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COMMENT

Third Reich newsreels—an effective tool of propaganda?

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With a few important exceptions, Third Reich newsreel has attracted little scholarly attention [1]. That feature film and documentary have attracted more is understandable, especially as many non-historians have been drawn to the subject. Most historians involved with Third Reich film have concerned themselves with propaganda, which is not unexpected, in view of their interest in the state and the fact that Third Reich film (of all varieties)—either overtly or covertly in numerous ways—promoted the interests of the state. But given this interest in propaganda the neglect of newsreels, which formed part of the Third Reich cinema programme, is all the more surprising. If the message was not overt in feature film, it was in newsreels, which from late 1938 formed a compulsory part of the cinema programme, as was also later the case in occupied Europe. During the war it reached large numbers as cinema attendance was very high.

These contributors add considerably to our knowledge about the structure and organisation of the Third Reich newsreel empire, newsreel production history, and most importantly a consideration of newsreel reception. Newsreels also of themselves provide a valuable historical source for understanding the period in which they were produced and shown, in this case the war, and in particular the relationship between propaganda and public opinion. The picture which emerges is a complex one and the variations from context to context are significant.

Propaganda—and getting it right—was exceedingly important for the Nazis. Not only did they and others on the right believe that Germany had lost the First World War because of a stab-in-back by leftwing politicians, but also that the superiority of British propaganda had cost them that war [2]. This reveals of course an unwillingness to think the unthinkable, that Germany had in fact been defeated militarily.

The lesson of the ‘propaganda failure’ had been learned. Shortly after Hitler came to power a Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda was set up, headed by the astute Dr Joseph Goebbels, who always attracted a great deal of attention both within and outside Germany. As is well known, Goebbels was a hands on Minister of Propaganda and an avid filmgoer, though his love of cinema was mainly confined to feature film and of course female stars, but he was Minister of Propaganda and newsreels were part of his remit. Until the outbreak of war, the latter appears to have been neglected, a poor relation to some extent, in that Goebbels was unwilling to introduce state or party produced newsreels, though that policy had an important benefit of concealing the extent of state control. Goebbels had not been keen on party feature films produced in the first year of Nazi rule, and with Leni Riefenstahl’s

Olympia we now know the state went to great length to conceal its financial support [3]. This policy of concealment would be continued in the occupied countries.

In a sense, Germany was already on a war footing at the time of Munich, when newsreels became a compulsory part of the programme and PK (Propaganda-Kompanie) units were set up within the Wehrmacht, whose brief was to send back footage for the exclusive use of the Propaganda Ministry. Newsreels helped prepare the German public for war. Once the war began there was a shake-up and the separate newsreels companies were merged. Goebbels took full command and was closely involved in editing newsreels as Roel Vande Winkel and Kay Hoffmann reveal. The different newsreel companies were combined to form the *Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH*. In addition to the German newsreel, the *Deutsche Wochenschau*, a special customised foreign newsreel was also established. Known as the *AuslandsTonwoche*, it was eventually produced, according to Vande Winkel, in 36 languages. He also shows how this was not merely a replication of the *Wochenschau*. This newsreel empire—into which went much energy, organisation and talent—was the direct result of the military conquest of Europe. Customised newsreels were shown not only in the occupied countries but also in German satellites and in neutral countries. Not surprisingly in neutral countries there was some loss of control though, according to Vande Winkel, the Swedish censor passed a German newsreel as late as 7 May 1945.

After the war had ended the belief lingered that Nazi propaganda had been highly effective. Such an argument was still being presented 25 years ago in a work which emphasised the organisation of the propaganda empire and the techniques of persuasion [4]. That view did not remain unchallenged, helped by a more nuanced account of the Third Reich, in particular as provided by social historians [5]. Ian Kershaw has argued that it is far harder to persuade people to accept something new, but far easier to reinforce previously held opinions by building on existing values [6]. Propaganda has its limits. The power of film propaganda—the title of a recent book, which uses several case studies drawn from different countries and periods, and includes several pages on German newsreel—reaches the conclusion that ultimately ‘the medium was subservient to the message’ [7]. These detailed studies of German newsreel, customised newsreels for occupied countries, or newsreels produced in Vichy or in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia offer further confirmation that the medium cannot be divorced from the message.

Each occupied country had a distinctly different relationship with the German conqueror—historically, politically and administratively. Custom-made newsreels were produced for most but not all the occupied countries. The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was annexed to the Greater German Reich. Deemed German, it was not given a custom-made newsreel, since the Germans believed that the local language (*Letzeburgesch*) was merely a German dialect, a perception deeply resented by the inhabitants. Proximity to Germany and the German language made them more hostile, not less, and, as Paul Lesch shows, German newsreels prior to the outbreak of war were not well received. Fearing annexation and for good cause—having met such a fate in the First World War—Luxembourg had revealed a reluctance to show German newsreels, preferring those from countries with whom it was in sympathy: France, Britain and the US. Most newsreels were French. Deciding to screen German newsreels proved counterproductive and ultimately led to the banning of all newsreels by early 1939. After conquering Luxembourg, the Germans expected the inhabitants to embrace them as a friend, or more precisely, as a close relative, while traditional friends (Britain, the US and France) were now to be considered enemies. A tall order and thus not

surprising that German newsreel propaganda in Luxembourg, as Lesch reveals, was not particularly successful.

The German approach to integration into the Reich was heavy-handed to say the least. Yet Lesch suggests that in contrast to newsreels, German feature films proved popular and, surprisingly, audiences proved incapable of detecting covert propaganda. Despite open hostility to German newsreel coverage in 1938, when Czechoslovakia was carved up under the Munich Treaty, they were able, four years later, to take innocent pleasure in Veit Harlan's anti-Czech feature film, *Die Goldene Stadt* (1942). Whether collaboration practised by a small minority can be attributed to the influence of newsreels is, as Lesch rightly suggests, difficult to establish because so many other factors come into play.

As a point of comparison, it would be interesting to know how German newsreels fared in Alsace-Lorraine, another annexed territory which did not get a custom-made newsreel, as in much of Alsace a German dialect (Allemanisch) was spoken, but no work has been done as yet. Unlike Luxembourg, Alsace-Lorraine had been annexed by Germany during the Franco-Prussian War and thus spent a longer period under German control (1870–1918), yet we also know that there was great hostility to re-annexation [8].

It is also interesting to learn from several contributors about a form of protest peculiar to the cinema. Shortly after the war began (May 1940), the Security Service began sending agents to cinemas to monitor and report back audience response—audience research with a deadly purpose and an indication of how seriously the Nazis regarded cinema. Sometimes an agent was led to despair, as in the memorable comment cited by Lesch that anyone who thought Luxembourg could be won over is either 'living on the moon or suffering severe dementia'. Audience outbursts, which greeted German newsreels prior to the war, did not wholly cease after conquest and led to instances of the lights only partly dimmed. Such behaviour was not confined to Luxembourg. Brett Bowles provides numerous examples of French audiences applauding at the wrong moment, whistling, coughing, sneezing, and laughing, even using sneezing powder. Karel Margry also indicates that in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia newsreels were greeted with cheers and jeers in 1939 and 1940 and that, on one occasion, a fit of conspicuous audience coughing at the sight of the *Reichsprotektor* was taken up with the *Reichsprotektor* himself.

Ironically, it was the Nazis themselves who prior to 1933 had pioneered cinema protest though no one dared go as far as they. After some catcalls at a showing in Berlin of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), with Goebbels in attendance, the Nazis released stink bombs and white mice, resulting in a cancellation of the screening and ultimately a ban until Hollywood agreed to make cuts [9]. Once in power the Nazis took offence at the slightest whisper, as when a Swedish comedy, *Petterson und Bendel*, publicised as anti-Semitic, was screened at a cinema on Berlin's Kurfürstendamm in July 1935. Whispers and catcalls from one day became by the next 'an incident', and prompted Hitler two months later to issue a warning at Nuremberg about 'Jewish protests' [10]. Not all outbursts were negative. But Lesch has discovered that the outburst which greeted Veit Harlan's anti-Semitic feature film *Jud Süß* (1940) was exaggerated. The original Security Service report recorded comments directed against Jews, which was transformed into 'demonstrations' once the report reached Berlin for dissemination [11]. The Nazis would have liked to orchestrate audience response, but audiences could not be easily controlled. The darkened cinema afforded a possibility of protest. Members of the audience were not always passive recipients, and in some

occupied countries, on occasion, felt sufficiently safe to give vent. The darkened cinema could be a site of protest and the authorities took such protests seriously, bringing light in some cases to the darkened cinema but, surprisingly, little was done against the perpetrators. When it suited them, they played up responses; on other occasions they were downplayed.

Czechoslovakia experienced war-time conditions prior to the outbreak of war. Losing the German-speaking Sudeten areas at the time of Munich, it was invaded six months later and dismantled. A Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created under a *Reichsprotektor*, while Slovakia was granted separate independence and became a puppet or client state. All of this took place six months prior to the outbreak of the war.

Aktualita, the Czech newsreel company founded in 1937 under government protection, was privately owned. Its purpose had been to put across the Czech viewpoint at home and abroad as German designs on Czechoslovakia became apparent. Prior to conquest the Germans also had designs on *Aktualita* itself, as Margry reveals. Surprisingly, *Aktualita's* anti-German stance still continued even after the conquest when dismissed newspaper editors and government advisors were taken onto the staff. But, as the years passed this anti-German stance, not surprisingly, disappeared. The general director survived while the other staff did not.

