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Stefan Vogt. *Nationaler Sozialismus und Soziale Demokratie: Die sozialdemokratische Junge Rechte 1918-1945.* Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 2006. 502 S. (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-8012-4161-2.

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Social Fascism Revisited: A *Sonderweg* of the Left?

During the tumultuous fourteen years of the Weimar Republic, members of the Communist Party (KPD) regularly assailed their moderate Social Democratic Party (SPD) colleagues with accusations of "social fascism." By allying with bourgeois parties in defense of a liberal democratic state, the Communists argued, the SPD fomented nationalist revisionism, monopoly capitalism, and–inevitably–fascism. Few western scholars have accepted this critique in its entirety, but many have blamed the Majority Socialists' initial vacillation between Left and Right for the weakness and ultimate collapse of the Weimar Republic. Rather than nationalizing heavy industry, purging the monarchist bureaucracy, or breaking up Junker estates, the SPD colluded with right-wing paramilitary groups in 1919 to suppress working-class revolutionaries and tolerated a capitalist economic order that guaranteed the persistence of the conservative elites who brought down the Weimar Republic.[1] While most historians now concede that the 1918-19 revolution was "incomplete," however, some contend that such moderation was necessary. As the bourgeois parties disintegrated, the Majority Socialists constituted the chief bulwark against both communism and fascism. Indeed, leading socialist moderates, sometimes referred to as the Junge Rechte, endorsed "social market" capitalism, peaceful revision of the Versailles Treaty, and a bourgeois alliance in defense of liberal democracy. Though they failed in staving off fascism, these historians argue," the "young Right" succeeded in paving the way for the social liberalism of postwar ("Bad Godesberg") Social Democracy.[2]

Stefan Vogt's new intellectual history rejects this bourgeois revisionism out of hand, adding a new wrinkle to the "social fascist" paradigm of the 1930s. In Vogt's provocative reading of events, Weimar social democracy enabled fascism not only in its hostility to the communist Left but in its ideological commitment to the radical Right. Far from suggesting a "third way" between free market liberalism and revolutionary Marxism, the Junge Rechte incorporated "national Socialist" traditions that were hostile to modernity and rationality. Like Hitler's National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP), Vogt suggests, these Social Democrats were similarly obsessed with *vÃ¶lkisch* nationalism and eastward expansion and covetous of the reactionary *Mittelstand.*

Despite his protests to the contrary, Vogt therefore proposes a "special path" thesis rather more teleological than the first (pp. 16-22).

A long first chapter examines the origins of the Junge Rechte, or more precisely its ideological underpinnings, in the socialist revisionism of the prewar period. Whereas many historians read Eduard Bernstein's turn away from revolutionary Marxism as a pragmatic attempt to create a more viable and modern *Volkspartei*, Vogt locates a growing fascination with ethnic nationalism and anti-Enlightenment irrationalism. War merely accelerated preexisting trends toward "national Socialism" (pp. 27-28). The socialists' decision to support war credits and defend their country from invasion was certainly a departure from doctrinaire Marxism, as Vogt makes clear. But one wishes for greater differentiation between the moderate patriotism endorsed by universalist, and often Jewish, socialists like Bernstein or Hermann Cohen and the exclusionary *vÃ¶lkisch* nationalism of the radical Right.[3] It also seems careless to conflate Bernstein's support for colonialism or imperialism on economic grounds with radical nationalism (pp. 35-39). Paul Lensch or Eduard Heimann's emphasis on the "fundamentalen Konflik zwischen Deutschland und England, in dem die gesellschaftlichen Prinzipien von Individualismus und Liberalismus besonders ausgprÃ¤gt sein" has parallels to conservative nationalist propaganda (pp. 41-45). The fact remains, however, that many left-wing socialists also denigrated the individualistic Anglo-Saxon social order well before Germany entered the First World War.

