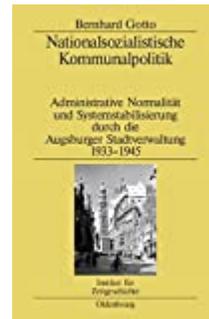


Bernhard Gotto. *Nationalsozialistische Kommunalpolitik: Administrative Normalität und Systemstabilisierung durch die Augsburger Stadtverwaltung 1933-1945.* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006. 476 S. EUR 69.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-57940-6.



Reviewed by Leonid Rein (International Institute for Holocaust Research Yad Vashem)

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Nazification from Below

For many years, research concerning the functioning of the Third Reich's governmental apparatus concentrated mainly upon the top echelons of "Hitler's State." In recent decades, however, scholars have become increasingly interested in the functioning of the lower levels of Nazi administration. In Germany, for example, a group of studies has appeared that analyzes both the regional and communal administrations under National Socialism. Despite the shift in perspective, however, the results of these studies have suggested that communal administration in National Socialist Germany was merely an organ of the central authorities of the Reich.

Bernhard Gotto's book seeks to revise this picture. It is based upon three basic assumptions: first, that the municipal administration in Augsburg during the Nazi period was an "ernstzunehmender und eigenständiger Akteur" (p. 1); second, that Augsburg's municipal administration developed its own "administrative normality," using the norms and practices of the pre-Nazi administration and adapting them to National Socialist goals and methods while at the same time working out new administrative elements corresponding to the new *Zeitgeist*

(p. 2); and finally, that "local and regional power structures created a balanced network of power relations and forms of power practices" (p. 4). One of the main goals of the book is to illuminate the peculiarities of Swabian National Socialism, since Austria was the capital city of the *Gau* Swabia between 1933 and 1945.

The innovation of Gotto's study lies in his discussion of the functioning of Augsburg's municipal administration, not only during peacetime, but during World War II as well. He also tracks the fates and professional careers of Augsburg's Nazi-era municipal functionaries after 1945. According to Gotto, the nazification of Augsburg was not a revolutionary process, but was instead much more evolutionary in nature, a "revolution on silent soles," as author describes it. Municipal functionaries from the Weimar era were not ousted from their offices automatically upon the Nazi seizure of power. Thus, Augsburg's Oberbürgermeister, Otto Bohl, a member of the Bavarian Popular Party who attained his post in 1930, stayed in office well into the Nazi period. One of the peculiarities of Swabian National Socialism was that the Nazi elite in this region consisted mostly of state and

municipal officials. The fact that most party dignitaries were also experienced administrators led to a situation in which tensions between Augsburg's municipal administration and the *Gau* structures were virtually nonexistent; the Gauleiter of Swabia, Karl Wahl, was himself an official at Augsburg's slaughterhouse for quite some time. Personal and family ties to high party and municipal functionaries were at least as important as ideological convictions for pursuing a career in Augsburg administration under the new regime. Among other examples, Gotto discusses that of Karl Wiedemann, a communist deputy in Augsburg's municipal council during the Weimar period, who not only escaped incarceration in Dachau concentration camp but also found a place in municipal administration thanks to his status as brother of *Gau* inspector and Nazi deputy of the city council, Matthias Wiedemann. Still, as is shown by Gotto (and here lies, in my opinion, a certain self-contradiction of this study), the key positions in Augsburg's city administration belonged to National Socialists, even if some of them were so-called *Märzgefallene*, those who joined the NSDAP after March 1933, while the top Weimar-era officials were pushed into marginal technical or political fields. Still, career advancement in Augsburg's administration depended upon both ideological convictions and professional skills. Re-structuring rather than rebuilding of Augsburg's city administration created the administrative normality and stability required for new conditions.

Gotto examines in detail relations between party and municipal structures in light of the so-called German Communal Regulations (*Deutsche Gemeindeordnung*) issued in 1935. This ordinance established the office of "Plenipotentiary of the NSDAP," which was supposed to supervise municipal administrations. The author shows that even before the Nazi rise to power, communal administrations in Germany could not act as they pleased, despite the fact that, in case of Augsburg, party influence upon administrative routine was rather limited because of the sovereign governing style of Oberbürgermeister Josef Mayr and the smooth functioning of a city administration that did not give occasion for any external regulation. Various strategies were used to minimize pressure from party offices. Gotto cites the example of Josef Mayr's appointment of a special ambassador for the Four Year Plan. One of the youngest workers in Augsburg city administration, Nikolaus Feile, was appointed to position. For Feile, who was only 31 at the time of his appointment, the post was an advancement that generated obligation to Mayr, rather than to Hermann Göring's

organization.

