

**Eberhard Demm.** *Censorship and Propaganda in World War I: A Comprehensive History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. xviii + 330 pp. \$115.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78453-851-4.

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Eberhard Demm's *Censorship and Propaganda in World War I: A Comprehensive History* represents an accomplishment of the first order on a topic as complex and nationally diversified as the subject at hand. Based on his own preface, Demm's work is the first comprehensive study on Great War censorship and propaganda since the interwar period and is a well-received addition to literature of the World War I centennial era. Demm uses topical chapters rather than a straight chronological narrative, but this method suits the subject well and allows the reader to conduct constant comparative analysis.

The book begins in chapter 1 with a study of censorship before spending most of the pages discussing propaganda. Understanding that even First World War specialists may not have the technical knowledge regarding both censorship or propaganda, the author succeeds throughout the book at breaking multifaceted subjects into easily understood concepts for the lay reader and academic alike. Statements such as "the indispensable perquisite of successful propaganda is censorship" (p. 5) might seem obvious at face value, but it provides a position from which to better indulge in his censorship narrative. Demm notes that all belligerents, both democracies and monarchies, practiced varying forms of censorship, with the most restrictive carried out in France, Italy, and

Austria (p. 11). While countries cracked down on films, songs, postal letters, and even oral communication, the British harnessed censorship of soldier's letters to enact positive change in areas of military life such as army cooking (p. 13).

Chapters 2 and 3 look at the aims, organization, and arguments of propaganda throughout the war. The author does well in his description of many of the war's cartoons, which helped propel the "fight between good and evil" narrative that arose in nearly all warring nations (p. 35) and was linked to the cultural hatred between sides. Fear also became a driving factor and was weaved into the aims and arguments of various propaganda mediums. Expanding on these themes, Demm uses chapters 4 and 5 to provide technical details of propaganda execution. He notes the use of everyday items for propaganda purposes which "penetrated the whole cultural fabric," including ashtrays, children's books, matchboxes, and calendars (p. 73). Photographs of the dead were problematic on all sides as governments attempted to balance national pride while avoiding national horror. The book's analysis of theater and the new medium of film is particularly interesting, as is his study of various oral indoctrination programs such as the American Four Minute Men, whom Demm calls the "undisputed masters" at oral methods (p. 60).

Chapter 6 discusses the targets of various countries' propaganda. Some nations pursued children, who were encouraged to go home and inform their parents or to heckle local residents into buying more war bonds (pp. 93-94). His section on propaganda efforts targeting national minorities is descriptive. All belligerents directed efforts at their own soldiers to some extent, purportedly to keep morale and the fighting spirit high. Some countries responded to perceived soldier disloyalty with capital punishment, with Italy ultimately condemning 4,028 to death and executing 750, a surreal paradox between modern warfare and ancient justice (p. 105).

While chapter 7 usefully diverges to look at propaganda and information leaders among the primary warring powers, chapter 8 addresses nongovernmental antiwar propaganda efforts, a related topic that could be easily overlooked. Concerns over labor strikes, diminishing public support, or societal unrest were real and private citizens made efforts to both foment and prevent the rise of these movements. Demm uses effective examples to make his points. In Britain, antiwar leaders harnessed the comparison between "millions dying in the trenches and the warmongers and capitalists 'thriving in warmth and prosperity,'" while Germany, Russia, Austria, and Italy complained about the lack of basic staples such as food and warmth (p. 163). Political strikes were a potent weapon employed by antiwar leaders and labor advocates (p. 166).

Chapter 9 gets to an important question: just how effective were World War I propaganda efforts? While censorship was generally efficient, it is also the case that people in all nations found ways to outwit the censors, many times by simple indirect communication. And of course, there was good propaganda—that which was credible, based on fact, and had high receptivity—and bad propaganda (pp. 180-182). Overall, when one thinks of the central task of propaganda to "reinforce individual attitudes to war and ... channel them to-

wards appropriate action," it seems clear that a four-year bloody slog was encouraged by citizens and governments partly because of effective censorship and propaganda campaigns by all powers. Following this analysis, Demm's final chapters provide the reader with useful organizational charts of belligerent information apparatuses and examples of effective visual propaganda, an important addition to a work that heavily references pictures, paintings, and the like.

This needed book casts a wide and deep net in subject matter and mostly succeeds in pulling in a sizeable catch of evaluation and description. There are a few cases where the assessment falls short. While the author covers the Western powers in detail, including the United States, he devotes very little space to the Ottoman Empire, which remains an unfulfilled objective of the book's pursuit. There are also a few claims that do not stand up to historical reality. Demm seems to suggest that Germany's internal propaganda campaign played an outsized role in leading to the country's decision to resume unrestricted submarine warfare in January 1917 by putting pressure on Chancellor Theodor von Bethmann Hollweg. In so doing, the author contextually ignores the more important role played by Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, and that the ultimate decision was not made by Bethmann Hollweg but rather by Kaiser Wilhelm II (p. 26). Lastly, the introduction and legacy chapters, at less than three pages each, could have used greater scene setting and discussion. These minor faults notwithstanding, this book is a spectacular addition to the World War I literature for readers interested in the intersection of the social, political, and military histories of the conflict.

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