

Jörg Osterloh. *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung im Reichsgau Sudetenland 1938-1945*. München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006. 721 S. EUR 59.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-57980-2.

Reviewed by Deborah Vietor-Englaender (Technische Universität Darmstadt)
Published on H-German (January, 2008)



The Holocaust in the Sudetenland

From a stylistic standpoint, this book may be rather heavy going at times, but reading through it is worth the effort, as it represents the best kind of solid, historical research. Jörg Osterloh unfolds the story and the stages of the persecution of the Jews in the Sudetenland. Osterloh has made use of more than thirty archives including numerous institutions in the Czech Republic. He draws on books and contemporary newspapers as well as police reports, lists of “unreliable people” (p. 196), and interrogation minutes. The book contains photographs, maps of the camps, census lists of Jews from May 1939, and lists of “Aryanized” firms.

Osterloh divides his subject into eight sections and his tale moves tragically from one act to the next. His introduction is followed by an analysis of the position of the Jews in Sudeten society up to 1938. In 1921 approximately 33,000 Jews lived in the Sudetenland; in 1930 they numbered 25,000 (p. 53). They tended to be concentrated in towns—particularly Teplitz-Schönau and Karlsbad (p. 55). Many spa towns were very concerned not to lose their Jewish clientele, as Frank Bajohr has noted.[1] Osterloh cites a typical comment made to the rabbi of Teplitz when he was in Marienbad and had not been recognized as a Jew: “Mir san ja olweil gute Judenfeind. No. in der Saison häg’n mir halt unsre Gesinnung für ein por Moant in en Schronk eini” (“We are all enemies of the Jews but we hang our attitude up in a closet for a few months during the season,” cited on p. 157). After 1933 a number of Jews from Germany fled to Czechoslovakia. Most went to Prague, but some fled to the Sudetenland.

By 1939, however, only approximately 2,500 Jews were left.

Part 3 deals with the terror unleashed against the Jews as an aftermath of the Munich Agreement of September 29, 1938. Most Jews had opposed the Austrian *Anschluss* in March 1938 and were, after Munich, terrified by what they could see and hear. The writer Ernst Sommer realized when stones were thrown at him that he had to leave fast (p. 187) to escape pogrom-like excesses. Many others followed him—12,000 of the 28,000 Jews in the Sudetenland in 1938 had left by the beginning of November 1938, when the so-called “Reichskristallnacht” pogroms began (p. 203). Part 4 demonstrates clearly that Jewish organizations and religious communities and their property and wealth in the Sudetenland were doomed from the moment the Wehrmacht marched into the country in October 1938.

Part 5 (pp. 301-482) is the most significant section of the book. It deals with the “Aryanisation” of Jewish property in the Sudetenland as an example of the systematic economic elimination and exclusion of the Jews. Jews were deprived of all rights, their property was seized, and they were ousted from any positions they held. The “Aryanization” of Jewish housing in the Sudetenland began almost immediately after the occupation. Konrad Henlein moved into a building that was Jewish property shortly after the troops marched in (p. 443). The situation was similar in Munich, as shown by the story of Unity Mitford.[2] In 1939 Adolf Hitler’s private office gave her

a shortlist of four flats and she inspected them. While she did so, some of the Jewish owners were still in their homes, looking at her and listening to her on the eve of their forcible dispossession as she measured up and imagined color schemes and decoration. She was completely oblivious to their plight. Between mid-March 1938 and April 1939, approximately 50 percent of Jewish housing space in Austria (including Vienna) passed into Aryan hands. In the Sudetenland, the percentage was much higher. Osterloh makes it quite clear that it was not necessarily the members of the Sudeten German population who were most involved with "Aryanization," but rather firms from the Reich and banks. (Osterloh recently contributed to a major volume on the role of the Dresdner Bank in the Third Reich and should be considered an authority on this subject.)[3] The tables and statistics at the end of the book clarify the question of who seized which firm and who owns them now. Considerable competition occurred between local and Reich firms to take over Jewish firms, not only for financial gain, but also to maintain local levels of employment (p. 564). Many Sudeten Germans did not have the necessary capital to accomplish these tasks, but firms from the Reich did.

In part 6, Osterloh shows that once the assets of the remaining Jews in the Sudetenland were appropriated, these individuals were isolated and deprived of all rights, and in many cases forced into "Judenhäuser" (p. 487). However, no specific plans for their physical extermina-

tion existed in 1939. By 1941, plans had been made to "re-settle" Jews in "Barackenlager" and two were established in Dlaschkowitz and Schönwald (p. 490). Part 7 presents the last act of Osterloh's story, which took place from 1942-45 (pp. 517-554). These years saw deportations—first to Theresienstadt and then "to the East," which meant, in most cases, death. Theresienstadt was used as a camp from November 1941 onwards; before that it had served as an alternate accommodation for prisoners from overcrowded prisons in Prague. Sudeten German Jews were first deported there in November 1942. At the same time (in 1941 and 1942) thousands of Jews from the Reich and other countries were brought to the Sudetenland by the "Organisation Smelt" for forced labor and later deported to Theresienstadt or farther East. The last wave of deportations (directly to extermination camps) occurred in January 1945. By the time of Hitler's suicide in April, hardly any Jews survived in the entire Sudetenland.

Notes

[1]. Frank Bajohr, "Unser Hotel ist judenfrei". *Bäder-Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2003), 148-151.

[2]. David Pryce-Jones, *Unity Mitford: A Quest* (London: W. H. Allen, 1978), 267.

[3]. Dieter Ziegler, ed., *Die Dresdner Bank und die deutschen Juden* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Deborah Vietor-Englaender. Review of Osterloh, Jörg, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung im Reichsgau Sudetenland 1938-1945*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14111>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.