According to Vogt, another essential element in the genesis of "national Socialism" is the Marburger School's decision to oppose an ethical and religious socialism inspired by neo-Kantianism to the dialectical materialism of Marx. This section is fascinating to read and cleverly argued. It nonetheless requires a considerable elision of Kantian idealism and anti-Enlightenment irrationality to prove that Jewish socialists like Bernstein or Cohen provided the basis for National Socialism.[4] The same lack of nuance characterizes Vogt's appraisal of Paul Tillich's "religious socialism," which ostensibly sought "AnschluÃ an einen ideologischen Diskurs, der sonst vom rechten Rand des politischen Spektrums" aus betrieben wurde" (p. 76). Both claims might have been better served by drawing out the similarities between "national Socialist" trends on the bourgeois "Left" and the socialist "Right." Vogt manages to discuss concepts like *Mitteleuropa*, "Christian" Socialism, and "national Socialism" repeatedly without a single reference to Adolf StÃ¶cker's Christian-Social or Friedrich Naumann's National-Social Party (*Nationalsozialen*). These lacunae are especially hard to understand when prominent members of both organizations would later join the SPD and/or the NSDAP. The chapter concludes by examining two of the most important social bases of the Junge Rechte in the wake of the First World War, the *Jungsozialisten* and, more importantly, the Hofgeismar discussion circle ("Hofgemeisarkreis"). Vogt argues effectively that these two groups, impressed more strongly by the war experience than their older colleagues and radicalized by the Ruhr occupation, sought to emancipate the German nation alongside the proletariat.

Chapter 2 addresses the organizational development of the Junge Rechte during Weimar's period of relative political and economic stability. Having come together and matured during the initial crisis years (1919-24), the Junge Rechte experienced a period of political stagnation during the years of relative stability (1924-30). Vogt makes a convincing case, however, that the socialist "right-wing" gained a growing influence on various republican institutions. Academics like Adolf Reichwein and Eduard Heimann introduced adult education programs at the universities of Jena and Berlin, while Theodor Haubach, Gustav Dahrendorff, and Carl Mierendorff took up prominent positions in the party bureaucracy, the paramilitary Reichsbanner and socialist press, especially *Die Neuen BlÃ¤tter fÃ¼r den Sozialismus*, which became one of the most influential socialist periodicals during the waning years of the Weimar Republic. From Reich Interior Minister Carl Severing to Chancellor Hermann MÃ¼ller, from intellectuals like Tillich and Radbruch to journalists like Rathmann and Mierendorff, by the late 1920s the "Junge Rechte besaÃ ein breites und zuverlÃ¤ssiges Netz an VerbÃ¼ndeten in der obersten FÃ¼hrungsetage der Partei, etwas, das dem linken FlÃ¼gel der Partei weitgehend fehlt" (p. 153).

Having established the disproportionate political and institutional strength of the Junge Rechte, Vogt turns in chapter 3 to the "Entwicklung ihrer ideologischen und politischen Diskurse" in the context of five "ideologischer Leitmotive": nation, class, state, democracy, and belief. Many of these arguments are already familiar. There is no doubt, for example, that the Junge Rechte was more "nationalist" than the proletarian Left and the USPD or KPD. But Vogt never really proves that their patriotic support for *AnschluÃ* with Austria, revision of the Versailles Treaty, or the return of lost territories in the East was qualitatively different from mainstream socialism. If, in fact, there is little to distinguish the Junge Rechte's for-

eign policy from that of Weimar's longtime foreign minister and Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Gustav Stresemann, are we to believe that he was also a proto-Nazi? The same lack of differentiation applies to Vogt's discussion of class and politics. Vogt argues that the Junge Rechte, in rejecting the Marxist idea of outright proletarian revolution–which the majority of socialists had already repudiated before the First World War–favored national over social revolution. Yet this antipathy to class warfare and support for a "social market economy" seems also to represent a "third way" (p. 180) between doctrinaire socialism and free market capitalism. When it comes to the discussion of building a stronger executive in order to ameliorate the exhausting struggles among interest groups that were paralyzing parliament, the Junge Rechte likewise articulated a view shared by many bourgeois and socialist republicans (pp. 205-206). There is no denying that the ethical concerns of the Junge Rechte with regard to the economic interest politics of the 1920s bore certain similarities to the anti-materialism of the bourgeois Center-Right. But these concerns were hardly indicative of Nazi proclivities. Indeed, Vogt admits numerous times that, *despite* their putative affinities for the forces of "conservative revolution," the Junge Rechte remained firmly anchored in the ranks of Social Democracy, unwilling to abandon proletarian interests, undermine the Republic, or embrace antisemitism (pp. 159-160, 165-166, 168-169, 175, 180, 191, 209-210, 212, 215, 220, 256-257). These frequent qualifications do little to enhance Vogt's argument.

