

David E. Barclay, Eric D. Weitz. *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840-1990*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999. v + 580pp. Tables + notes + bibliography + and index. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-000-7.



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D. E. Barclay: *Between Reform and Revolution*

The German Left between Reform and Revolution

As the party of opposition throughout most of its history, the German Social Democratic party (Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands, SPD) has been the subject of an amazing amount of scholarly work. As the "model party" in the Second International and as the anti-monarchical and anti-capitalist party of the Second Reich which nevertheless threw its support behind the Kaiser's war; as the overnight inheritors of state power in 1918-19, and as the socialist party which utilized right-wing army veterans and big business input to crush its leftist opposition and put the brake on reforms in the Weimar Republic while democratizing German politics; as the ineffective opposition which engaged in petty quarrels while Hitler amassed a movement; and, as the post-World War II reformist predecessor to the Blairite "Third Way," the SPD remains fascinating for its mass of evident contradictions and its place in German history. . The phrase "model party" comes from J.P. Nettl's "The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a Political Model," in *Past and Present* 30 (April 1965): pp. 65-95. For another view of this phrase, see Georges Haupt's "Fuehrungspartei?"

Die Ausstrahlung der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie auf dem suedosten Europas zur Zeit der Zweiten Internationale," in *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* 15/1 (1979): pp. 1-30.

In recent years, a number of scholars have reexamined the SPD and the German Left as a whole. Many of these scholars are represented in this collection of essays, edited by Eric D. Weitz and David E. Barclay. Both of these historians utilize the approaches of Alltagsgeschichte, gender studies, and women's history, and they follow Werner Conze and Ossip K. Flechtheim in insisting that the SPD and KPD were grounded in the specific "social and political conditions" of Second Reich and Weimar Germany. . Pp. 11-12 and 18. See also Weitz's *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton, 1997) and Barclay, *Rudolf Wissell als Sozialpolitiker 1890-1933* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1984).

The essays in this collection cover a significant span of time, stretching from Warren Breckman's essay on German radicalism in the period of 1830-1848, to Peter

Loesche's essay on the current state of the SPD. Breckman's essay "Diagnosing the 'German Misery': Radicalism and the Problem of National Character, 1830 to 1848" is an interesting examination of how the issues of nationalism and identity became part of the discourse of radicalism and socialism, becoming a staple of socialist writers' ruminations and debates on "cosmopolitanism" and "philistinism." Most interesting in this case is Frederick Engels' remark in 1890 that only the German working class has successfully broken the "narrow limits" of the "general German type" (p. 55).

Three essays examine the Lassallean labor movement. Hermann Beck's "Working Class Politics at the Crossroads of Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism" explains the distance between socialism and liberalism in terms of the social and political issues fostered by industrialization, when liberals, socialists, and conservatives competed for working-class allegiance. The early separation of liberals and democrats from socialists was due to these issues, and not because of any "traditional weakness" of German liberalism (p. 82). Toni Offerman's "Lassallean Labor Movement in Germany: Organization, Social Structure, and Associational Life in the 1860s" examines the Lassallean parties and concludes that they were grounded in Verein tradition and truly represented the everyday German worker's interests. Ralf Roth's "Buerger and Workers: Liberalism and the Labor Movement in Germany, 1848-1914" investigates the fundamental break that German socialism made with civic law and political custom; at the same time, he stresses the importance of socialist-liberal cooperation, which he shows through his case study of Frankfurt am Main.

Important reevaluations of the SPD are provided by Mary Jo Maynes's "'Genossen und Genossinnen': Depictions of Gender, Militancy, and Organizing in the German Socialist Press, 1890-1914," Jonathan Sperber's "The Social Democratic Electorate in Imperial Germany," and Adelheid von Saldern's "Latent Reformism and Socialist Utopia: The SPD in Goettingen, 1890 to 1920." According to Maynes, no model for a socialist party structure existed in Imperial Germany, and the SPD created a culture wherein women and men became politicized activists. By 1890, this political culture was having a great effect on party policy, and resulted in the SPD's growing sensitivity to women's issues and eagerness to organize women. Sperber takes a close look at electoral politics in Imperial Germany, finding that the SPD garnered votes from a wide social demographic. Unlike many historians, who have identified the Nazis as the first "people's party," Sperber gives that credit to German Social Democracy.

