



Mario Zeck. *Das schwarze Korps: Geschichte und Gestalt des Organs der Reichsführung SS.* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2002. X + 478 S. + 15 Abb. Bibliographische Angaben. EUR 72.00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-484-34051-0.



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Defending the Volksgemeinschaft

Two of the most prominent questions that have emerged in the past decades concerning National Socialism involve the so-called intentionalist-functionalist debate as well as suggestions that Nazis were progressive innovators seeking to bring about radical social renovation. The first debate, truly tackled for the first time in the work of Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, though addressed earlier by writers such as Hannah Arendt, focuses on the question of whether the increasing radicalization of the Third Reich was the result of consistent implementation of a unified ideology by a more or less monolithic leadership, or the unforeseen consequence of Nazi Germany's chaotic and unpredictable power structure. The second aims to discern whether the Nazis confidently confronted the world in which they lived by seeking novel or even radical, ways to address modern questions and contemporary problems, or whether they sought to withdraw from the modern world in order to rediscover some traditional and stable past. The first inquiry raises fundamental issues concerning the nature of the Nazi state and the place of ideology in policymaking. The second forces us to consider the possibil-

ity that Nazism was indeed a dynamic, progressive and genuinely popular political and social force with mass appeal, rather than the result of social "flaws" or "system failure" in the modern world, ultimately making the Nazis much more familiar, much more like us. In this volume, Mario Zeck actively enters both of these conversations through his analysis of the official newspaper of the SS. Zeck provides much insight into an era of German history that continues to arouse unabated curiosity.

Das Schwarze Korps, the press organ of the SS, circulated from 1935 to 1945. With a distribution of 500,000 to 750,000 copies from 1939-44, it became the second largest political weekly of the Reich. Zeck commences his study of the periodical with an in-depth look at Gunter d'Alquen, the chief editor principally responsible for the founding, conception and evolution of the paper as a whole. Attracted to National Socialism at a young age, he joined the Hitler Youth in 1925, entered the NSDAP at seventeen and joined the SS in April 1931. After consultation with SS Chief Heinrich Himmler, d'Alquen was appointed editor-in-chief of the body's

Newly founded official paper.

Throughout his work, d'Alquen enthusiastically advanced the ideals of National Socialism while conceptualizing them. Instead of seeing the paper as exclusively intended for SS members, d'Alquen sought to encourage a wider readership. He wished to utilize the paper as a forum through which "ordinary" *Volksgenossen* could air frustrations, articulate complaints, demand reform and denounce so-called enemies of the nation in letters to the editor. The paper was to serve as a vital means for fulfilling one of the distinct aims of National Socialism: the forging of an assertive, active populace mobilized to protect and foster the interests of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The paper's eventual success was grounded above all on the intimate connection it sought to create with its readers. Simple disappointment, dissatisfaction, envy and spite permeated many of the letters that readers sent to the editor. Readers' sentiments were often infused with an ideological fervor calling for a radical social reordering based upon National Socialist ideals. Petitioners sought to address the worries and plight of the so-called little man while fostering a sense of "fairness," "equality of opportunity," as well as "justice" within the emerging *Volksgemeinschaft*. The editorship sought to forge the paper as a medium of inner opposition, denouncing everything seen to dilute the "purity" of National Socialism or run counter to the interests of "clean" Nazis. During the war, when the paper sought to promote solidarity within the Reich among the leadership and people, hostility towards Nazi leaders did wane a bit in terms of intensity and frequency of attacks. Nonetheless, the paper never gave up addressing popular complaints and grievances that other more prominent Nazi press organs often ignored.

The paper often depicted leading members of the Catholic Church as notorious sex offenders, cheats and traitors, propagating an image of a prudish and hypocritical church in which perversion had become the norm. Antisemitism also appeared with considerable frequency; readers were presented with an image of the Jew as the incarnation of evil. It even extended the image of the enemy to Aryans infected by "Jewish thinking" and thus lost to the national community. Anyone could thus be labeled an enemy of the race. In order to highlight the parasitical nature of the Jew, the paper insisted that peaceful coexistence between Jews and Aryans was impossible—with no exceptions. Besides laying out the problem, the paper also proposed solutions to the "Jewish question." At first the paper promoted forced emigration. With the increasing unfeasibility of such a plan, it threatened physical extermination. Nonetheless, the paper consis-

tently condemned pogroms upon the Jewish population, criticizing the apparently disorganized, ad hoc nature of such attacks. D'Alquen and other editors were constantly worried that foreign nations could utilize such excesses in propaganda against the Reich. Furthermore, they were uncomfortable with what they considered the uncontrollable excesses of the populace, and they generally believed that racial persecution should be smoothly carried out through systematic and organized action from legitimate state security organs. In so doing, *Das Schwarze Korps* contrasted itself with Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer*, a paper that not only supported such excesses when they took place, but even incited readers to commit them.

During the war, the paper's anti-Bolshevik stance was revealed more clearly. D'Alquen presented communist ideology and communists as completely responsible for the inhumanity and brutality of the Second World War. His paper portrayed the Soviet leadership as a criminal clique manipulating the Russian masses. It presented Soviet soldiers and civilians as a deceived, helpless, abused mass, a mere tool in the hands of a thoroughly corrupt leadership. Although the paper presented Bolshevism itself as the "revolt of subhumans," the populace was generally excluded from such defamation.

