

Andreas Müller. *„Führt der Bauer, stürzt der Staat“: Deutschnationale Agrarpolitik 1928-1933.* Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2003. 445 pp. EUR 44.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8316-0225-4.



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Andreas Müller's book is a careful study of the German National People's Party (Deutschnationale Volkspartei, or DNVP) during the last five years of the Weimar Republic. Müller analyzes the party's agricultural agenda, its relationship with rural and industrial interest groups, the quarrels and factions within the party, and its performance in local and parliamentary elections. Müller makes the argument that the DNVP, once it had chosen total opposition to the Weimar system, used agrarian policy as a means to destroy the Republic. With this strategy, according to Müller, the DNVP ceased being an agricultural party altogether and was instrumental in its own demise in 1933.

Müller divides the party's path into oblivion into three parts that coincide with increasing political problems of the Weimar democracy during its last years. In fact, he argues that the DNVP's political campaigns were both, a mirror and a driving force behind the demise of the Weimar Republic. Müller first summarizes the agrarian ideology of the DNVP before 1927. In the tradition of conservative agrarian demands, the party promoted the protection of the domestic market and emphasized the special role of agriculture for the national economy and for German society as a whole. Müller then turns to the years 1927-1930 that saw the collapse of the conservative agrarian block in the midst

of the global agrarian crisis. In several chapters and subchapters Müller examines the party's governmental involvement, its stand towards the new rural party, the Christian National Peasant Party, or CNBL, and the DNVP's performance in regional and parliamentary elections. Under the leadership of Alfred Hugenberg, the DNVP abandoned all willingness to work through governmental channels and embraced a radical opposition to the Weimar system. This action triggered the collapse of the conservative agrarian block in parliament. Frictions within the party and between the DNVP and agrarian interest groups became unbridgeable. Hugenberg's campaign against the Young plan illustrates the split between the right-wing hardliners and more moderate groups. It also showcases how the DNVP utilized rural sentiments to further its own strategic goals.

The second part of the book describes the DNVP's uncompromising struggle against the Brüning government. Hugenberg's agitation against Martin Schiele, the moderate leader of the main agrarian interest group, the Reichs-Landbund, or RLB, led to a split of the party itself. A group around Graf Westarp left the DNVP over Hugenberg's radical anti-governmental stand. Hugenberg's strategy, to win the rural population by exploiting peasants' dissatisfaction with the government's agricultural politics, however, did not materialize. The party

that most profited from the split of the conservative block was the NSDAP. In the parliamentary election of September 1930, the DNVP received only half of its former votes. With Graf von Kalckreuth as the new RLB president and the CNBL weakened, the floodgates were opened for the Nazi Party to infiltrate and win over the countryside.

The Nazi incursion into the rural sector is the topic of the book's last part. Better organized, more dynamic, and with less financial troubles than the DNVP, it was an easy task for the NSDAP to organize the rural population and to shed its image as a mostly urban party. The Nazis quickly developed an agrarian agenda, hired a professional, Richard Walther Darric, to mobilize the countryside, and started to aggressively undermine the existing peasant organizations and parties. The Nazis' main tool was their new organization, the Agrarian Apparatus, which allowed for a fast penetration of the rural sector. How did the DNVP react to the Nazis' blunt agitation? Under Hugenberg's leadership, the DNVP embraced the Nazi party and many of its ideas. The DNVP hoped to reap parts of the harvest in the form of electoral votes. Hugenberg's tactic was successful this time. An authoritarian regime replaced the Weimar government. In Hitler's first cabinet, the DNVP got the post of Minister of Agriculture. But it was a pyrrhic victory, or, in Muller's words, a "death warrant" (p. 379). Six months later, the DNVP had been swallowed up by the party it once embraced.

This chapter on the relationship between the DNVP and the Nazi party is the most compelling part of the book. Muller compares convincingly the agrarian pro-

grams of the two parties, reiterates Hugenberg's tactic and its success and failure. He writes passionately about the "fatal dual strategy" (p. 301) and analyzes the DNVP's "paralysis in agricultural politics" (p. 302). More of this kind of interpretation of the data, of the election results and strategic campaigns of the DNVP would have strengthened the first parts of the book. Muller analyzes the recurring elections and personal quarrels, but one sometimes loses sight of the argument in the many sub- and subchapters and more than 1700 footnotes. The book, based on Muller's dissertation at the University of Wurzburg in 2002, provides a useful appendix with the names of the DNVP's representatives in the parliament, but an index is missing. For a more general social and political history of the conservative agrarian party during the last years of the Weimar Republic, it would have been interesting to look at how peasants responded to the agrarian crisis and to the DNVP—as the promising title of the book evokes. Muller mentions the intriguing quote "Fallt der Bauer, strzt der Staat" only once in the introduction (p. 20), but never interprets it further. What exactly was the relationship between dissatisfied peasants and the state? How volatile was the relationship and what role did the main agrarian party play in the demise of the Republic?

Overall, Muller's study is useful as an analysis of a political party. The author has found important archival documents that shed light on the forces within the DNVP that contributed to the demise of the party. The implications of the party's inner struggle are of great interest for the understanding of the last years of the Weimar Republic.

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