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Ulrike Bartels. *Die Wochenschau im Dritten Reich: Entwicklung und Funktion eines Massenmediums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung völkisch-nationaler Inhalte.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004. 551 S. EUR 86.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-631-52570-8.

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Ulrike Bartels's work is a doctoral dissertation originally presented at the anthropological faculty of the University of Göttingen in 1996, and is the first in-depth examination of the *Wochenschau* programs during the Third Reich. Although commonly remembered as an essential element of National Socialist propaganda, the weekly newsreel (*Wochenschau*) programs have not previously been the object of academic inquiry. It seems that the media in the Third Reich have been largely ignored in academic studies of National Socialism: to date historical studies have focused mainly on feature films and (later) radio. Individual studies of the SS publication "Stürmer," the newspaper "Illustrierte Berliner Zeitung" and of documentary films are yet to be conducted. The propaganda units so important for the purposes of war propaganda have also only received marginal attention, and the work carried out by Dani Uziel on this topic has not yet been published.[1] An in-depth examination of visual propaganda utilizing the methodology of scholarship on images is also almost completely lacking.

Given this context, Bartels's work is groundbreaking. The thesis consists of two parts: the first part describes the inception of the German *Wochenschau* and its importance for National Socialist propaganda, grounding this information within a history of the development of the German film industry and its contemporary political context. In the second part, the focus turns to the weekly newsreel itself. In addition to a quantitative analysis of the topics covered in the shows, Bartels also highlights the selective information policies of the National Socialists. In four topic-focused appendixes (customs and traditions; rural life; the celebration of public holidays; German minority populations) that form the heart

of her work, Bartels examines the völkisch-nationalist perspective of the weekly newsreel in a systematic film analysis.

In the following brief review it will be possible to highlight only a few details of Bartels's work: part 1 provides a general overview of the film industry and its governmental regulation prior to 1933. As in many other areas after 1933 it was only a small step to secure the subordination of the film industry within the NS state. Within this context the role played by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, who repeatedly intervened to correct the *Wochenschau*'s propagandistic approach, is of central importance. Goebbels's obsessive attention to detail, as shown by his diary notes, is one remarkable aspect of this process. Of particular interest are the chapters in which Bartels examines how the National Socialists intentionally manipulated *Wochenschau* programs via narrative commentaries, music, the reconstruction of specific scenes, and the invention of fictitious atrocities and their visualization (pp. 105ff).

As Bartels emphasizes, it seems that the Führer paid a great deal of attention to the *Wochenschau* programs, and their importance grew during the course of the war as they became an instrument of war propaganda. The members of the propaganda units provided a constant supply of material forwarded by the Reich's Ministry of Propaganda to the firms producing the programs. However, the administrative responsibility for this process was a matter of intense debate and rivalry between the OKW and the Reich's Ministry for Propaganda right up until the end of the war. Goebbels, in any case, made clear stipulations as to what should and should not be shown. Images of fallen German soldiers, executions,

and deportations of Jews (and so on) were all forbidden.

The second part of Bartels's work is preceded by an overview of the surviving material: roughly 50 percent of the pre-war *Wochenschau* programs produced by Ufa and Deulingtonwoche have survived, whereas only a marginal share of the material produced by Fox and Bavaria/Tobis/Emelka remains. However, all 286 films of the standard *Wochenschau* newsreel have been archived. Bartels's quantitative analysis of this material brings to light an at first surprising result: in her comparison of the programs from 1932 to 1933/34 she finds that it is not the number of overtly political contributions which increased significantly, but those contributions focusing on "Customs and Traditions" (p. 290). In her film analysis of the *Wochenschau* segment "Cutting the Hay in the Bavarian Alps" (*Heumaht in den bayrischen Alpen*) Bartels demonstrates convincingly how the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* is enacted within the rural setting (pp. 306-307).

Bartels comes to a similar conclusion in her assessment of festivities and public holidays, concentrating her focus on the May Day celebrations, but also on rural festivities. In her study of the representation of German minority populations abroad Bartels draws on the *Wochenschau* films produced during the war years. These portrayals differ from other examples in that they are embedded in the racist criteria of National Socialist doctrine (pp. 456-457). In the aftermath of Stalingrad, credibility became a pressing issue: although Goebbels, who well understood the functioning of the media, argued for at least partially informing the public of the devastating defeat, Hitler blocked any attempt to do so. In spite of this decision, a shift in German war reporting did take place, away from the previous propagation of the seemingly unstoppable march of the Wehrmacht towards an emphasis on the virtues of martial heroism. Consequently more images of the front were shown and fewer of the achievements of the NS state within the Reich itself. Now it was the homeland and the front together that constituted the NS-*Volksgemeinschaft*. However, Bartels's hypothesis that the pre-war NS-*Volksgemeinschaft* enacted within the *Wochenschauen* was predominantly a community of blood-and-earth needs a more thorough investi-

gation. To this end the segments of the *Wochenschauen* concerned with entertainment, for example, would need to be examined.

Bartels's study is an empirically saturated and thorough examination of an important field of media disseminated NS propaganda. In this respect it is an element of an as yet unwritten history of media in the Third Reich; such a history would include and describe an array of media and their interconnections.

Nonetheless, several critical comments are in order: Bartels restricts her focus almost exclusively to her specific subject. A glance through the bibliography shows that her work fails to reflect upon contemporary research on National Socialism, media history, or more recent and differentiated concepts of propaganda. The cited work, *Geschichte griffbereit*, edited by Immanuel Geiss (2002), is an inadequate substitute for a consideration of the wide-ranging literature on NS-racism and *völkisch* politics. Much the same can be said for the study of media: Bartels restricts herself here also almost entirely to the field of film in the Third Reich, and also neglects to include the latest literature. This state of affairs is of course partially explained by the fact that eight years passed between the completion of her thesis and its publication.

One further weakness lies in the excessively detailed explanations of particular subjects, such as the history of the May Day celebrations. At this point and in many other places within the text, one would have wished for more careful editing. The third and final point of criticism concerns the author's failure to ground her text and thus the object of her study within a wider field of inquiry and in particular in the theories of more recent interdisciplinary media studies, which reflect more fully on the practices of media consumers. These critical comments detract only marginally from the importance of Bartels's work, however, which represents the first in-depth examination of one of the most important instruments of propaganda in National Socialist Germany.

Note

[1]. Dani Uziel, "Army, War, Society and Propaganda," (Ph.D. diss.: Hebrew University, 2003).

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