contrast clung to his strategy of stabilising the rule of the SED by a social policy not really founded in economic realities. Obviously Schürer spoke with a leading Stasi officer in order to induce Honecker to undertake a change of course in economic policy through the Minister for State Security, Erich Mielke.



Silke Mende

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sondern vorn«**

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