

Thomas Zeller. *Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930-1970.* Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007. 289 S. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-223-0.



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Published on H-German (April, 2008)

Propaganda for the *Wirtschaftswunder*

Mark E. Spicka's book recounts the role played by the social market economy in West German federal politics from the late 1940s through the 1957 elections. By the late 1950s, it had become not only part of the public image of the main political parties sponsoring it, the CDU and CSU, but also an important aspect of West German identity. West Germans saw the related "economic miracle" as a far greater reason to be proud of their young state than its political institutions. As Spicka reminds us, however, the proper economic policy for the Federal Republic was contested during these years as well, in large part because the "economic miracle" did not begin to develop fully until the mid-1950s. Until then, the social market economy had to be sold to the electorate.

Recent scholarship on the Federal Republic has emphasized close connections between economic, social, cultural, and political developments and in particular how the first three have influenced "formal politics."^[1] Spicka embraces this interdependence but wants to reverse the equation by asking how political parties tried to form identities and consciousness among the wider public. The Christian Democrats and their allies slowly

realized that in order to win support for the social market economy, West Germans had to associate it with deeper political and cultural meanings. In the 1949 elections, the CDU/CSU portrayed the social market economy as part of an anti-materialist (that is, anti-Socialist) economic policy that would help promote personal freedom and strengthen the family. Along with the 1948 Currency Reform and the general economic trend since 1947 (for which the CDU/CSU and Ludwig Erhard were happy to take credit), it also represented an "unshackling" of the German economy from foreign control. By 1953, however, the CDU/CSU had begun to stress consumerism within the framework of the social market economy in electoral propaganda. This new emphasis not only responded to developments in the economy but also allowed the Christian Democrats to become a true *Volkspartei* that could now reach out to groups for whom a heavily anti-materialist, Christian message had only limited appeal. By the end of the 1950s, the West German political system had become a stable three party affair (CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP) as the smaller parties in the right and center went under in the wake of the CDU/CSU juggernaut.

Nonetheless, some things clearly remained the same. For example, the Christian Democrats continued to use the social market economy in an anti-Marxist context. As the SPD noted, the June 1953 uprising in the GDR did much to discredit the notion of economic planning in Germany and also helped the CDU/CSU sell its own policies to the electorate.

The sections on “Die Waage,” the nickname for an organization formed in 1952 by West German businessmen, represent one of the book’s strong points and demonstrate the wider coalition outside of the CDU/CSU that wished to promote both the social market economy and Erhard. Die Waage sought to counteract not only German industry’s mistrust of Erhard’s anti-monopoly and cartel positions but also the general criticism his policies encountered because of inflation and other economic problems experienced by the Federal Republic as a result of the Korean War. Its modern advertising campaign used practical examples to reach the masses of the population; for example, in the form of advertisements featuring the characters “Fritz” and “Otto” (originally named “Klarkopf” and “Querkopf”) in dialogue over the virtues of Erhard’s policies for their everyday lives. Erhard’s policies were described as helping to promote German sovereignty. Moreover, they promoted a vision of German society that the Christian Democrats also endorsed, one based around better labor-management relations and “natural gender roles” that featured men as producers and women as consumers.

Another strength of Spicka’s book lies in its portrayal of the evolution of political campaigning and propaganda in the Federal Republic. The 1949 elections displayed much continuity with Weimar-era elections, particularly in their styles of political advertising and emphasis on

party platforms as opposed to individual politicians. The 1953 election saw the emergence of a full-fledged, modern campaign apparatus for the Christian Democrats that used techniques taken from the United States, much as Die Waage’s advertisements had. Not only was the Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach used for polling; the campaign was also much more personality-driven. These trends culminated in 1957, when the Christian Democrats focused on promoting Konrad Adenauer and his team of competent advisors, including Erhard. In response to its defeats at the polls, over the course of the decade the SPD would adopt not only its opponents’ campaigning methods, but also its economic policy.

Spicka ably demonstrates how the Christian Democrats and related groups sold the Social Market and Erhard to the West German public. He also provides a fine overview of the methods used to wage federal election campaigns through 1957. Through no fault of the author, a problem appears with the page layout between pages 132 and 135 (some of the text is repeated, and then a short passage is obviously missing). Hopefully, this error can be corrected when additional copies are printed. Otherwise, the book is beautifully illustrated with many reproductions of German political posters and print advertisements from the late 1940s and 1950s.

Note

[1]. These include the influential essay collections assembled by Robert G. Moeller, ed., *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and Hanna Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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Citation: Thomas Maulucci. Review of Zeller, Thomas, *Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930-1970*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 2008.

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