The key principle of Augsburg's city administration under Mayr was "to work toward the Oberbürgermeister," but ultimately it was "working toward the Führer." [1] The municipal administration of Augsburg saw as its primary goal the creation of a racially suitable, contented *Volksgemeinschaft*. Gotto concentrates primarily upon welfare policies, health care, and civil engineering. The municipal welfare department, partly in cooperation with the Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt and partly on its own, contributed to the marginalization and persecution of the so-called asocial elements, while the health care department contributed both directly and indirectly to the infamous euthanasia program by providing information on the physically and mentally ill to the Office for Hereditary and Racial Care. Attempts on the part of Augsburg's municipal administration to cope with housing shortages were initially influenced by Nazi chimeras about the "return to nature"; projects devoted to small suburban settlements and the renovation of the historic city center were slowly abandoned in favor of a more pragmatic solution, which included the construction of multifloor apartment buildings. Unfortunately, Gotto dedicates very little space to such themes as the role of Augsburg's municipal administration in the persecution of Jews. For centuries, Augsburg was an important German Jewish center. Augsburg's Jews were robbed of their civil, human, and property rights and were ultimately deported to the East. Readers of Gotto's book will search in vain for a coherent picture of the functioning of Augsburg's municipal administration in this process, although the theme of persecution of Jews would illustrate more than anything else the nexus between administrative routine and implementation of Nazi policies that is the main focus of Gotto's study.

During the war, Augsburg's municipal administration was faced with multiple challenges, such as the need to strengthen the "home front" and assist those affected by the Allied bombings. On the one hand, the war demanded significant effort from the city administration, since many of its officials were enlisted in the Wehrmacht and, on the other, the developing war weakened ties to central authorities in Berlin. The more or less successful ability of the municipal administration to cope with various problems provided the regime with legitimacy in the eyes of the population and thus prolonged the life of the Third Reich as a whole. Only toward the end of the war, and especially after the devastating Allied air raid of the night of February 25-26, 1944, along with the

subsequent air raids, did administrative chaos began to emerge in Augsburg, as it became more and more difficult for the city administration to cope with the situation. At the same time, as Gotto shows, although relations between municipal and party organs were quite good before the war, during the war relations were characterized by competition for the favor and trust of the city population. The relationships between various municipal departments (for example, those that dealt with food, economy, and family support, and the city population during the war) became closer, but at the same time, city residents themselves learned to be self-confident in their dealings with municipal institutions and even to play these institutions against one another. Gotto also shows how, at the very end of the war, pragmatic considerations prevailed increasingly over ideology in the functioning of city administration. The city leadership, with Mayr at its head, preferred to avoid the total destruction of Augsburg and surrender the city to U.S. forces rather than follow Hitler's order to hold on until the end. Here, once again, Gotto sees the expression of a Swabian model of National Socialism.

The final chapter of Gotto's study tracks the post-1945 careers of some of Nazi era functionaries of the Augsburg city administration. In comparison to the experiences of administrators in other German cities, it was practically

impossible for these functionaries to find their way back into city administration. Even if de-Nazification proceedings in Augsburg were far from complete (and despite the efforts of people such as Mayr or Wahl to minimize their role under the National Socialist regime and to stress the "soft" nature of Swabian National Socialism), the decisive position of Major Everett Cofran, the American military commander of Augsburg, vis-à-vis former Nazi officials and the fact that many of the officials of postwar Augsburg administration had been persecuted by the National Socialists, both prevented former key functionaries from resuming positions in city administration and also made it difficult for the latter to claim financial compensation.

Despite the occasional contradiction, Bernhard Gotto's volume as a whole represents an important contribution to the research into the lowest levels of the Third Reich administration, destroying the myth of local administration as a mere executor of the will of top echelons of Nazi government.

Note

[1]. This expression was coined by Ian Kershaw. See Anthony McElligott and Tim Kirk, *Working towards the Führer. Essays in Honour of Sir Ian Kershaw* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

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