Shifting the focus from ideology to practice, in chapter 4 the author contends that the Junge Rechte manifested strong proclivities for National Socialism in everyday politics. Here too, little distinguishes the Junge Rechte's political support for German self-determination or a revision of the Versailles Treaty from that of the republican Center-Left (pp. 271-277). The Junge Rechte's conception of a "socialist market economy" (p. 278) or a "third front" between communism and free market capitalism (p. 294) seems remarkably similar to the social market capitalism of Ludwig Erhard, the basis of the postwar West German economy. Although clearly ambivalent toward the Weimar constitution, the Junge Rechte's debate about whether to tolerate Heinrich BrÃ¼ning's minority government was precisely the question facing all moderate republicans who feared an even worse dictatorship of the Left or Right. In suggesting that the constitution be changed to allow majority instead of proportional voting (p. 297), the Junge Rechte wanted to preserve democracy, not undermine it (p. 309). Indeed, the fact that the Junge Rechte continually vacillated between authoritarian and democratic methods of defending the Republic (pp. 325-336) is perfectly consistent with the stance taken by the Majority Socialists in 1919, when Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Noske invoked Article 48 and employed the Freikorps to prevent a Communist revolution. Particularly inscrutable is Vogt's assertion that a desire to attract lower-middle-class voters in the midst of the Great Depression reflects widespread sympathies for National Socialism (pp. 346-349). The author himself admits that "die MÃ¶glichkeiten fÃ¼r die SPD, in die Entwicklung einzugreifen, angesichts der vehementen Ablehnung der Weimarer Demokratie durch einen groÃen Teil des BÃ¼rgertums und vor allem der bÃ¼rgerlichen Eliten denkbar gering waren" (p. 259). What, then, was so "irrational" in the Junge Rechte's determination to attract disenfranchised *Mittelstand* voters away from the Nazis? By 1932 even Leon Trotsky and Rudolf Hilferding, neither of whom could be called National Socialists, had abandoned doctrinaire Marxism in the name of building the widest possible coalition against fascism.[5]

The leitmotif of political and ideological collusion also informs the final chapter on the Junge Rechte's fervent opposition to the Third Reich. For, despite being "disproportionately" represented among the socialist resistance, Vogt contends that these socialists maintained their "zuvor festgestellten relativen AffinitÃ¤t ... zum National Sozialismus" (p. 358). After surveying the Junge Rechte's central involvement in nearly every important resistance group, Vogt concludes the chapter with an extensive analysis of the Junge Rechte's participation in the famous Kreisau Circle and July 20 plot against Hitler. Numerous historians have argued that the Kreisauers, for all their noble motives, were nationalist conservatives at heart, intent on salvaging German honor and restoring the rule of law, but little interested in liberal democracy. Vogt suggests, however, that the Junge Rechte was even *more* nationalist, authoritarian, and culturally pessimistic than East Elbian conservatives like Helmuth von Moltke and Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg (p. 452-453).

