



Heike B. Görtemaker. *Ein deutsches Leben: Die Geschichte der Margret Boveri 1900-1975.* München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2005. 416 S. EUR 26.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-406-52873-6.



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Published on H-German (March, 2006)

A Female Journalist and the Third Reich

Margret Boveri (1900-75) was a well-known German journalist. In this beautifully written and carefully researched biography, Heike Görtemaker narrates the life of Boveri, best known perhaps for her eyewitness account of the destruction of Berlin in 1945. Görtemaker, concerned with offering a fair and honest treatment of Boveri's career as one of the few top female journalists in National Socialist Germany, devotes most of her book to Boveri's life and career in the Third Reich and its aftermath

The first part of the book narrates Boveri's elite family background and upbringing during the First World War and the Weimar Republic. Boveri initially trained as a teacher and obtained a doctorate in history under Hermann Oncken before she began a journalistic career, writing as freelancer for the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The second and most substantial part of the book begins with Boveri's first permanent job at the *Berliner Tageblatt* in 1933, which was previously owned by the Jewish Mosse family and, like most German newspapers, bought up by the National Socialists. The Nazis fired Jewish journalists and Boveri took over a vacancy. Al-

though Boveri never joined the National Socialist party, she became, as all practicing journalists had to, a member of the Reichsverband der deutschen Presse, a section of the National Socialist-controlled Reichskulturkammer. Boveri's aim was to become a foreign correspondent. After publishing occasional travel reports in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, she became the Stockholm correspondent for that newspaper in 1939, the year the Nazis bought it. They further marginalized the *Frankfurter Zeitung* before finally closing it down in 1943. Its employees lived with the constant threat that their paper would be banned by the government.

After the outbreak of war, Boveri became New York correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in late 1940. In her second section, Görtemaker sheds new light on Nazi foreign propaganda and on American perceptions of the Third Reich. While in the United States, Boveri never attacked the Nazis, publicly defended Nazi foreign policy and wrote propagandistic pieces about the shameless capitalist system of the United States. Görtemaker persuasively reveals that Boveri was not a National Socialist, but rather a German nationalist, as difficult as this differ-

entiation may be to understand. Interestingly, while in the United States, Boveri was in touch with German exiles like Carl Zuckmayer. Interned with other German diplomats and journalists after Pearl Harbor in a luxurious resort in West Virginia, she was allowed to return to Europe in May 1942 and became a correspondent in Lisbon and Madrid. After the Nazis closed the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1943, Boveri joined the staff of Goebbels's weekly *Das Reich* in Berlin, where she witnessed the end of the war.

Boveri wrote down her experiences of the Soviet occupation of Berlin in a letter to a friend that later formed the basis of her book *Tage des Überlebens*. In it, she focused almost exclusively on German suffering at war's end and spent a great deal of time on the harsh treatment of German civilians by Soviet soldiers, including the rape of German women. Like many Germans, Boveri subscribed to anti-Slavic stereotypes somewhat similar to Goebbels's anti-Bolshevik propaganda.

In the third and final section, Görtemaker discusses Boveri's attempts to come to terms with her own past (as a journalist who had after all supported the regime) and she considers German guilt more generally. Self-righteously, Boveri effectively refused to accept charges of guilt and rejected American attempts at denazification and reeducation in a rant published in December 1945 as *Amerikafibel*. In 1948, Boveri published her account of the trial against the leading Nazi diplomat Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Der Diplomat vor Gericht*. In it, she rejected the legitimacy of the International Military Tribunal at

Nuremberg, arguing that only those who had lived under the Third Reich had the right to judge. The publication of these pamphlets was significant, and reflected the widespread feeling that Germans in the 1940s and 1950s were not yet ready to come to terms with their Nazi past.

For the rest of her life, Boveri tried to cope with her life under Nazism and its aftermath. She did not engage in discussion of the Holocaust, instead commenting on the fate of Germans under the Nazis and thereafter. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Görtemaker's book appears at a time when academics and the public have been heavily discussing the issue of German suffering during and after the Second World War. More background dealing with the way in which Germans remembered the Third Reich and the Holocaust would have been helpful in this book, however. Not least because of her difficult personality, Boveri's writing was relegated to the arts section of newspapers. Politically, Boveri remained opposed to the Bonn Republic, advocating re-unification in the 1950s. She changed her mind in 1961 when East Berlin erected the Berlin Wall—after which she was to argue that Bonn and East Berlin should acknowledge each other's existence. She welcomed Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.

Despite occasionally getting lost in detail, Görtemaker succeeds in fleshing out the wider significance of Boveri's life for a better understanding of the political, cultural and intellectual history of the Third Reich and its aftermath. Her book deserves to find a wide readership.

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Citation: Christian Goeschel. Review of Görtemaker, Heike B., *Ein deutsches Leben: Die Geschichte der Margret Boveri 1900-1975*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. March, 2006.

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