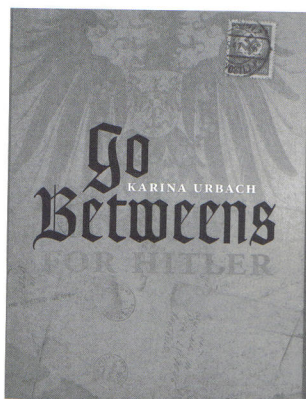


# Book Reviews

by Coryne Hall



**“Go-Betweens for Hitler”** by Karina Urbach. (Oxford University Press), 389 pages, 10 illustrations in the text.

During the period from the First to the Second World Wars go-betweens were the unofficial side of diplomacy. Most of them were aristocratic or royal, forming a closed club of amateur ambassadors whose international contacts and easy access to those in power made the ideal conduits. In this study, Karina Urbach has hit upon a little-known side of diplomacy, whose ramifications are still with us today.

There were many of these go-betweens. Prince Max Egon von Furstenberg acted as a conduit between the Kaiser and the Habsburg monarchy right up to 1918; during the First World War Queen Marie of Romania approached her cousin George V with demands for territorial gains; and the German Foreign Minister tried to persuade Marie’s mother the Duchess of Coburg to travel to neutral Romania to demand support for Germany.

The most famous use of back channels was the Prince Sixtus peace initiative, when Empress Zita of Austria-Hungary used her mother’s friend Princess Sarsina to approach her brother Sixtus, who was fighting in the Belgian army. The exposure of these peace feelers had an effect on the idea of go-betweens in general. Now discredited, they were looked upon as traitors to their country.

After the First World War Bolshevism was seen as a very real threat to aristocrats and royalty alike, being a danger to their way of life. Fascism was seen as less of a threat, as when Hitler came to power he did not threaten to repossess their property. The fear of Bolshevism caused many of these people to be radicalised and used by Hitler.

The most famous, although not the only one, was Carl Edward, Duke of Coburg. A grandson of Queen Victoria, he was shipped off to Germany when young to become heir to the Dukedom. Ms Urbach comes down very hard on Coburg, whose misfortune was to be seen as too English in Germany, and too German in England. She is also hard on his sister Princess Alice, who helped him in his go-between

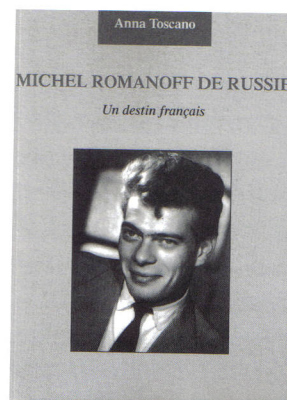
missions in England by letting him use her Sussex house to lobby politicians on behalf of Hitler and then whitewashed his career in her memoirs. When he was later interned as a traitor, it was Alice who helped secure his release.

Hitler was anxious to secure an alliance with the British and to this end Carl Edward was in touch with both Edward VIII and, later, George VI. In 1937 he helped to organise the Duke of Windsor’s visit to the Rhineland. He was also close to his cousin Prince Josias of Waldeck-Pyrmont, who had the Buchenwald concentration camp under his jurisdiction. Two other go-betweens used by Hitler were Princess Stephanie Hohenlohe (an Austrian adventuress who acted as a conduit to the press baron Lord Rothermere) and Prince Max Egon zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg. Hitler also used members of the Hesse, Wied and Mecklenburg-Schwerin families to contribute to his secret diplomacy during the Third Reich.

One of the many unanswered questions in all this is the role of Queen Mary, who stayed in touch with her German relatives during the inter-war years and was the main link to the German network for her sons Edward VIII and George VI. Needless to say, the correspondence in the Royal Archives for this period is closed, joining that of a lot of other archives to which Ms Urbach was unable to gain full access.

From peace feelers in the First World War to appeasers on the eve of the Second World War, this unique book makes fascinating reading and proves we still have a lot to learn about the activities of some of Europe’s best-known royal families.

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**“Michel Romanoff de Russie. Un destin français”**, by Anna Toscano. (Editions l’Harmattan, Paris). 326 pages, text in French. 51 illustrations.

Prince Michael Romanoff was descended on both sides from Tsar Alexander II. His father Prince Feodor was one of the many sons of Grand Duchess Xenia; while his mother Princess Irene was the daughter of Grand Duke Paul by hismorganatic marriage. Nevertheless, he considered himself French, not Russian.