The history of *Aktualita* is, as Margry points out, really the history of one man, Karel Peceny, one of its shareholders and its general director. In founding and managing an earlier newsreel company, Peceny had also built up an impressive film archive. The Germans allowed *Aktualita* to exist, though initially they tried to buy the company, at other times tried to confiscate the archive, and at almost all times tried to control the newsreel's contents. Peceny held out in varying degrees against all these attempts, though was more successful with the first two than with the last. As the vice tightened, and especially after the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942, he revealed more and more willingness to compromise in order to remain in charge of *Aktualita* and, most importantly, retain ownership of the newsreel and of his vast archive.

What may be construed as resistance to the Germans in the early years may have come from his staff, in particular his chief editor, removed in December 1942. Peceny revealed his primary concern after making himself chief editor in April 1943. Indeed, holding out against the Germans in 1939 enabled him to become full owner of *Aktualita* when he was able to persuade the other shareholders that it was better for *Aktualita* to be owned and managed by one person. A Czech nationalist but not a socialist, Peceny found no difficulty in relaying the fanatical anti-Bolshevik message in German propaganda from 1941 onwards and supported the Anti-Bolshevist League, whose activities were faithfully reported in *Aktualita*. An employer, he was not a man of the left, and consequently not a natural ally of many of those who continued to resist the Germans. He proved more successful in retaining his archive than in controlling what appeared on the screen. Thus, as Margry argues, the Germans could leave *Aktualita* in his hands because, worn down by the vicissitudes of war, and no longer employing staff who understood what was at stake, he revealed himself to be, a businessman whose paramount concern was to retain control of his property. What is interesting is that the Germans, despite trying three times, never actually took control of *Aktualita*. Tenacious and astute, Peceny was able to retain control, by playing off different German officials against each other, though he failed in his attempt to retain links with Slovakia.

Peceny's tenacity did not extend to film content. *Aktualita's* anti-German stance not surprisingly disappeared, but the extent of complicity is most apparent once Peceny made himself chief editor, which occurred after conditions worsened following the

assassination of Heydrich. In his favour however, as Margry points out, the newsreel was never popular with the small but vociferous Czech fascists, the Vlakja. Nevertheless, Peceny complied with German policy. Czechs were to be Germanised and newsreels would give this aim coverage.

For Peceny the economic motive was far stronger than the political. His stance on refusing to give up his archive, even daring to trick the Germans, might seem heroic, but it is clear that retention of his property was the dominant motive. His behaviour might on occasion seem ambiguous, but the profit motive was paramount. He may have refused to include more war footage in 1940 but did agree to provide lavish coverage of Goebbels' visit to Prague, though sent in a large bill for expenses incurred. In some areas Peceny could be grateful to the Germans for improving *Aktualita's* circulation and, conversely, the Germans were so satisfied with *Aktualita* that they made no effort to increase or extend the *Deutsche Wochenschau* for the Protectorate's German speakers. In financial terms the war years were boom years for *Aktualita*. Thus the Czech case was distinctly different in that an indigenous newsreel company was transformed, retained its chief player, who initially had not been associated with collaboration. As far as the Germans were concerned, what they wanted were newsreels promoting their interests, and ultimately this is what *Aktualita* came to do. Despite the attempts at a take-over, the continuity with a pre-war newsreel company had its value for Goebbels, for appearances were meant to be deceiving. And Peceny, though fending off take-over, was himself taken over, delivering just what the minister wanted.

Norway was also conquered and placed under a *Reichskommissar*. Like Luxembourg, it had had no indigenous newsreel prior to the conquest though foreign newsreels, including German ones, had been shown on a regular basis. According to 'Aryan' teachings, Norwegians being Nordic were racially akin to Germans though were unable to understand German, which made the German language *Wochenschau* unsuitable. A Norwegian language newsreel began operating in August 1941, more than a year after the German conquest, set up by the small indigenous National Socialist party, led by Vidkun Quisling, with little support from amongst the population. His name has become synonymous with political puppet because he had established a 'government of national unity' in the wake of the German invasion. He was then sidelined, though reinstated two years later. The German *Reichskommissar*, directly responsible to Hitler, held real power. In January 1944 the German and Norwegian newsreels merged and the puppets lost out. This 29-month period of independence from direct German control Tore Helseth attributes to German neglect, given the weakness of the Norwegian film industry, which posed no commercial threat. Thus, as Helseth emphasises, Norway was unusual in having no newsreel awaiting transformation. Luxembourg was in a similar position but, deemed German, was given the *Wochenschau*.

