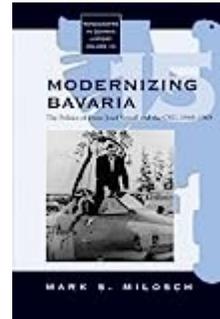


Mark S. Milosch. *Modernizing Bavaria: The Politics of Franz Josef Strauss and the CSU, 1949-1969.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. xiv + 196 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-123-3.



Reviewed by Ellen Evans (Georgia State University)

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A Regional Success Story

In this book, Mark S. Milosch attempts in just one hundred and seventy-six pages of text to cover and coordinate three separate subjects: the career of a powerful man, the history of a political party and the transformation of a region. On the whole, he has succeeded, but his extremely detailed description of the industrial and scientific developments in Bavaria (which he essentially sees as the “modernization” of the state) tends to overwhelm the narrative framework. Nevertheless, the research is impressive, the bibliography extensive and the author shows a thorough mastery of the peculiar characteristics of the Free State of Bavaria to an extent unusual for an American historian. Bavaria is the largest German state, and the only one with the same contiguous borders since 1815. At the end of World War II, it was largely rural, economically and socially backward, yet fiercely defensive of its autonomy, with a gigantic chip on its collective shoulder in regard to northern Germany, often referred to by Bavarians as “Prussia” even decades after the disappearance of Prussia from the map. Contributing to Bavarian intransigence has been the scornful and derisive attitude of northern Germans toward their country cousin to the south. Milosch is especially good at

bringing out the importance of religious differences, with German Protestants and secularists retaining strong anti-clerical and anti-Catholic biases well into the postwar period. Overcoming these stereotypes and prejudices was as much of a problem in “modernizing” Bavaria as raising its standard of living, level of education and economic productivity.

Milosch’s coverage of the Christian Social Union is also perceptive, though less relevant to his main theme, because the party played only a passive role in the state’s economic transformation. The CSU as founded in 1945 was intended to be a branch of the national Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a new postwar creation uniting Catholics and Protestants for the first time in a genuinely inclusive, forward-looking “people’s party.” Its separate name and organization were merely supposed to be gestures recognizing Bavaria’s size and separate history. The party’s founders had no intention of reviving the old Bavarian People’s party (BVP), with its parochialism, exclusive Catholicism and rural and small-town base. Yet by the end of the 1940s, the party had lost interest in appealing to the Protestant northwest

of the state or to its major cities, and was content to dominate state politics from its 91 percent Catholic base in the provinces of “old Bavaria,” in effect becoming a clone of the prewar BVP. This regression became especially evident when the party stubbornly refused to ratify the Basic Law, Germany’s new constitution. Since the CDU had no organization in Bavaria, and the other two national parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Free Democrats (FDP) had only small constituencies in the state, the only rival to the CSU was the Bavarian party (BP), which was even more backward-looking and parochial, though less closely allied with the Catholic Church. (The Bavarian party lost support during the prosperous years of the “economic miracle” of the 1950s and died a natural death by 1969.)

In 1954, in frustration at the CSU’s monopoly of power in Munich, an unlikely combination of all the other parties in the state legislature formed a government, ousted the CSU from power, and jolted party leaders from their complacency. They grudgingly changed their ways and began to reach out to urban and Protestant voters. The catalyst that transformed both the party and the state was of course the strong personality of Franz Josef Strauss—ironically, since Strauss’s own ambitions were centered in Bonn (where he served as the head of the CSU delegation in the national parliament), not in Munich, the state capital. Strauss became the first Bavarian politician to play an important role in national government (previously the Post Office was traditionally reserved for them). However, despite his abilities, he never achieved his ultimate goal of becoming Chancellor of Germany because of his “aggressiveness, brutality, and hostility to anyone who criticized him or trespassed on his territory” (p. 116), not to mention instances of “drunkenness, abuse of power, and corruption, which, though never perfectly substantiated, became proverbial” (p. 117). As Minister of Defense in Konrad Adenauer’s cabinet, he used all of his contacts and forceful nature to lure major industries to Bavaria, particularly those in aerospace. Not only industry, but, crucially, scientific research institutions were persuaded to establish themselves in the state. Strauss was especially fascinated by the possibilities of atomic energy, even the prospect of nuclear rearmament, but for political reasons his plans in this area did not pan out. The major portion of Milosch’s narrative is concerned with the details of the transactions resulting in these successful efforts, in which Bavaria came to rival and even surpass the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, which had been expected to continue as the center of German industry.

Bavaria’s economic development was handicapped in the early postwar years by its high energy costs, which stemmed from its geographical location, far from the coal fields of western Germany and the seaports where oil imports arrived. Strauss’s ideas for overcoming this handicap included a plan to build pipelines through the Alps from Italian ports, a project initially considered fantastically impractical and expensive, but which did, in fact, eventually become a reality. Strauss’s wheeling and dealing, however, did nothing to overcome the handicap of his unpopularity everywhere in Germany outside his home state. His involvement in a scandal in 1962 led to a temporary departure from government, and after his failed bid for the chancellorship in 1980 he left national politics to end his career as permanent chairman of the CSU.

In the meantime, Bavaria had been transformed: new industries brought in scientists and engineers from other parts of Germany and they in turn helped to improve education at all levels, enabling native Bavarians to benefit from and participate in the new economy. Milosch notes the significance of the improvement in education and the end to the old system of segregation at the elementary level, with separate schools for Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) children, but he fails to mention the importance of Vatican II, in the early 1960s, in promoting community schools and other ecumenical measures—a significant form of “modernization” in addition to economic changes. By 1969, “[n]on-Bavarian Germans coming to Bavaria who, generations ago, would have scorned to be mistaken for a Bavarian or to acquire a Bavarian accent and mentality were increasingly pleased to be mistaken for Bavarians and happy that their children would be Bavarian ... and so Germany’s center of gravity shifted southward” (p. 175). Readers may notice some comparisons with the changing attitudes of northerners in the United States toward the southern states in the newly developed “Sun Belt.”

A recent German publication by Jaromir Balcar, *Politik auf dem Land. Studien zur bayerischen Provinz 1945 bis 1972* (2004), deals with modernization of a different kind, that occurring at the rural and small town level, where the term meant passable roads, new school buildings, fire departments and such amenities—not major industry and scientific research. The two books, though so different, complement each other well. As Balcar shows, the economic growth and prosperity described by Milosch at the state level slowly penetrated into the most remote and backward villages of the state.

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