Adelheid von Saldern agrees with Maynes that the SPD was often shaped by pressure from below. Her case study of the SPD local in Goettingen gives a clear example of a party membership that lacked a clear grasp of Marxian theory and were mostly submissive to party discipline, but which had a defined set of reformist goals that were inspired from daily life experience and made part of party policy.

In his "A Social Republic? Social Democrats, Communists, and the Weimar Welfare State, 1919-1933" David F. Crew concludes that the SPD implemented social reform with the goal of easing the effects of capitalism and paving the way for socialism. However, these reforms also intruded into the lives of workers and garnered protest from the whole political spectrum. Social reform was a divisive issue, with the Communist Party appealing to a segment of discontented workers who were disillusioned by the new order. Once the Communist Party was forced out of the workplace, the streets and the unemployment offices became the centers of its organizing efforts.

The SPD's actions in the latter days of the Weimar Republic is examined by a number of scholars. Donna Harsch, in her "Iron Front: Weimar Social Democracy between Tradition and Modernity," finds that the party's Iron Front coalition was an effective new organizational tool that revitalized the party for a brief period and contributed to Nazism's electoral downturn. She also disputes the common view of the SPD as a hidebound, bureaucratic machine. The late-Weimar SPD and KPD is analyzed by Eric Weitz and William Carl Matthews. In his "Communism and the Public Spheres of Weimar Germany" Weitz traces the development of the German Communist Party in the midst of the hyper-politicization of the Weimar years, and ties its actions and policies to the social strife arising from the Depression and from German popular culture. These factors were much more determinate in shaping the KPD than Soviet directives. William Carl Matthews' "The Rise and Fall of Red Saxony" shows how the party declined in a solidly Social Democratic area of Germany due to the economic disaster of the Depression, with the resulting collapse of coalitions, failed reform due to shrinking popular support, and the transformation of the economic basis of socialist organizing and political culture. Geoff Eley, in his "Cultural Socialism, the Public Sphere, and the Mass Form: Popular Culture and the Democratic Project, 1900-1934," reminds us that the German Left never organized a majority of German workers, and modern mass culture was one reason why. Both parties imagined and propagated a

“socialist culture” that indicates the semi-repressive tendencies shown by Crew, and the Left’s scorn for popular culture. So while socialists and communists lamented the escapism of cinema and other newer forms of mass culture, the Nazis “harnessed needs and longings the Left neglected” (p. 336). . This conclusion was illustrated very succinctly in Adelheid von Saldern’s “Cultural Conflicts, Popular Mass Culture, and the Question of Nazi Success: The Eilenriede Motorcycle Races, 1924-39,” in *German Studies Review* 15 (1992): pp. 317-38 Eley also disputes Juergen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere.

One of the lesser-scrutinized aspects of German Social Democracy and Communism is resistance during the Third Reich. Gerd-Rainer Horn utilizes SPD and Gestapo reports on the resistance to show a divergent view of Nazism between the underground activists and the exiled leadership; the former were more militant, more willing to work with the KPD, and more realistic in their view of Nazism’s staying power, while the latter held on to older ideas. Beatrix Herlemann finds a similar divergence in the KPD, and shows how underground activists helped change Comintern policy temporarily in 1935. The experience of exile changed the SPD, and one of the main links between the traditional SPD and the democratic socialism of the post-1945 party, according to David E. Barclay, was Rudolf Hilferding.