In examining film content and in particular the depiction of national unity in the Norwegian newsreels, Helseth makes use of Benedict Anderson's notion of the 'imagined community', which in wartime Norway was often simple wish-fulfilment. His discussion of the narrator's voice is also of interest, namely, to whom was it speaking. If the newsreels were for the enjoyment and instruction of the indigenous National Socialist party, then the majority of Norwegians were excluded. Only in the first few months of the Norwegian newsreel's existence was there a possibility of persuading Norwegians to back a winning horse. After that conditions were less favourable.

Quisling, like French fascists and collaborators, and collaborators elsewhere, faced a problem. Supporting the German invader, who at times spoke a similar political

language, but whose interests were not primarily that of the conquered nation, was not necessarily the best way to win popular support. Obvious to us, but not quite so obvious then. Indigenous fascists and their allies so hated the parties in power at the time of defeat and so fervently believed in some kind of new order that they often seemed incapable of recognising that the German conqueror would not treat them as partners. This was one battle the German occupiers could have won with careful handling but chose not to because they were, after all, the master race.

Belgium and the Netherlands were conquered shortly after Norway: each got a different kind of rule. The Netherlands was given a civil government under a Reich Commissioner, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, while the royal family fled to Britain. Belgium was placed under military rule while the king remained on the throne. The Netherlands had been neutral in the First World War while the invasion of neutral Belgium by Germany had been a major cause of that war—certainly the reason for British entry. Linguistically divided with the French language then dominant over the Flemish, newsreels in Belgium, prior to the occupation, had appeared only in French. Only one was actually produced in Belgium and even that, as Vande Winkel points out, was still not considered local. Once the Second World War began Belgium was strictly neutral as a defensive policy. German newsreels were shown, but were suspended when this elicited a hostile response, just two months prior to invasion. Shortly after the invasion Flemish speakers were exposed to Dutch newsreel prints, either because of ignorance or ineptness on the part of the conqueror who did not realise that though the written language was similar to Dutch, the spoken was different. Hitler had a soft spot for the Flemish people, believing them distant kin, and was keen that newsreels be produced in French and Flemish versions. Thus thanks to the German conqueror, Flemish speakers (like the Norwegians) got their first newsreels in their own language though this in itself was not enough to ensure support or acceptance during the occupation.

In contrast to Belgium, the Netherlands prior to invasion had two major national newsreel companies. Four foreign newsreels, including Ufa, were also available. Like the Belgians, once the war began the Dutch were unhappy with the political coverage in German newsreels and, after an item on the invasion of Denmark, banned all newsreels to the outrage of the German envoy. Victory was short for the invasion of the Netherlands followed shortly thereafter.

The two Dutch newsreel companies were put under the control of Tobis and continued producing in tandem while newsreels from Ufa and the ATW were also available. Thus for much of the occupation (until May 1944) the Dutch were exposed to newsreels from more than one source. Why this was the case is not altogether clear. One explanation advanced makes Alfred Greven responsible for the arrangement, who considered it necessary for political and economic reasons. Greven, sent to oversee film in Belgium and the Netherlands as well as in occupied France—in the latter responsible for facilitating French film production which was not always subservient to German commercial interests—was a complex character: he did not always follow orders [12]. Nevertheless, Vande Winkel believes that the more likely explanation for the continued existence of two newsreels is a conflict between the Ministry of Propaganda—which ran things when the occupied country was under civilian rule—and the civilian ruler, Seyss-Inquart. He hoped that by treating the Dutch lightly—for the Dutch were after all Germans *manqué*—they would transform themselves into Nazis [13]. If this is the correct explanation it illustrates the limits to the reach of

the Propaganda Ministry. Further, these competing authorities provide support to some extent for a view of the Third Reich as a polycratic system.

France after defeat lost some territory, and was then divided into a larger, northern area, directly under German military control with Paris as headquarters, and a smaller southern half which remained 'autonomous' with its capital at Vichy. Initially, both zones had their own newsreel, each with a different agenda: *Actualités Mondiales* shown in the Occupied Zone and *France-Actualités Pathe-Gaumont* shown in Vichy. The former presented the occupation as inevitable and irrevocable, but as compensation Germans were depicted as having respect for French culture and concern for French welfare. The Vichy newsreel provided a more palatable message, namely, a fiction that France was still independent under the paternal elderly military hero, Marshal Pétain, who promised a national revival and traditional conservative values. According to Bowles, Germans hardly appeared in Vichy newsreels. Though footage was sometimes shared between the two zones, it was repackaged. Vichy also censored German footage as when Hitler and Pétain met in October 1940 while the Occupied Zone chose with care its footage from Vichy, preferring items which could not be misconstrued politically.

Actualités Mondiales had some teething problems. Both Brett Bowles and James Charrel have noted the German origin of the narrators in early editions [14]. It took time to get this right. Improvements, Bowles notes, coincided with Ufa establishing a local office in Paris in October 1940. A format evolved in which French voices were used for light items with German voices for serious, political items. Certainly, as shown elsewhere (for example, *Aktualita*) there was a similar division of labour—on the whole serious political matters could not be left to local newsreel units.

Some narrators, according to Bowles, were even female but were confined to 'feminine' topics. It is worth bringing in here the issue of gender roles. When and why were female narrators used? Was their use deliberate, as it seems was the case with the French, or was it occasionally the result of failure, i.e. staff shortage, as in the case of one particular newsreel made for the Channel Islands, the only part of British territory the Germans did conquer? This female narrator's accent was not British and indicates that she came from the New York or New Jersey area, possibly recruited from the typing pool. Moreover, she was also not commenting on items of particular interest to a female audience which, given Nazi views on women, is most curious, for the narrator's voice should have been authoritative, further evidence that the Germans did not always get it right [15].

From August 1942 until the liberation the two zones shared a newsreel, *France-Actualités*. Its technical quality was high, and its editing skilful, but this was not enough to ensure success. For it was the context which exerted the greatest influence. Audiences, as Bowles shows, were too aware of the political changes in Vichy which the newsreels could not disguise—though Pétain himself never lost his credibility. As support for the resistance grew his image was used as a weapon, and the way he was filmed was changed. However, the course of the war along with material deprivation stiffened the hostility of French audiences to the newsreel. Thus by 1943, as German fortunes waned and the resistance grew, the newsreels, according to Bowles, lost all credibility. Audience outbursts increased, providing further evidence that the medium was subservient to the message.

French audiences seem to have been particularly demonstrative in expressing their dissatisfaction with the newsreels. Bowles cites an unusually large number of audience outbursts, appearing in a variety of forms—initially in the Occupied Zone and later also

in Vichy and then in both zones. As the resistance grew the outbursts became bolder. Initially in the Occupied Zone warnings had to be issued; some cinemas were temporarily closed. Cinemas had partly to dim their lights, an order not rescinded until late June 1941 which Bowles attributes to German confidence as a result of improvements in the newsreel itself, but most importantly, also because audiences had become convinced of German invincibility. In Vichy the introduction of *France-Actualités* sparked off outbursts there too, leading to a discussion as to whether newsreels should be shown in half-lit cinemas. Interestingly, at this point in time in the Occupied Zone the outbursts subsided because *France-Actualités* did not differ so radically from its predecessor. By late 1942 however, as the pro-German line became more pronounced, the outbursts escalated in the Occupied Zone, and even took place in cinemas where the lights were on, suggesting a large measure of audience support. Charting so fully these audience outbursts is very revealing, and offers one important means of gauging newsreel reception. In this respect French audiences were especially obliging for subsequent historical research, though its significance has been downplayed [16].

However, newsreels could influence public opinion. Though it was difficult to persuade audiences that Britain was an enemy, anti-Bolshevism proved acceptable, as Bowles points out, but it lost its anti-Semitic component. This provides further evidence in support of Kershaw's thesis, mentioned earlier, that it is far easier for propaganda to reinforce existing beliefs than to persuade people to adopt new ones.

The newsreels, one would assume, would be accorded a more favourable reception in Germany than in occupied/defeated countries. Even there, as Kay Hoffmann shows, the picture is mixed. German audiences had been exposed to the Nazi viewpoint for a longer period, just under seven years before the outbreak of war, but more importantly the Nazis claimed to be acting on behalf of 'Aryan' Germans. With the outbreak of war, and especially with the initial victories, the propaganda task for a victorious Germany—righting the wrongs of Versailles—was an easy one. The conquered nations, in contrast, had to be persuaded that it was in their best interests to be conquered. Moreover, they were exposed to German newsreels for a shorter period—four or at most five years, the last two of which Germany was obviously no longer invincible. Even with regard to the newsreels within Germany doubts have been raised. Mistakes were also made there. The cinematography was not always perfect. Some blame can be laid at the feet of Hitler, who did not want more light at his headquarters, resulting sometimes in dark images. Hitler also did not want to be filmed with original sound; indeed as the war progressed he became reluctant to appear in newsreels, as Hoffmann and Vande Winkel mention. The Minister of Propaganda had to follow his Führer, who also had the final cut which, according to Hoffman, he exercised until 1942, after which it was left to military men at Hitler's headquarters, as in the spring of 1943 over the Katyn massacre footage [17]. Goebbels had wanted to show the footage to German audiences as evidence of Bolshevik atrocities, but was prevented from doing so. According to Vande Winkel, it was cut out at least twice from the *Wochenschau* though was included in the *Auslandstonwoche*, thus offering additional proof that the *Auslandstonwoche* was not a mere duplication of the *Wochenschau*.

