

**The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact With Hitler by Ben Urwand.
The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.**

Thousands of books have been written, and continue to be written, about the Nazi regime of 1933-1945, and all of its evil acts have been well documented. It is surprising then to read a book whose focus is something different altogether.

In *The Collaboration*, Ben Urwand, a Junior Fellow of the Society of Fellows at Harvard, (of whom I suspect to hear much more in the future), has written an analysis of the working relationship that existed between the major Hollywood Studios and the Nazis, and that continued until about 1940. Urwand divides his book into six chapters, bookended by a Prologue and an Epilogue: *Hitler's Obsession with Film, Enter Hollywood, "Good", "Bad", "Switched Off", and Switched On.*

It is easily forgotten but Germany had a thriving movie industry before the Nazis came to power, and it continued in a more attenuated form for some years after 1933; but Hollywood movies were also hugely popular, indeed the Führer himself was a devotee. After the Nazis took control of Germany, however, there were concerns about the potentially subversive nature of some Hollywood films, and steps were taken to censor at home and try to control production abroad. Through their diplomatic hubs in major nations, notably their consulate in Los Angeles, the Nazis engaged with the major studios and put them under the severest pressure to change scenes, dialogue and pretty much anything else they felt was an attack on the regime or its ideological planks.

Urwand shows all too clearly how the studios, many of them founded and run by Jews, were so keen for their businesses to prosper in Germany that they appeased rather than opposed in the majority of cases. The Germans played the system and did it so well that Urwand's claim of 'Zusammenarbeit', collaboration, rings all too true.

In their fear of giving Hitler more propaganda against the Jews, Jewish actors and themes were removed from movies and many Jews lost their jobs in the industry; but the Nazis were not only interested in films that challenged, they were enthusiastic about some, such as *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, starring Gary Cooper, and *Our Daily Bread*, directed by King Vidor, which were deemed to have, or promote, 'National Socialist themes'.

It was not until 1942 that the Hollywood studios went into war overdrive, producing some 800 pictures that were concerned with the Second World War and the evils of fascism, and after the war was over a group of studio bosses was taken on a tour of Germany which included a visit to a concentration camp, though their response to what they saw, according to Urwand, was deeply superficial and their major interest was not what had been done by the Nazi state but whether in the aftermath of the war Hollywood could not superimpose itself on whatever shreds were left of the German film industry.

This is a powerful, highly informative, occasionally shocking book that shines a bright light on the Nazi-Hollywood axis during the 1930s and 40s, and is a valuable and important contribution to an ever deeper understanding of extraordinary times.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh