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Detlef Mühlberger: Hitler's Voice. The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933. Vol. 1: Organisation and Development of the Nazi Party; Vol. 2: Nazi Ideology and Propaganda

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From 1920, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (*VB*) was the official newspaper of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, NSDAP). After Adolf Hitler assumed power in 1933 and until the collapse of his regime twelve years later, the *VB* continued to be the major daily organ for Nazi news and propaganda. The paper carried not only transcripts of Hitler's speeches, but various pieces by other party members as well: opinions, reports of meetings, policy outlines, statistics, and increasingly rabid denunciations of Jews and non-Germans. Though cited in every reputable Hitler biography and history of the Third Reich, the *VB* has oddly never been published in substantial form in either German or English. Detlef Mühlberger's two-volume, *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933*, thus fills a longstanding need.

Taking as primary source material a microfilm copy of the *VB* Bavarian edition from January 1920 to January 1933, Mühlberger extracted over thirty thousand items before narrowing and translating his selections into English. Though bearing the judicious warning that the reader "need[s] to use the extracts presented . . . critically and with care" (I; p.23), the published works still weigh in at over a thousand pages. Mühlberger does not exaggerate when he claims that "[c]ollectively, these volumes provide the most detailed insight into the content of the *VB* available to date" (ibid.).

The editor marshals his material differently but effectively from one volume to the other. The first, half again as large as the second, contains eight chronologically arranged chapters covering periods of one or two years each. Mühlberger subsumes excerpts from any given year beneath rubrics such as "The Annual Review of the Nazi Party in 1926," "The Breakthrough of 1930," or "Towards the Third Reich, 1932-1933." The second volume offers six chapters on specific

Nazi socio-political concerns from 1920 to 1933: "The Assault on the Weimar 'System,'" "Racism," "The Pursuit of the Working Class," "Overtures to the *Mittelstand*," "Cultivating the Peasantry," and "The Appeal to Women." Mühlberger opens all chapters by recounting significant events and developments in German history and politics during the years in question. He then allows the material to speak for itself. A sort of first-person narrative of the organization, development, and preoccupations of the National Socialist Party uncoils page by page.

Because the literary voices range from the personal to the rhetorical, even those familiar with the story will find items of interest. Eastern Saxony party functionaries warn in 1925, for example, that "[t]hose who like to see Adolf Hitler simply as a 'drummer,' whose path has to be 'controlled,' should keep away from us!" (I; p.129). A meeting report from 1925 bespeaks a continuing German effort to establish a national identity through historical icons: "A deep impression was made by the tableaux vivant: Freedom Fighters of the 9th century (Arminius and his Teutons)" (I; p.144). In an article from 1932 entitled, "Anyone who really knows him," Joseph Goebbels describes Hitler as "a kind man by nature" who "above all ... loves children, to whom everywhere he is the best friend and fatherly comrade" (I; p.575). No less chilling is the inclusion of the articles of the *Lex Zwickau*, or "Reich Law for the Prevention of Life Unworthy of Life through Operative Surgical Measures" (II; p.91), the purport of which may be surmised from the title. And perhaps not many will know that the National Socialists once directed their ire against the J.W. Woolworth chain of department stores, which were then in "uncultured Jewish" (II; p.205) fashion undermining German merchants.

Mühlberger's translations are lucid and smooth. Whenever the Nazis perverted the meaning of a German word or coined one outright, the editor gives both the original and his interpretation. He provides hundreds of informative footnotes giving brief biographies behind each name as it appears. The helpful explanatory apparatus also includes two maps of Nazi Party *Gaue* (districts) from 1926 and 1933, a comprehensive glossary of abbreviations, and a bibliography. *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933* may, nay, should, be taken in hand by a wide range of scholars and students, from those in German studies to others in history, political culture, and even media studies. Given the previous unavailability of these documents, they are indispensable additions to any university library.

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