Once the war began to be lost, newsreel makers had a harder task. Keeping up morale was all-important, but audiences sometimes knew more, as information—especially from the eastern front—trickled in and hardships on the home front increased. Reporting German victories in their absence was by no means easy. Goebbels also had to contend with his boss, who insisted on victories being proclaimed, even in

their absence. This began with the Battle of Moscow in December 1941, when it was obvious that this was a failure [18]. Though the newsreels had had a head-start in Germany compared to the occupied countries, once the war began to go badly wrong, the task became uphill there too. The message that by conquering most of Europe Germany was bringing peace and prosperity to Germans was obviously untrue. Doubt began to creep in, despite censorship and other forms of control. From 1942 onwards, each year brought with it a more difficult propaganda task. The newsreels were initially very popular. But from the time of Stalingrad—and on Goebbels' orders—cinema-goers were to be refused entry once the newsreel began, a good indication that newsreels had begun to lose their attraction for German audiences. The newsreels themselves also began to sound hollow. The D-Day newsreel was a pathetic compilation when compared to newsreels of 1939 to 1941 which focused on the conquest of Poland or France and the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Hitler was the visionary and Goebbels the practical man, who had a better ear once things went wrong, while Hitler, as we know, remained in denial. Goebbels did not have a free hand and also had enemies amongst the Nazi hierarchy. So it was not smooth sailing devising messages for a German audience, and the failures mounted as the war began to be lost.

Some policy initiatives such as solving the 'Jewish Question' disappeared from the newsreels altogether, though Goebbels, Hitler, Goering and others in their well-publicised speeches kept blaming the Jews to the very end. Early in the war there were a very few items showing Jews being forced to work, as in Lodz (1939) or Belgrade (1941), and a brief item on the capture of a Yugoslav officer of Jewish origin, no doubt intended to illustrate the racial failings of the Yugoslav army, similar to attacks on the French and British for employing colonial troops [19]. With the attack on the Soviet Union the linking of Jews with Bolshevism once again became possible [20]. However, after 1941 there were no further items, aside from one reference in a Polish newsreel, which initially was dated to 1941, but which subsequently has been re-dated to 1942 [21]. After the decision was taken to exterminate the Jews—which despite disagreement about the dating certainly occurred by the end of 1941 and was implemented on a systematic basis shortly thereafter—the Jews disappeared completely from the newsreels. Their absence has been remarked on by several of the contributors. Bowles suggests that in France footage of Jewish deportations might have sparked sympathy for the Jews as well as an anti-German backlash. By late 1942 the Jews had become for Goebbels 'a delicate question' which should not be touched on at all [22]. It is interesting to note that it was considered undesirable to refer to this central policy in newsreel format—attaching an image of a human face to the enemy—but that nevertheless it continued to be acceptable to conjure up that enemy via the written or spoken word. Jews did not wholly disappear from the screen. Minor Jewish characters appeared in three German feature films in 1942 (*Die Entlassung*, *GPU* and *Rembrandt*), and in one in 1943, *Wien 1910* (*Vienna 1910*), which had passed the censor the previous year but was delayed because it had offended the sensibilities of Austrian Nazis [23]. Even in feature film they would soon disappear, and no such films were in the pipeline after 1942. Jews did feature in a documentary made in Theresienstadt in the summer of 1944, better known under its unofficial title, given it by the inmates: *The Führer Gives the Jews a City*, but this film was made by the SS, mainly to show neutral audiences that nothing untoward had happened to the Jews [24].

German newsreel did win an award for cinematic excellence from the Venice Film Festival and not solely because Germany was Italy's ally. Giuseppe Volpi came person-

ally to Berlin in 1941 to bestow awards on Emil Jannings for Ohm Kruger and Luise Ullrich for her portrayal of Annelie as well as Heinrich Roellenberg as the Head of the *Deutsche Wochenschau*. At a similar time in New York the exiled Siegfried Kracauer examining German newsreels in the early years of the war, gave them full marks when compared to the British or American [25]. In purely cinematic terms they were superior. They were also longer—extended to 40 minutes in May 1940. The technical mastery of the medium was obvious—dynamic images, good camera work, which included the type of camera, and skills of cameramen, some of whom were incorporated into the military (the PK units) which made possible the inclusion of footage showing direct combat. Newsreels were also well edited, building on an established German tradition. All of this, for Kracauer, contributed to the Nazis being able to produce state-of-the-art newsreels. Important for Kracauer was the fact that they were especially cinematic: the spoken word itself comprised, in his calculations, less than a third of the film in contrast to American newsreels, where it covered 80–90% of the shots [26]. The Germans felt able to rely on the image to communicate the message, and when that proved insufficient they could employ music or sound before having to resort to the word. Significantly, at key points the music stopped to enable the sounds of battle to be heard, in particular the sounds of military equipment.

