

Alexander Freiherr von Spitzmüller and his Diary.

Thomas Just
Austrian State Archives

Abstract

Alexander Freiherr von Spitzmüller (1862-1953) was one of the most influencing persons during the final period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He started his career as a civil servant in the Austrian financial ministry where he worked with Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk. In 1910 Spitzmüller was appointed chairman of the board of the 'Creditanstalt' in Vienna, thus by far the most important bank in the monarchy. Spitzmüller was a counselor of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and a friend of the Rothschild family.

He served as a Chairman of the Creditanstalt until he was appointed Trade Secretary in 1915. In 1916 he was appointed Finance Minister. He quit in 1917 and became the Common Finance Minister in September 1918.

During all his years in office Alexander Spitzmüller kept writing a diary which now is part of the holdings of the Austrian State Archive/Dept. Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv. This diary is especially interesting because it is written by an in depth insider of high politics and high finance during the downfall of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. One can gain a lot of information regarding the 'inner circles' of the Creditanstalt and his relationship with his 'archrival' Rudolf Sieghart, the mighty Governor of the Bodencreditanstalt. Spitzmüller always reflects his work in his diary, stating for example on the 18th of December in 1915: 'Es ist furchtbar unter solchem Drucke ein Amt führen zu müssen, das mir sonst Freude machen würde. Die Tragik meines Lebens! Statt Handelspolitik Drosselung von Verkehr und Konsum'. He also wrote a lot about the relationship between the civil government and the high command and the different opinions between these two poles of the administration of the monarchy. My paper will concentrate on his time as Chairman of the Creditanstalt and his different terms serving as a secretary, regarding his judgements of politics and finance during the prewar crisis and the First World War.

Spitzmüller also used his diary in his brilliantly written autobiography, titled '... und hat auch Ursach, es zu lieben', which was published in 1955.