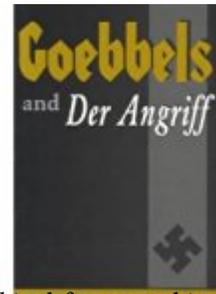


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Russel Lemmons. *Goebbels and Der Angriff*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994. x + 172 pp. \$22.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-1848-2.

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In this concise little book, Russel Lemmons analyzes Joseph Goebbels's use of *Der Angriff* as a propaganda tool in the battle for Berlin from the founding of the newspaper in 1927 up to January 1933. In the process, he fills several holes in the literature on the Nazi Party's struggle for power and its propaganda techniques. Specifically this is the first serious scholarly focus on either *Der Angriff* or *Gau Berlin* before 1933. The author takes to task several long-standing conventional interpretations and elaborates on a few others. Most notable is his revision of Oron Hale's dismissal of *Der Angriff* as ineffective. He argues convincingly that it "played a much more important role in the rise of National Socialism in Berlin than Hale allows" (3).

Professor Lemmons has exploited most of the appropriate published and archival primary sources and has a thorough grasp of the directly relevant secondary literature. He is straightforward with the reader about the strengths and weaknesses of the available evidence. He does, however, have the disconcerting habit of consolidating all sources in one note at the end of each paragraph. Thus one sometimes has trouble determining which statements in the paragraph draw directly from the evidence and which are his own conclusions. Like most scholarship still coming off the presses, Lemmons's has not benefitted from the archival holdings of the former DDR or the captured German documents in the former Osoby archive in Moscow. It is too soon to tell whether those holdings may require any changes in his perspectives or conclusions.

The first two chronologically organized chapters cover the history of *Gau Berlin* and Goebbels's career up to 1927 and analyze the role and nature of *Der Angriff* from 1927 to 1933. When the Party was banned in

Berlin and Goebbels was prohibited from speaking, he decided to start the newspaper as a weekly. Thus the Party could continue its propaganda and have a structure that enabled its organization in the capital to survive the ban. *Der Angriff* played a key role in Goebbels's battles with the Strasser brothers, but it held the Party together through difficult times.

Lemmons analyzes the paper's staff as largely unqualified Party administrators who nevertheless served well, especially in projecting the viciously anti-Semitic line that dominated the pages of *Der Angriff*. Hans Schweitzer, the political cartoonist "Mjoelnir," was exceptionally skilled at presenting the themes of anti-Semitism, economic exploitation, and political violence that Goebbels wanted to push on the Berlin audience. Lemmons concludes that a significant part of *Der Angriff*'s readership was the Berlin working class and that Goebbels aimed his sensational "fighting press" at them. Thus Goebbels eschewed hard news and concentrated on polemics together with macho accounts of violent SA clashes with Party enemies.

More of the history of the Berlin *Gau* and Goebbels's paper emerge in the four remaining chapters, which focus on themes of *Der Angriff*: the Party image and the Fuehrer myth, the SA and political violence, appeals to the proletariat, and Goebbels's attack on "the System." Since anti-Semitism pervades every theme, Lemmons does not feel it necessary to address it separately. Rather he weaves its presence into all of his analyses. Well-chosen examples of Mjoelnir's work illustrate the themes developed in these chapters.

Several important theses emerge from Lemmons's analysis. He joins those critical of the conventional argument that after the electoral failures of 1928, the Party

abandoned its appeals to workers in favor of appeals toward peasants. He demonstrates the contrast between *Der Angriff's* continued focus on its Berlin working-class audience with that of Streicher's *Der Stuermer* and argues that in fact, leaders were allowed to focus on regional audiences as they saw fit. Thus on this point and others, he sides with the polycratic against the Hitlercentric school. Nevertheless, he notes that the paper played a key role in developing the Hitler myth as central to the Party's mass appeal, especially during the presidential election. The theme of political violence was especially suited to the worker audience, and *Der Angriff* developed the effective mixed image of a triumphant, macho SA that could steal the streets from the Red Front and an heroic, martyred SA that fell victim to Jewish-backed socialist political and financial establishments that used "the System" to grind down the worker. Building on the work of his mentor, Jay Baird, Lemmons also explains *Der Angriff's* role in the creation of "the Myth of resurrection and return."

Lemmons's work has the most problems in dealing with the conventional argument that the Nazi movement was anti-modernist in tone. The author states that though the wooing of the working class would seem to call this argument into question, the Nazis did try to attract workers by appealing to tradition, by attacking Marxist ideas of "class consciousness," and by approaching "the proletariat as an 'estate'" (109). Likewise, *Der Angriff's* emphasis on anti-Semitism, heroic death, and the *Volksgemeinschaft* all demonstrate Nazi anti-modernism. Like many conventional debates, that between the anti-modernists and their critics establishes a false dichotomy that is best replaced by a synthesis more suitable to the complexity of "modern" thinking. Lemmons approaches but does not embrace such a synthesis, and he ultimately presents a relatively simple anti-

modernist conclusion. The book also oversimplifies the anti-police propaganda that was part of Goebbels's assault on "the System." Lemmons argues that *Der Angriff* had an anti-police theme intended for a proletarian audience; it contended, he says, that the Berlin Police Department was a vicious, heartless organization" (117). Such an argument would be more consistent with the KPD's attacks on the police as an institution in the service of oppression. The evidence Lemmons presents is in fact more in keeping with the common Nazi theme that policemen were upright servants of society who were misused by a Jewish-dominated liberal-socialist leadership. Although *Der Angriff* was probably not always consistent and might have mixed its messages, Lemmons has clearly misread some of the images in Mjoelnir's cartoons. Twice he misinterprets the identity of SA men (96, 121), and in the latter case he confuses a policeman with a stormtrooper (121). Here a very disgruntled policeman is caught between "Isidor" Weiss, the Berlin *Polizeivizepraesident*, and some Red Front "thugs." His three examples of Mjoelnir's portrayal of policemen all show the police as upright, soldierly Aryan prototypes. In the worse case, they are Roman legionaries helping Weiss, portrayed as Nero, to martyr a Nazi - the most clearly mixed image.

Yet aside from this minor mistake, the book has few flaws. Lemmons presents a well-written analysis, which is easily accessible to any educated reader. Anyone will learn a great deal about the Nazi experience from this little book, but it is a must for the specialists in social history, propaganda, NS Party politics, and Nazi-police relations.

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