As in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*—which had no narrator—music was especially important: it could be considered another voice, ensuring that the message was delivered in a non-verbal manner, closely matched to the image. Goebbels was fully aware of this, as Hoffmann makes clear. Why music played this role is worth consideration. Can this be attributed to Germany's rich musical tradition, which not only encompassed classical music but also folksong, military marches, and patriotic student songs? Did this encourage filmmakers to match it to the image, rather than cling to the word? Were German audiences assumed to have been aurally sophisticated?

The narrator's role may have been downplayed in German newsreels, but this was not the case in the documentary *Der ewige Jude* (1940), directed by Fritz Hippler, the Propaganda Ministry's Head of Film Department, who since 1935 had been involved with newsreels and who in 1939 was put directly in charge of them. The hectoring voice of the narrator is ever present in that film which suggests that Hippler cannot take credit for the newsreel's cinematic achievements. Finally, Kracauer pointed out that the different parts of one newsreel belonged to an organic whole. The same message appeared in different items which all added up to a victorious Germany under Nazi rule.

Given the cinematic triumph, was this also a propaganda triumph? Achievements in cinematography and related areas are still not a sure-fire recipe for success in the propaganda sphere. No matter how much manpower and organisation went into the production of newsreel, no matter how good the cinematography, nor how well constructed the individual newsreel, nor how ingeniously the message was presented, it was still the message which counted. The newsreel cannot be divorced from its context: its success was ultimately bound up with the course of the war.

The Nazis, in a strong position with regard to news dissemination, could screen out alternative views. But audiences were not that malleable. Moreover, newsreel was only one medium amongst several, though in most countries the most accessible. In the occupied countries newsreel producers faced an uphill task once the war began to go badly, which in some countries occurred soon after the custom-made newsreel was up and running. Furthermore, Germany had become responsible for controlling the lives and often the deaths of the inhabitants. Persuading them that they should be grateful

for being conquered was not easy. Some mileage could be gained from being saved from the Bolshevik threat but this was not possible during the existence of the Nazi–Soviet Pact which was when Western Europe was first conquered. The first German defeat, the Battle of Moscow (December 1941), coincided with Pearl Harbor bringing the US into the war. After that the task became harder. From the time the custom-made newsreels were fully operational to the first military defeat the Germans had less than 18 months of favourable conditions in which they could try to persuade the conquered peoples to support the winning side. Once she was losing there was divergence and resistance to German rule increased, making the conditions for successful propaganda in turn less favourable. No matter how ingeniously newsreels were made, no matter how good the cinematography, audiences could not be persuaded that all was well. Cinematic achievements alone were insufficient, even with a captive (in all senses of the word) audience. The medium was still separate from the message which this new research confirms.

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NOTES

- [1] Publications in English include David Welch, Nazi wartime newsreel propaganda, in K.R.M. Short (ed.), *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (London and Canberra, 1983); Goebbels, Götterdämmerung, and the Deutsche Wochenschauen, in K.R.M. Short and Stephen Dolezel (eds), *Hitler's Fall: the newsreel witness* (London, New York and Sidney, 1988), pp. 80–99; *Propaganda and the German Cinema* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 191–203; Robert Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: the most infamous propaganda campaign in history* (New York, 1978), pp. 223–258; Felix Moeller, *The Film Minister* (London, 2000), pp. 145–160; and R.C. Raack, Nazi film propaganda and the horrors of war, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 6 (1986), pp. 189–195.
- [2] Eugen Hadamovsky, *Propaganda und Nationale Macht* (Berlin, 1933), pp. 25–36; an English translation appeared after the war: *Propaganda and National Power* (New York, 1972). See also Alice Goldfarb Marquis, 'Words as weapons: propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (1978), p. 493.
- [3] Hans Barkhausen, 'Footnote to the history of Riefenstahl's Olympia', *Film Quarterly*, 1 (1974), pp. 8–12.
- [4] Robert Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won*, pp. 17–21. Subscribing to the notion of 'totalitarian thought control', Herzstein maintained that the Nazis had won the propaganda war and attributes their success to, amongst other things, 'inducing the population to wage an increasingly hopeless struggle'. He also provides counter-evidence, as in a chapter on the German reaction to Hitler's war (pp. 403–431), which still does not deflect him from his central thesis.
- [5] Welch, Goebbels, Götterdämmerung, p. 80. See also p. 97, note 4.
- [6] Ian Kershaw, How effective was Nazi propaganda? in David Welch, (ed.), *Nazi Propaganda* (London and Canberra, 1983), pp. 183–184.
- [7] Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda* (London and New York, 1999), p. 126.
- [8] L.M. Vassberg, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and language choice—the effect of nazi assimilationist policies in Alsace, 1940–1945', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 17:3 (1994), pp. 496–516.
- [9] Modris Ecksteins, War, memory and politics: the fate of the film, *All Quiet on the Western Front, Central European History*, XII (1980), p. 71.
- [10] Initially described in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, 14 July 1935 as 'catcalls mixed in with the applause' at the Ufa cinema on Berlin's Kurfürstendamm, they were attributed to 'Jews getting impudent and friends of Jews as long as the cinema remained darkened'. By the next day this had made the paper's front page headline: 'Jewish impudence: the incident at the première of a Swedish film in Berlin'. Catcalls rather than a demonstration are also mentioned in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 16 July 1935. For Hitler's comments, see Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler, Speeches and Proclamations, 1932–1945*, I, trans. Mary Gilbert (London, 1990), p. 706. Another case of catcalls being transformed into an incident though not involving Nazis, which nevertheless got their approval, was the reception accorded to the British film *Jew Süss* (1934) in Vienna. See Susan

