

The Second World War

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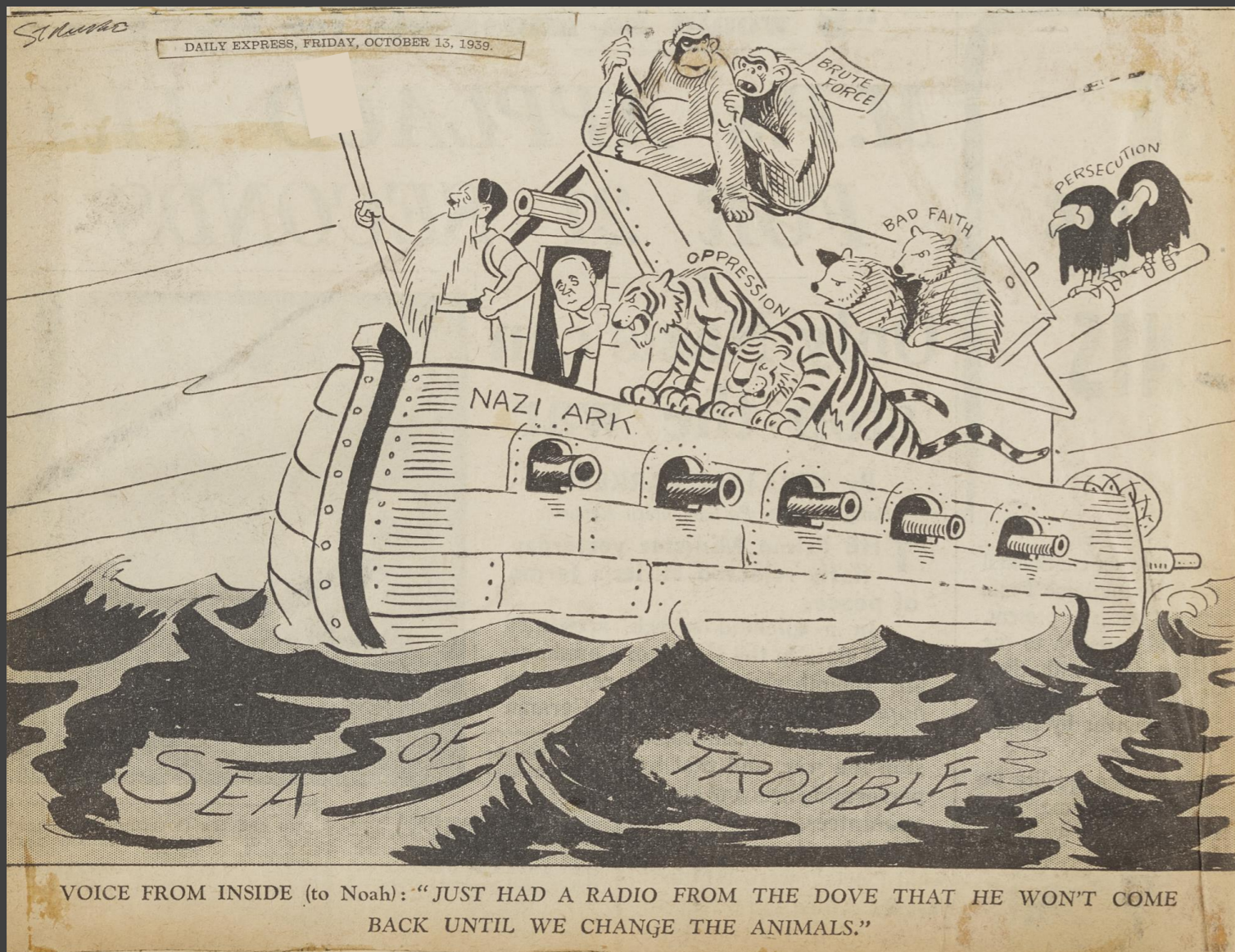


Figure 1: Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, LIDDLE/WW2/GA/PRB/3.

Anti-German Sentiment in Popular British Discourse during World War II

'our unrelenting struggle against the vile, dark, criminal forces which have laid their foul grip on Western Europe and on Christian civilisation'
- Winston Churchill

This discourse actively shaped the curriculum in German Studies at the University of Leeds and the way Germans and German speakers were perceived changed dramatically.

Othering Germanness

In this way, the supposedly 'alien' quality of Germanness is emphasised whilst equally stressing the status of Britain as the heroic 'saviour' of mankind. The striking parallels between Churchill's rhetoric and the ideology reflected in key shifts to the pedagogy and curriculum of German Studies at the University of Leeds demonstrates how the re-entry of xenophobic values into British discourse was actively shaping the dissemination and representation of German language teaching in 1930s and 1940s Britain.

'by not being Others we define ourselves'
- Elazar Barkan

References: Elazar Barkan, 'Post-Anti-Colonial Histories; Representing the Other in Imperial Britain' *Journal of British Studies*, 2, (1994), 180-203, p. 180.

Conclusions

It is clear that the anti-German sentiment circulating within British media and popular British discourse throughout World War Two had a significant impact on the representation of German language and culture within German Studies at the University of Leeds. Moreover, the violence of the language in political speeches and British publications during this time contributed to the spread of xenophobic attitudes towards Germanness. It is shocking to see how stark the influence of this prejudice is on the curriculum during the 1930s through to the mid-1940s at Leeds, in which Old High German Texts were removed due to desiring to avoid the connections between Old English and German and thus ties between British and German culture. As a result, we can see how the syllabus at Leeds was manipulated to distance the influence of German identity and language on British culture, as a means of othering 'the enemy'.

German Studies at Leeds during World War II



Figure 2: Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, LIDDLE/WW2/GA/PRB/4.



Figure 3: The National Archives, Kew Central Office of Information, Posters Collection, INF 3/140.

Changes to German Studies in Britain

Following the outbreak of war, there was a drive in boys' schools to learn German as a means of supporting the war effort, whereas German was discouraged in girls' education.

Changes to the Curriculum at Leeds

Following the outbreak of WW2, the number of students studying German Studies at the University of Leeds decreased suddenly. The outbreak of war coincided with the introduction of alternative schemes to the curriculum. The number of Old High German texts were reduced to 13 in 1935 from a total of 18 in 1920. These texts were then removed entirely from the literatures section of the course but some could still be found in the languages courses.

Motivations for Changes

It is thought that these texts were removed due to their focus on the Germanic roots shared by both English and German, thus demonstrating a decisive need to separate British and German culture for the purposes of maintaining the Self-Other distinction.

References: Special Collections, Leeds University Library, University of Leeds Archive Collection, LUA/DEP/016.



Figure 4: Photograph from the University Archive of the University of Leeds depicting the forefront of Parkinson Building. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, University of Leeds Archive Collection, LUA/PHC/003/5.