



Gangolf Hübinger. *Gelehrte, Politik und Öffentlichkeit: Eine Intellektuellengeschichte.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006. 264 S. EUR 24.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-525-36738-4.

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Intellectuals Reconsidering the World

Gangolf Hübinger's new book explores the roles German academic intellectuals played in Germany's political life before 1930. Instead of trying to produce a new *Geistesgeschichte* of the modern period, he aims at a reevaluation and reconsideration of an age characterized by a complete regrouping and reconsideration of knowledge and a new relationship between science and life, as well as by the replacement of class society with mass society. In both transformations, intellectuals played an important role. In the past, their activities have been strangely underestimated because of a scholarly concentration on Friedrich Nietzsche and his readers. In correcting this rather narrow focus, Hübinger has produced an intriguing, brilliantly written story of academic intellectuals' roles in German society before 1930.

The book consists of five chapters with a biographical focus (on Georg Gottfried Gervinus, Theodor Mommsen, Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and Rudolf Hilferding/Gustav Radbruch) and three that follow a structural approach (treating historicism, cultural history, and historical myths of the *völkische Bewegung*).

The first chapter discusses Georg Gottfried Gervinus's contribution to the writing of German history. Gervinus's "Einleitung in die Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts" and his eight-volume "Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts" are the focus of this chapter; according to Hübinger, the second in particular differed from comparable publications of the time because of its European rather than nationalistic orientation. In the second chap-

ter, on political science within historicism, Hübinger reminds the reader that the task of the historian is to discuss the relationship between cultural development and political form. From the nineteenth century, historians developed, according to Hübinger, two basic options for explaining this relationship: an individualistic method versus a generalizing, comparative method. The third chapter is dedicated to Theodor Mommsen, whose life exemplifies the mediation between academic work and political order. Mommsen was the prime example of a public intellectual who used his international reputation as an academic to participate in the political sphere of the German Empire. The fourth chapter discusses the changes that made capitalism the subject of cultural history around 1900. The fifth chapter is dedicated to Max Weber as academic and public intellectual. Scholars have long noted Weber's broad interests, which included such disparate topics as agrarian society from the Roman Empire to nineteenth-century Prussia and archaic and modern demagogues. Although historians are aware of these seemingly erratic interests, they have failed, according to Hübinger, to analyse them.

The academic intellectuals of Hübinger's study considered it their duty to enter public discourse, to voice dissenting opinions, and provide visions of a better life. And while small in numbers, because of their education and influence, they were able to mobilize people and, thus, turned ideas into social forces. Hübinger's discussion of historical myths, in his sixth chapter, clearly illustrates that this transformation sometimes resulted

in catastrophic outcomes. Around 1900, German society was characterized by a general search for meaning and purpose beyond religion and science. Germany society witnessed a transition from reliance on the construction of national histories by professional historians to a preference for nonacademic forms of historical memory. Historical myths (*Geschichtsmymthen*), became very popular because they fulfilled an essential function in the creation of meaning for society. Hübinger defines those historical myths as specific inventions, which created sacred places of commemoration and traditions with a clear starting and endpoint. These myths took on religious dimensions and offered a new identity to those who followed their destiny (pp. 164-165). While such myths contributed to the creation of collective identities during the Wilhelmine Empire, they also played a significant role first in the delegitimation and later in the very destruction of the Weimar Republic.

In his conclusion, Hübinger suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century, the place and function of the academic intellectual in society had changed decisively. With the arrival of modern forms of mass communication such as newspapers, intellectuals lost their function as social critics. Removed from the public eye, intellectuals became desired as experts on specialized committees. Max Weber's involvements (first, with the Association for Social Policy; after the November Revolution,

as a member of the committee that produced the draft of the Weimar Constitution; and then, his participation in the Paris peace negotiations) exemplify this type of transformation in intellectual careers from public involvement to service to the state.

Furthermore, Hübinger establishes that the crisis of historicism resulted in a shift of the production of history. With the retreat of the intellectual from public discourse and the arrival of mass society, history had become a contested subject that no longer belonged exclusively to the academic world. By around 1900 the mechanisms and rules for the production of history writing in the non-academic world were established. After World War I, it was no longer historians who influenced the nation's general concept of German history, but freelance writer and poets. The most visible sign for this shift was of course the success of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1919), which probably constituted the most influential philosophy of world history since Hegel. Such books sold hundreds of thousands of copies, while academic treatises no longer reached audiences beyond the small academic village.

In sum, Hübinger's book offers a refreshing history of intellectuals in German society and their contribution to the formation of modern society. It sheds new light on the role of intellectuals and of history within public politics.

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