



Markus Dreist. *Die Düsseldorfer Bezirksregierung zwischen Demokratisierung, Nazifizierung und Entnazifizierung: Eine staatliche Mittelbehörde an der Schnittstelle zwischen Verwaltung und Politik.* Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003. 158 S. EUR 14.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-89861-205-0.

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Coming to Terms with Düsseldorf's Nazi Past

This volume represents the proceedings of a 2002 conference of the same name hosted by the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf and the Bezirksregierung Düsseldorf. The conference, which has provided the starting-point for a complete research project on the subject,[1] was supported in the true spirit of contemporary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Regierungspräsident Jürgen Bässow explains in his opening remarks that he had wanted to know more about the relationship between the *Bezirksregierung* and the Nazi regime and the government's role in Nazi atrocities. He therefore called upon academic historians and archivists to fill in the voids. In the introduction, Gerd Krumisch reassures the audience that the contributors were asked by the president's office to contribute to a "kritisch[e] Geschichte" (p. 13) rather than an exculpatory or laudatory one. The results of their efforts are the nine essays presented here that deal with various aspects of governmental administration from the end of the First World War to the early postwar period as well as the complicated question of reparations. Included in the proceedings are summaries of the discussions.

As the subtitle of the collection suggests, all of these essays treat in one way or another the complicated relationship between the Nazi party apparatus and governmental administration. Most generally, the papers collectively deal with three fundamental questions. First is the question of continuity between the Weimar and Nazi periods on the one hand and between the Nazi and post-

war periods on the other. Second is the question of the place of mid-level governmental administration in the NS system—in particular, the degree to which the vaunted "unity of party and state" described the relationship between the Düsseldorf *Bezirksregierung* and the party apparatus; the participants employ and interrogate Ernst Fraenkel's model of the "dual state" to make sense of the increasingly complex webs of authority and competence extending from the level of state down to the communal level. These two questions are intimately connected to the third, which explores the relationships between the administrative and party authorities through the political and career histories of administrative personnel.

The papers are arranged roughly chronologically, beginning with Toni Pierenkemper's overview of the extraordinarily crisis-laden period between 1914 and 1945 (p. 15). The history of the region, which does not exist as a "natural" economic unity but rather as a politically imagined space, can be divided into two phases, the first being the period of the Rhenish *Sonderweg* during which the area was occupied by the Allies. During this period there was a shift in the relationship between politics and economics in the region as local governments became increasingly significant in economic development and in the financing of public-works projects such as airports—a manifestation of the "Schwäche des politischen systems der Weimarer Republik und seiner Repräsentanten" (p. 22). At the same time one saw the increasing dominance of big-business both in politics (Hugo Stinnes and Alfred

Hugenberg being the two most obvious examples). After the Allied evacuation of the region in 1930, the national revolution of 1933 and the attendant economic and political policies changed the situation drastically. *Gleichschaltung* and agricultural policies reshaped the political-economic landscape. So, too, did the centralization of administration at the expense of local governments and the development of the “polykratisches System” (p. 24) of economic decision-making at the expense of big business (although he admits this is still contested). To determine just how much room for maneuver individual businessmen had in this system will require further examination of the role of the *Mittelbehörden*, Pierenkemper concludes.

Gerd Kumeich’s essay in turn demonstrates that the Ruhr occupation was a crucial episode in the delegitimation of both the state administration and democracy. The seeming inability of the regional and national authorities to adequately support German passive opposition to the occupation seemed to demonstrate the weakness of the German political system that had already been discredited during the war. It is still unclear, Krumeich writes, what role the fascist activities in the Ruhr played in this undermining of political authority. In the summary of the discussion, it is concluded that it is as yet unclear if or how this delegitimation had an impact on late Weimar politics.

The relationship between the party and the mid-level state authorities is the subject of Kurt Dörmann’s and Horst Romeyk’s essays. Dörmann deals with the impact of the seizure of power in 1933/34 on the mid-level administration and its role in the eventual disempowerment of the district president in Düsseldorf. Examining the presidencies of Karl Bergmann, who was forced out of office in May 1933, and his successor Carl Christian Schmid, Dörmann demonstrates that the Party, through its *Beamten-gesetze* and the party apparatus it created to take over certain administrative functions, greatly weakened what was a previously effective governmental office. Here personnel policies were crucial, as figures in important positions of party leadership took over and held simultaneously district and lower-level governmental offices. Horst Romeyk also tackles Nazi personnel policies and examines the political careers of the mid-level officials in the *Bezirksregierung*, outlining the influence of the regime on the political affiliations and political choices of those whose jobs often very precarious. The picture he paints is perhaps not a surprising one: there were few members of the NSDAP before 1933 and an increased number immediately afterward. The

pressures to join the party were tremendous, particularly in highly politicized offices such as the divisions for churches and schools. He titles his piece “Konjunkturritter?” and indeed describes how the party created the conditions under which political conformity was necessary for professional survival. Romeyk is not interested in exculpating the governmental officials for their complicity in the regime; rather he seeks to demonstrate how the subordination of the *Bezirksregierung* to the party agenda was possible, insisting that “die Alltäglichkeit des BÄnsen hat sich in vielen kleinen Akten der Verwaltung manifestiert” (p. 83).

