

LUTHER, Tammo. *Volkstumspolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1933-1938. Die Auslandsdeutschen im Spannungsfeld zwischen Traditionalisten und Nationalsozialisten*. Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004. 175pp, bibliography, index. Euros 42.

This is a revised dissertation based largely on the holdings in the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) in Bonn and the files of the Führer's Deputy, Rudolf Hess but it also draws on a wealth of material from a number of research institutes in Germany. The focus of the study is on the years 1933-1938. The author also considers the situation overseas but he is chiefly concerned with Germans living outside the Reich (*Auslandsdeutschen*) in East Central and South East Europe. In contrast to earlier studies of the relationship between specific German groups and the Reich, Luther offers a general overview of the official policy of the German government in the 1930s.

This cannot be done of course without a broader setting and the book examines the period leading up to the First World War. This was indeed the 'hour of the *Auslandsdeutschen*', in so far as they all alike experienced the resentment against 'things German' arising from the perceptions of the other major powers – rightly or wrongly – that the German Empire had been largely responsible for the outbreak of the terrible conflict. The Treaty of Versailles, sanctioning losses of former Reich territory, deepened the feeling of commonality and encouraged the sense of a German 'Volk' or nation beyond the impermanent and detested political state borders.

Not surprisingly the sporadic pre-war links between *Auslandsdeutschen* and German governments were reinforced and intensified in this atmosphere. This was particularly noticeable in the case of those Germans newly lost to the Reich in regions

bordering above all Poland and Czechoslovakia – the so-called *Grenzlanddeutschen*. But of course Weimar governments were anxious to give support to all Germans outside the Reich, whether they were Reich German citizens who happened to be living abroad or of German origin. It took time, however, for German governments to forge a consistent line on the care of German minorities amid the plethora of official, semi-official and private organizations springing up for this purpose after 1918.

The tenure of office of the great Weimar statesman and foreign Minister, Gustav Stresemann, was crucial in this respect. He above all perceived the potential economic value of the *Auslanddeutschen*, stressing their importance as intermediaries of German trade and influence in the new Eastern Europe – a policy which in effect demanded that German minorities behave loyally within their host states. Equally, in throwing his weight behind the demand for cultural autonomy for Germany's minorities throughout Europe in 1925, Stresemann emphasised how vital it was for the Reich to respect the rights of non-German minorities inside and outside Germany. Luther tends to see Stresemann's liberal minorities policy in terms of creating a suitable climate abroad for the revision of Germany's Versailles borders. Stresemann certainly secured significant Reich financial support for the *Auslanddeutschen*, delivered in part through disguised funding mechanisms in order not to arouse the suspicions of the victor powers. However, no government can afford to ignore its minorities abroad and it becomes ever clearer as time passes that Stresemann would not have allowed his commitment to promoting Germany's recovery to threaten the wider European understanding he was building by the mid-1920s.

Sadly, this was not a priority for all those working for the *Auslanddeutschen*. Luther's survey of the major organizations in the field covers familiar ground. This is particularly true of the *Deutsche Stiftung*, discussed in detail by N.Krekeler as long

ago as 1973 (*Revisionsanspruch und geheime Ostpolitik. Die Subventionierung der deutschen Minderheit in Polen*), although Luther's judgement is more nuanced; Bastian Schot's *Nation oder Staat. Deutschland und der Minderheitenschutz* (Marburg/Lahn, 1988), examined among other things umbrella organizations like the *Deutsche Schutzbund für das Grenz und Auslandsdeutschtum*, formed in May 1919, where *völkisch* figures like Max Hildebert Boehm played a key role and which actively promoted a greater Germany mindset. The efforts of Boehm and others to bring about a more active and coordinated strategy for Germandom abroad fed into the first conference in 1928 that brought together the entire political leadership of German minorities in Europe with leading Reich representatives from state and industry. Symptomatically, the reorganization of Europe was described as the *duty* of all Germandom and it was contended that 'the existence of the German nation and the prestige of the German people as a whole could not be preserved from a purely defensive position.' (p.47)

Luther characterises those involved in the above work during the Weimar Republic as conservative-nationalist and labels them 'traditionalists', as distinct from National Socialists. In this respect he could perhaps have given more attention to *Auslanddeutschen* leaders critical of the likes of Boehm and Werner Hasselblatt. One of those, the remarkable Baltic German leader, Paul Schiemann, condemned the greater Germany mindset as inimical to the cause of German minorities everywhere and drew a distinction between people like himself – 'minority politicians' – and the 'borderland politicians' clustering round the *Deutsche Schutzbund*. While accepting that the latter had more influence in Berlin, his hope was that they would modify their stance through contact with minority politicians. This tension was built into the organization set up in 1922 for all German minorities in Europe. Luther is incorrect

in calling this the Association of German *Volksgruppen* in Europe – it only took this name in 1928; before that it was referred to as the Association of German *Minorities* in Europe. The change in nomenclature was symptomatic of the trend that Schiemann and others bewailed.

This is simply to make the point that there were indeed ideological affinities between those labelled ‘traditionalists’ and died in the wool National Socialists. Luther himself admits to such. True, Hitler’s stark insistence on German blood as a precondition of German citizenship went beyond anything traditionalists would have advocated – at least openly. The sad fact remains that the major organizations for the care of Germans abroad were relatively easily coordinated after 1933. Luther’s considerable achievement is to trace this process in detail, beginning with the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*, where Hans Steinacher, the man who replaced existing president Otto Gessler, urged change to avoid *Gleichschaltung* by the Nazi Party. Moreover, the ‘traditionalists’ had no difficulty in pushing hard for a coordinating central authority at last to bring greater coherence to the field – the early outcome of which was the setting up of the *Volksdeutsche Rat*, headed by Karl Haushofer. Luther is a good guide also to the predictable organizational chaos generated by rival Party organizations with aspirations to manage Germandom abroad, such as Ernst Wilhelm Bohle’s *Auslandsabteilung* or Alfred Rosenberg’s *Aussenpolitisches Amt*.

A central theme of the later stages of this book is the way in which Nazi activists tried to blur the distinction between ‘Reich German’ abroad and those of ‘German origin’ in the interests of overall control – a process that inevitably whittled away at the traditionalist monopoly until finally the *Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle* under Lorenz of the SS assumed full control in 1937. While Luther shows how the euphoria

overtaking the traditionalists on Hitler's arrival in power in 1933 had already turned to disillusion by the following year and admits that the 'traditionalists' and Nazis had similar intellectual roots in the broad *völkisch* tradition he still insists: 'Whereas traditionalists like Steinacher and Haushofer inscribed on their banner the principle "nationhood for the sake of nationhood" the National Socialists strove to make those of German nationhood in all parts of the world an 'agent' of German foreign policy.' (p.100) This reviewer remains sceptical about such a clear distinction but that does not detract from the value of Luther's most interesting analysis.

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