The author is probably correct when he argues that the Junge Rechte contributed little to postwar politics; most were too traumatized by the collapse of Germany's first republic to engage immediately in building a second. But this reticence hardly confirms a proto-fascist, irrational, anti-modern trend within German socialism. The communists were certainly more hostile to the Federal Republic, while adherents of the bourgeois Center-Right, which lent the greatest support to Hitler in 1933, were easily the most supportive. It seems that the few

concessions to "national Socialism" made by the Junge Rechte represented a pragmatic turn to the liberal democratic Center, not an ideological leap to the radical Right. In their desire to expand the socialist constituency into bourgeois ranks, in their pragmatic support for a "social market" capitalism, and ultimately in their attempt to build a republican front against fascism, one hardly gets the sense that the Junge Rechte reflects a peculiarly German fascination with irrationalism, anti-modernism, or authoritarianism. Rather, in reading Vogt's book, one cannot help but wonder what might have happened had the rest of the Left followed their lead.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Bela Kun: "[T]he 'National Revolution' of Hitler is a new stage of the "German Revolution" begun in November, 1918. It is indubitably established that the November Revolution–not of the German proletariat, but–of Scheidemann, Ebert, Noske and Haase, and the 'National Revolution' of Hitler-Goering-Goebbels-Rosenberg, are two extremes of one and the same process of German historical development, which have a common content. The *unbroken connection* in the further development of German history from November 1918 (and in the sense of the Ninth of November of Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske and Haase) until January 30 and March 5 was not maintained by National-Socialism, but by Social-Democracy. In other words: *Ebert* sowed, Hermann *MÃ¼ller*, Otto *Wels* and Rudolf *Hilferding* nursed the growth, and *Hitler* reaped." Quoted in "The Second International in Dissolution" (New York: Workers' Library Publishers, 1933), accessible at `http://www.marxists.org/archive/kun-bela/pamphlets/1933/ch05.htm`. See also Arthur Rosenberg, *A History of the German Republic* (London: Methuen, 1936); Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London: V. Gollancz, 1942); Reinhard RÃ¼rup, "Problems of the German Revolution 1918-19," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (1968): 109-135; F.L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe: 1918-1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionÃ¤rer Attentismus. Die Deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des ersten Weltkrieges* (Frankfurt am Main: PropylÃ¤en, 1973); Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (London: Allen Lane, 1991).

[2]. See, for example, Hans Mommsen, "Die Sozialdemokratie in der Defensive. Der Immobilismus der SPD und der Aufsttieg des Nationalsozialismus" in *Sozialdemokratie zwischen Klassenbewegung und Volkspartei*, ed. Hans Mommsen (Frankfurt am Main: Europa Verlag, 1974), 106-133; Wolfram Pyta, *Gegen Hitler und fÃ¼r die Republik. Die Auseinandersetzung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie in der Weimarer Republik* (DÃ¼sseldorf: Droste, 1989); Eberhalb Kolb and Wolfram Pyta, "Die Staatsnotstandsplanungen unter den Regierungen Papen und Schleicher," in *Die deutsche Staatskrise 1930-1933. HandlungsspielrÃ¤ume und Alternativen*, ed. H.A. Winkler (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 155-181.

[3]. I have argued elsewhere that there were actually two competing conceptions of national identity within bourgeois liberalism, one universalist and one *vÃ¶lkisch*, which, along with the parallel socioeconomic crises of the 1920s, helped divide the republican Center-Left and pave the way for National Socialism. Vogt's work might have benefited by differentiating between the same universalist and *vÃ¶lkisch* nationalist trends within the (national) Socialist ranks. See Eric Kurlander, *The Price of Exclusion* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

[4]. See, for example, Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).

[5]. For example, Rudolf Hilferding: "Although the fascist movement appeared on the point of seizing power in Germany it had been kept from doing so thanks to the tactics of the Social Democrats, whose policy of 'toleration' prevented the bourgeoisie from uniting in a reactionary mass under fascist leadership, and so obstructed the entry of the fascists into the government during the period of their ascent." Quoted in D. Beetham, *Marxism in the Face of Fascism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 261. Similarly, Leon Trotsky: "March separately, but strike together! Agree on how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded with the devil himself, with the grandmother, and even with Noske and Grzesinsky. On one condition, not to bind one's hands" (Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism In Germany* [New York: Pathfinder, 1972], 138-139).

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