The extent to which one can talk of a “unity of party and state,” as the Nazis proclaimed there to be, is taken up further by Horst Matzerath and Alfons Kenkmann. Taking the perspective to the lowest levels of political administration, Matzerath examines the personnel politics of the party and “Kommunalaufsicht” by upper party and state authorities, which he finds to be more characteristic of dualism than any kind of party-state “unity.” State oversight of local administration, for which there were precedents already in the nineteenth century, became increasingly pronounced after 1933. This was only exacerbated in the concomitant office-holding of key party members, such as Gauleiter Josef von Terboven, who also became Oberpräsident of the Rheinland in 1935 (although Düsseldorf experienced the least amount of unification through personnel of all the Gaue, p. 88). Matzerath concludes that the changes led “zu einer schrittweisen Veränderung des Systems, bei dem die alten Strukturen zersetzt wurden, ohne dass neue tragfähige an deren Stelle traten” (p. 94). Kenkmann describes a somewhat more successful process of centralization in the development of the national police system and the eventual “Verschmelzung” of the SS and the police, which was accomplished with the persistence of local police systems and older police practices. It is suggested in the discussion that “Polykratie” (a term already introduced by Pierenkemper in his essay) rather than “Dualismus” may be a better way of understanding the unquestionably altered administrative system. The question of continuities arises again in the discussion of Kenkmann’s paper: Can this new “polycratic” system be understood as a “Verschmelzung” of old and new practices and if so, what, precisely, remained of old practices (such as professional education of police officers)?

In a provocative essay on the war’s end and the period of occupation, Bernd-A. Rusinek suggests several directions for further research. Insisting that 1945 should be seen in light of comparisons to 1918, he suggests that

a post-war history of the mid-level political administration should be mindful of the question of whether the period represented a “heroische Tat schnellen Wiederaufbaus” or a mere “Restauration” (p. 115). In this regard, he argues that more needs to be known about the earliest Allied personnel decisions, about the politics of denazification and the role of old Weimar and Nazi political conflicts in those decisions, as well as “die Mentalität der Kohäsion als Bestandteil der behördlichen Identität” (p. 116). One must also answer the question of whether the “trained” officials put in place in the interest of reconstruction were really specialists—something perhaps best facilitated by cooperation with present-day administrators, as the current project promises, according to Rusinek.

“Wir brauchen Verwaltungsgeschichte,” writes Rusinek, paraphrasing Karl Marx, “[...]aber wir brauchen sie anders” (p. 120). He recommends an administrative history that examines the internal as well as external workings of the institutions from a cultural perspective that arrives at the internal mentalities and communications among administrators. Rusinek offers Bourdieu’s concept of “fields” to theorize the history of the administrative authorities as “Teil des gesamtgesellschaftlichen Kommunikationsprozesses ..., in dem Leitfragen konstituiert und Probleme entweder zu relevanten Fragestellungen erhoben oder als nicht von Interesse beiseitegeschoben werden” (p. 122).

The final two essays include Julia Volmer’s program-

matic call for an administrative history of reparations, which, according to Volmer, remains thoroughly unresearched. Volmer outlines what is known of the subject and offers suggestions for source material. Dieter Lück of the Hauptstaatsarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen gives an overview of the relevant archival sources and is followed by a discussion of other sources one might consult in an investigation of the *Bezirksregierung* under National Socialism.

While the specialist will find little new here, together the papers in the volume suggest that there is still much to be known about the history of one of Germany’s most important *Regierungsbezirke* and its government’s complex relationship with National Socialism. The essays will be of relevance not only to those interested in the history of the region, but to those whose interests lie in the three overlapping questions outlined above. As Rusinek points out in his contribution, the research project proposed here would be most useful if accompanied by comparisons to other large *Regierungsbezirke* whose experiences may have been similar—or different—from those of a district that was “besonders ’schwierig’” (p. 123).

Note

[1]. Christina Strick, “Geschichte der Bezirksregierung in Düsseldorf, 1917-1955,” H-Soz-u-Kult, January 26, 2004, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/projekte/id=64>.

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