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KAREN BAYER, *'How Dead is Hitler?'* *Der britische Starreporter Sefton Delmer und die Deutschen*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz. Abteilung Universalgeschichte, 219 (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2008), viii + 349 pp. ISBN 978 3 8053 3876 9. €45.00

Who was Sefton Delmer, and why write a book about this British journalist who is almost forgotten today in Germany? Karen Bayer's biography gives us the answer. Sefton Delmer was born in Berlin in 1904 to Australian parents. After the First World War started, his family was interned and could not move to Britain until 1917. After completing his studies at Oxford, Delmer returned to Berlin, where his father had been working for the Inter-Allied Control Commission since 1921. In 1928, the press magnate Lord Beaverbrook appointed him Berlin correspondent for the *Daily Express*. There he made the acquaintance of leading Nazis in the late 1920s, and accompanied Hitler on his election campaign in 1932. In his articles, Delmer could not hide his admiration for the Nazis, and attended sumptuous parties with them. It was only after the Röhm putsch and under pressure from his newspaper that, from 1934, his sympathy gave way to a more critical attitude. In the years that followed, he worked as a foreign correspondent reporting, among other things, on the Spanish Civil War. In July 1940, Delmer began working for the BBC's German Service, and from 1941 he played a large part in the Black Propaganda which the Political Warfare Executive put out against Germany.

Delmer's work for the British authorities did not come to an end with the war. He was involved with the democratic re-education of the Germans in the British Occupation Zone, and built up a new German news agency, the German News Service. This later gave rise to the Deutsche Pressedienst, a precursor of the the Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa). He also designed a British newspaper for Germany which was intended to provide a model for other papers.

When Delmer left this job after disagreements in the autumn of 1945, he returned to the *Daily Express* as foreign correspondent. For the next fourteen years, Delmer reported from all over the world, but Germany remained one of his most important topics, and he continued to be regarded as a 'German expert' (p. 169). He was not re-appointed resident German correspondent, however, but presented

as a star reporter in the 1950s: 'Delmer—the man who is always there! SEFTON DELMER, chief foreign affairs reporter of the *Daily Express*, is the man who is on-the-spot when big news breaks' (p. 244). In addition, he served as the *Daily Express's* oft quoted expert on National Socialism, his earlier sympathy for Nazism being 'consistently ignored' (p. 172). In the years that followed, he reported critically from the newly-founded Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, warned against a Fourth Reich, and deplored the continuity of Nazi elites in a resurgent West Germany. Thus in September 1949, one month after the first elections in the Federal Republic, he issued the following warning: 'The new chapter in German history beginning this week is another Nazi chapter' (p. 184). Much attention was paid to Delmer's reporting in the Federal Republic—and it was also much criticized. In 1954 *Christ und Welt* saw him as a pathological enemy of the Germans.

Unexpectedly for Delmer, Beaverbrook sacked him in 1959, after thirty-two years of service. In his memoirs, Delmer blamed the ill will of his boss of many years; Bayer points to his extravagant expenses and the declining quality of his articles. In the following years, Delmer published his highly acclaimed memoirs, and continued to write for British and German newspapers. He died in 1979.

This biography by Karen Bayer, her Ph.D. thesis written for the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, claims not merely to trace Sefton Delmer's life, but also to analyse his integration into his political surroundings, in particular, his ambivalent relationship with Germany and the Germans. Although the biography never degenerates into a mere retelling of Delmer's life, the study does not always fulfil its promise to provide an analysis. The main problem seems to lie with the book's chronological structure, which resists systematic analysis. Thus its highly readable nature is closely connected with one of its weaknesses, as it means that many of the work's important findings are scattered throughout the book. It might have been sensible to present and systematically to discuss, for example, Delmer's construction of his own biography in his memoirs, especially where it obviously differs from his reports, for instance, in his attitude to National Socialism. Bayer recognizes and discusses the problem (on pp. 23 and 26, among others), but she dedicates a whole chapter merely to the reactions to Delmer's books (pp. 255–61). Similarly scattered throughout the whole book we find references to Delmer's

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image of Germany (pp. 238–41, among others). Even if he never developed a coherent theory about the Germans (p. 239), a systematic account and discussion would have been desirable. Bayer shows that despite Delmer's knowledge of Germany and the Germans, his 'ideas about National Socialism were remarkably unclear'. According to her, it was 'the epitome of all that he considered bad' (p. 241).

Another point of criticism is that the biography is weakly contextualized. Readers find out too little about what distinguished Delmer's life and reportage from that of other British journalists, what he had in common with them, and what exactly made him a 'star reporter'. A brief glance at group biographies of British foreign correspondents in Germany and some reflections on the professional profile of journalists, and, in general, on the personalization of news might have provided greater clarity. More information about how he saw himself as a journalist would also have been welcome. Thus Bayer points out that in the 1950s, 'the presentation and content' of his articles suggests that they were 'not always to be taken completely seriously' (p. 217). The author cannot be blamed for the fact that, with the exception of a cartoon on the dust jacket, the book has no illustrations. These would have been helpful, among other things to document the presentation of Delmer as a star reporter, but also simply to help readers make themselves a clearer picture of the subject of the book.

Despite these weaknesses, this is a successful piece of work which shows that Sefton Delmer did not just report on Anglo-German relations, but that his reportage formed a part of these relations.

FLORIAN ALTENHÖNER studied history, political science, and American studies, and completed his Ph.D. at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2005. He has been a member of a Bundestag deputy's staff, and now lives as an independent historian. His publications deal mainly with the history of communication and the secret service, and include 'Das "Heimatheer deutscher Frauen" – bürgerliche Frauen in Berlin 1918 zwischen Propaganda und Denunziation', *Ariadne*, 47 (2005), 38–45, and *Kommunikation und Kontrolle: Gerüchte und städtische Öffentlichkeiten in Berlin und London* (2008).