Other enemies of the *Volksgemeinschaft* that emerged in its pages included unreformable criminals, the mentally ill, non-Aryans and homosexuals. The paper paraded these groups before the public as dangerous parasites on the *Volkskörper*. The paper declared that their very existence would inevitably corrode everything good, healthy and beautiful in the world. Caring for such "degenerates" would waste money that could be invested more wisely in "healthy" members of the national community. Besides campaigns against the church, Jews and other "degenerates," the paper confronted the Reich's legal bureaucracy, calling for greater independence and individualism on the part of jurists, lawyers, state prosecutors and judges. The paper vigorously criticized the state administration as well, arguing that it hindered the realization of National Socialism through obtuse regulations and inflexible structures. Through vehement polemics against so-called party parasites (whom it exposed by name), the paper truly distinguished itself from other Nazi press organs.

Das Schwarze Korps was not negative all the time, for it praised the attributes of "healthy" members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as well. It promoted positive images of men and women working together to create a better world, the former as soldiers, workers and farmers, the

latter as athletic, confident, beautiful, devoted mothers. It did not fail to praise the SS in glowing, flattering terms. In fact, the paper often sought to contrast the apparent corruption and arrogance of the party apparatus with the high-minded ideals of SS members. It claimed that its racial attributes and its extraordinary achievements in all fields, which were understood as interrelated, entitled the SS to first place in the social hierarchy of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The paper's editorial staff demonstrated fanatical devotion to National Socialism until the very end. Even as Nazi Germany lay in its death throes, d'Alquen and his editors used their editorials to urge readers to resist German's invaders. Through their glorification of loyalty, calls for unprecedented self-sacrifice and aestheticization of the downfall of the Reich, they attempted to foster fanatic resistance among the people.

Throughout the study, Zeck provides considerable attention to the disagreements between d'Alquen and other centers of power in the Third Reich. For the author, these multiple and protracted conflicts starkly demonstrate competing claims for power, fierce competition for influence and jurisdictional chaos, which characterized party and state rule within the Third Reich. Tensions between various interest groups sometimes hindered the paper's ability to achieve its vision. From the very beginning, for example, the paper sought to maintain a close working relationship with the SD. Both outfits clearly benefited from a lively exchange of information; sharing incoming letters to the editor guaranteed the paper access to the SD archives. Very soon, however, the editorship became concerned about the retribution the SD pursued against some who had written to the paper in confidence. These petitioners, after all, were the paper's lifeblood. Fearing punishment, readers became reluctant to write in, threatening the valuable flow of information. As d'Alquen sought to increasingly shield his readership, the SD responded by seeking to bring the paper in line with its own goals. A disgruntled, even hostile, relationship emerged between the paper and the SD. Himmler had to intervene in order to quell these tensions. Mutual suspicions nonetheless persisted.

As a paper of protest, *Das Schwarze Korps* often received harsh criticism from part and state officials. The editorship of the paper angered prominent Nazi jurists, such as Hans Frank, who believed that such polemics against the justice system constituted an attempt to increase SS influence. Because of its attacks against apparent bureaucratic insensitivity and incompetence, the

paper made many enemies in the national and local civil service.

Zeck concludes his analysis of *Das Schwarze Korps* with a consideration of stylistic and linguistic aspects. He reveals how the newspaper harnessed political rhetoric by seeking to move its readers through highly-charged comments and appeals: through consensus-building, the sharp delineation of the healthy and strong "us" versus the evil and degenerate "them" and artful emphasis and repetition of certain catchphrases. Rejecting the vulgarity of *Der StÄ¼rmer*, the editors choose instead to present hard-hitting polemic in an emotional, methodical, eloquent manner. Foreign words and language formulations lent prestige and a cosmopolitan flair to *Das Schwarze Korps*. Because of its desire to appeal to an ever wider audience, both domestic and international, the paper seldom utilized regional dialects and colloquialisms. Its layout and design consistently incorporated the latest techniques in journalism and visualization in order to connect with the reader in an exciting way. Harnessing such techniques, the paper proved extremely persuasive, understandable and entertaining to the general population. According to the author, it was able to legitimate itself, successfully foster National Socialist ideals and fears and help integrate the people into a unified, genuine *Volksgemeinschaft*.

In a highly organized, comprehensive study, Zeck elucidates the often conflict-ridden, competitive relationships of leading party members with the editorship of the paper. Despite their general ideological unity, top-level Nazis vied with each other for influence throughout the paper's development. Through a meticulous analysis of the paper's purpose, as envisioned by its top editorial team, as well its themes, design and layout, Zeck convincingly reveals the paper as innovative and dynamic, a truly modern work of print media. Concerning its reception, the author does indeed point out that the paper resonated powerfully with ever more readers. As proof, he indicates its increasingly wide circulation. Nonetheless, more information concerning the particular nature of how people "received" the paper is called for. Perhaps a comparative study of *Das Schwarze Korps* with other Third Reich papers (which the author himself recommends) would shed some light on why Germans embraced the SS newspaper and thereby indicate more precisely how it served as a motivating and integrative force in Nazi Germany.

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