- Tegel, The politics of censorship: Britain's *Jew Süß* (1934) in London, New York and Vienna, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 15 (1995), pp. 219–244.
- [11] Paul Lesch, *Heim ins Ufa-Reich, NS-Filmpolitik und die Rezeption deutscher Filme in Luxemburg 1933–1944* (Trier, 2002), p. 88, note 298. As Lesch notes, this is still a far cry from 'riots' as suggested by Friedrich Knilli, *Ich war Jud Süß: die Geschichte des Filmstars, Ferdinand Marian* (Berlin, 2000), p. 155.
- [12] This is evident from his Berlin Document Center file. See also Susan Tegel, Veit Harlan and the origins of *Jud Süß*, 1938–1939: opportunism in the creation of Nazi anti-Semitic film propaganda, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 16 (1996), p. 523. Greven also appears as a character in the recent Bertrand Tavernier film, *Laisser-Passer* (2001), which reassesses the roles of French employees of Continental Films, previously accused of collaboration. Based on the accounts of a writer and director still living, who once worked for Continental, the portrait of Greven, which emerges, is complex and not wholly negative.
- [13] Gerhard Hirschfeld, Nazi propaganda in occupied Western Europe: the case of the Netherlands, in David Welch (ed.), *Nazi Propaganda: the power and the limitations* (London, 1983), pp. 150–154, cited in Vande Winkel, note 89.
- [14] James Charrel, paper given at the XX IAMHIST Congress at the University of Leicester, 'The History of the Future: Visions of the Past', 18 July 2003. See also James Charrel, 'Entre pouvoir allemand et pouvoir français: les actualités cinématographiques en France (1940–1944)', *Société et Représentations*, 2001, pp. 63–70.
- [15] A copy of this newsreel can be found at the Imperial War Museum; it was screened at the XX IAMHIST Congress at Leicester, July 2003.
- [16] François Garçon, Nazi film propaganda in occupied France, in Welch (ed), *Nazi Propaganda* (1983), p. 174.
- [17] Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won*, p. 231.
- [18] Goebbels noted in his diary (11 January 1942) that audiences now applauded the *Wochenschau* less. See Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich, 1996), Teil 2, Diktate 1941–1945, vol. iii, p. 92.
- [19] *Ufa Tonwoche*, no. 472; *Wochenschau*, no. 558. R.C. Raack, Nazi film propaganda and the horrors of war, pp. 191–192; DW 558 (6 April, 1941) or in the *Wochenschau Sonderbericht* from 6 April 1941.
- [20] *Wochenschau*, nos. 566 and 567.
- [21] Raack, Nazi film propaganda and the horrors of war, p. 194, note 9. Raack redates this Polish newsreel to 1942 though the Polish archive had dated it to 1941.
- [22] Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret* (London, 1983), pp. 27, 110.
- [23] Richard Geehr, John Heineman and Gerald Herman, Wien 1910: an example of Nazi anti-semitism, *Film and History*, 15 (1985), pp. 50–64. The attempt to depict an anti-Semite who was not a proto-Nazi (Lueger) can by no means be construed as an anti-fascist film, as recently described in Thomas Elsaesser with Michael Wedel (eds), *The BFI Companion to German Cinema* (London, 1999), p. 105.
- [24] Karel Margry, Theresienstadt 1944–1945: the Nazi propaganda film depicting the concentration camp as paradise, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 12 (1992), pp. 145–162.
- [25] Siegfried Kracauer, The conquest of Europe on the screen: the Nazi newsreel, 1939–40, *Social Research*, 3 (1943), pp. 337–357. His 'Propaganda and the Nazi war film' (1942), originally issued by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, is reproduced in *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton, 1947), pp. 275–331.
- [26] *Ibid.*, p. 339. Kracauer gives a rough estimate for American newsreels in which the word covers 80–90% of the shots.

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