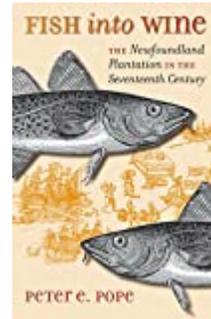


Peter E. Pope. *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. xxvi + 463 pp. (cloth), ISBN 978-0-12-345678-6; \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5576-8.



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A Grassroots Microhistory

The postwar period in the German Federal Republic was a time of rapid change, from the country's total collapse in 1945, through the "economic miracle" (*Wirtschaftswunder*) of the 1950s, to a steady process of modernization and a prosperity far beyond that of the prewar period. Bavaria—Germany's largest state and the only one whose contiguous borders have not been altered since 1815—changed even more dramatically than the nation as a whole, from a backward rural economy, severely strained by the postwar influx of two million German expellees and refugees from Czechoslovakia, Silesia and other eastern regions, to a major industrialized state, no longer the poor country cousin of the north. These developments have been well covered by historians at the national and state levels, but Jaromír Balcar has now extended their work to show how and to what extent modernization occurred in the countryside and the small towns. In this exhaustively researched study, he examines events in eleven rural districts representative of all regions of Bavaria, districts that were predominantly agricultural or forested, with a population density of about eighty people or fewer per square kilometer—much lower than that of the state average. The study ends in

1972, because in that year these sparsely populated districts were consolidated into larger administrative units. Balcar has not only consulted state and local archives and other printed material, including the records of the American occupation, but has also conducted numerous personal interviews in cases where documentation is inadequate or non-existent. His conclusions are not especially surprising, but contribute substantially to the historical record.

The book is divided into three sections. The first is concerned with the "political elite" of these rural districts: the mayors (*Bürgermeister*), district councilors and—at a higher level—state councilors (*Landräte*) and elected delegates to the state parliament. (Many of these offices had been appointive, but became elective under the democratization program insisted upon by the American occupation.) The author finds that from the 1940s well into the 1960s, these offices were filled by older men already well established in their communities, and whose education and experience dated from the period of the Weimar Republic and even from before the First World War. The large majority was either self-employed,

working as farmers, craftsmen or innkeepers, or pensioners. Virtually excluded from office were blue- and white-collar workers, expellees and other immigrants and women—even though women outnumbered men after the war and were actively involved in agriculture and small businesses. The picture was quite different for those officials at the higher levels elected to represent these rural districts, such as the *Landräte* and the delegates to the state legislature, who were much better educated, somewhat younger in age, often “outsiders” (from other parts of Bavaria) and likely to be professional civil servants.

After the elections of 1966 and 1976, changes occurred: leadership positions were now filled by younger men who had reached maturity in the National Socialist and wartime period. There were far fewer farmers, some businessmen and more civil servants, but still hardly any blue- or white-collar workers or women. Balcar attributes the continued political invisibility of women not to prejudice but to the influence of the Catholic Church in prescribing proper roles for the sexes. (Only a couple of the districts studied had any significant Protestant population.)

Section 2 of the book concerns the role of the political parties in the countryside, in particular the two parties which were most important in the state, the Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), both of which Balcar sees as evolving in this period into genuine “peoples’ parties” (*Volksparteien*). It is not altogether clear why the author devotes so much space to the SPD in his study, since throughout the entire period, the party had little or no significant following in the Bavarian countryside and small towns. In the early postwar years the party was viewed negatively because of its Marxist platform (unappealing to independent farmers and craftsmen) and, no less important, because of its traditional anticlericalism and, specifically, anti-Catholicism. In 1958, the SPD, in its famous Godesberg program, officially repudiated both Marxism and anticlericalism, which helped to make the party a genuine “peoples’ party” in the Federal Republic and in Munich and other Bavarian cities, but in the eleven rural districts of this study the party attracted only a small minority of the voters. SPD hopes of attracting votes from the expellee immigrants were not fulfilled, because this population formed its own political party as soon as was permitted by the occupation authorities. (This party, the BHE, Block der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten, died a natural death as the immigrants either assimilated or moved to other parts of Germany.) In 1958, the SPD, in

its famous Godesberg program, officially repudiated both Marxism and anticlericalism, and this helped to make the party a genuine “people’s party” in the federal republic and in Munich and other Bavarian cities, but in the eleven rural districts of this study the party attracted only a small minority of the voters.

Similarly, Balcar’s discussion of the evolution of the CSU, though interesting, is somewhat extraneous to his main theme. For its first ten or fifteen years, the CSU, contrary to the intentions of its founders, was a virtual clone of the old Bavarian People’s party—a parochial, Catholic party not willing to reach out to Protestants or newcomers and content to win enough votes from its pre-war base to dominate state politics. By 1960, however, it had become a genuine “people’s party,” with organizations in all parts of the state, appealing to Protestants and secular voters and acting as a true partner of the national CDU. But these changes, important as they were, made little difference to the rural districts which are the author’s subject: with the exception of one district in Franconia their residents were CSU voters consistently from the beginning. The only significant competition the party met, and that only for a brief period, was the Bavarian party, a protest movement extolling Bavarian exclusivity, more “blue-white” even than the CSU (a reference to the colors of the state flag) even at one point threatening secession from the rest of Germany, as earlier Bavarian particularists had done in 1871 and 1919. But with the economic upturn of the 1950s and the great popularity of Chancellor Adenauer, the Bavarian party ceased to exist, leaving the field entirely to the CSU. Balcar emphasizes the advantages the party had in the strong support of the Catholic Church and the state Farmers’ Union, the Bauernbund. The Social Democrats and the liberal Free Democrats had no such equivalent support groups.

Section 3 of the book describes the ambitious postwar plans for developing and modernizing the state and considers how they were or were not carried out in the eleven rural districts of the study. Short-term planning was necessarily limited to urgent immediate needs such as housing for the two million incoming refugees, improvements and repairs to roads and other transport and (where possible) the introduction of industries to provide employment. The long-term goal was to bring the standard of living of the most backward rural areas of the state up to the level of the more advanced regions. According to Balcar, however, not until the middle 1960s did the focus of planning shift from the cities to rural areas and their need for good roads, sufficient sources of clean water, adequate schools, fire departments and so forth. Even then,

local officials were often too poorly educated to understand and carry out the blueprints, or were even openly hostile to the idea of change. Only one of the eleven case study districts had leadership dynamic enough to carry through a substantial modernization.

The major problem, even after the local administrators were convinced of the desirability of change, was paying for it. Local taxes were totally inadequate to finance improvements, and the smaller the district, the less able it was to act; most were dependent upon state and federal subsidies, which were usually earmarked for particular projects. Inevitably, districts were obliged to borrow money and by 1970 were mired in debt. This indebtedness was the main reason for the consolidation of local governments into larger regional units. Balcar believes this reorganization was necessary, but considers that it led to lessened personal participation of citizens in gov-

ernment and hence reduced responsibility for their own affairs.

In conclusion, Balcar finds that, on the one hand, in these twenty-seven years the goal of closing the gap between modern urban areas and the backward countryside was not met, but, on the other hand, *all* parts of the state and the federal republic as a whole raised their absolute standard of living to levels far above those before the war. The development program would not have been in vain, he says, even if its only success had been that by 1970 there were good roads even in the smallest village, and all communities were accessible in winter.

The study's abrupt termination in 1972, while logical, is frustrating for the reader, who is left to wonder what has happened since that date: has modernization continued, and at what rate? Nevertheless, *Politik auf dem Land* is an excellent example of history at the most local level.

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