This book is part of an overall post-Cold War reappraisal of German Left, and there are three essays about East Germany: Norman Naimark’s “The Soviets, the German Left, and the Problem of ‘Sectarianism’ in the Eastern Zone, 1945-1949,” Atina Grossman’s “Pronatalism, Nationbuilding, and Socialism: Population Policy in the SBZ/DDR, 1945-1960,” and Anna-Sabine Ernst’s “The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Everyday Life in the DDR in the 1950s.” Naimark finds that Communists who had lived through the experience of the concentration camps had a much different attitude than those in exile in Moscow; while the former wanted to return to the hard-struggle style of Weimar politics, the latter enforced stability and charged radicals with ‘sectarianism’ (p. 429). Grossman’s essay examines the post-World War II controversy over reproductive issues. she shows how East German policies were strikingly similar to those of the Weimar years, when population losses and low birth rates resulted in restrictions on abortion and dialogue about women’s reproductive duty. Anna-Sabine Ernst outlines how the East German leadership promulgated traditional gender roles, indicating continuity in the DDR with German tradition.

The role of the post-World War II SPD is examined by Hanna Schissler, Dietrich Orlow, and Peter Loesch. Schissler’s “Social Democratic Gender Policies, the Working-Class Milieu, and the Culture of Domesticity in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s” provides evidence that the SPD held contradictory positions concerning women’s rights, paying lip service during the 1950s while advocating a culture of gendered domesticity. As in earlier cases, this policy was changed in the 1960s due to pressure from below. Orlow’s “German Social Democracy and European Unification, 1945-1955” contains a discussion of the difficulties the SPD faced advocating European unification while still offering a vision of socialism; this contradiction was settled in 1959, he says, when the party abandoned Marxism and then became a ruling power in West German politics. Peter Loesch’s “Is the SPD Still a Labor Party? From ‘Community of Solidarity’ to ‘Loosely Coupled Anarchy’” examines the fragmented modern SPD, which Loesch considers an “essentially decentralized and fragmented service organization in the political marketplace” (p. 535). To win elections the party has to appeal to a broad range of voters, and it is no longer a “labor party,” but union members can still represent their interests and the party can call attention to “progressive issues.” Finally, Eric D. Weitz’s closing essay, “Good-bye to All That: The Passing of German Communism and the Rise of the New Left,” looks at the broader German Left. Weitz sees very little prospect for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), many of whose leaders have controversial pasts from their days in the East German hierarchy. He sees some possibility for the PDS in coalitions with other parties, but - as Weitz says - the “conditions that gave rise to German and European communism have passed,” and class identity is facing greater competition from identities based on ethnicity, gender, and lifestyle (p. 551).

This collection of essays is a valuable reinterpretation of the German Left. Several of these scholars - such as Gerd-Rainer Horn, Anna-Sabine Ernst, and Norman Naimark - have consulted under-utilized sources and documents from Soviet and East German archives. The case studies of Ralf Roth, Adelheid von Saldern, and William Carl Matthews are particularly illuminating. This book is certainly the best collection of essays on the SPD and KPD that I have ever seen.

There are shortcomings, however. The Independent Social Democratic Party is scarcely mentioned, and even less is said about the various splinter Communist parties of the 1920s and the New Left organizations of the 1960s and 1970s. And in spite of Weitz’s fine work on German

Communism, the KPD is underrepresented here as well. Furthermore, the approach of Weitz and (evidently) most of the contributors leaves out a huge set of determinants, and in fact half of Barclay and Weitz's argument. On page two they write: "...German socialism had resonance far beyond Germany's shifting borders...German socialist "Emigres and exiles from the 1840s onward carried their ideas with them to such far-flung places as Milwaukee, Mexico City, and Shanghai." Yet they offer no citation for or elucidation on this statement. How can we understand German Socialism and Communism without placing them in their international context, never mind the other economic, structural, and international factors and determinants? Though Weitz's approach - situating the German Communist Party in its specific, localized context - has done much to undermine the traditional "Soviet appendage" view of the KPD, we must be careful to remember the wider context and milieu of the German

Left. I have yet to find a scholarly work that satisfactorily places either the SPD or the KPD in their internationalist or even their European contexts.

Still, I cannot find much to criticize here. This is an excellent collection of essays, and I hope it contributes to more scholarly work on the German Left (which I confess I am presently researching). This book should appeal to academics, graduate students, and anyone with the slightest interest in German socialism and/or communism. Unfortunately the high price (\$85.00 in the United States) all but rules out its use in the classroom and puts it out of reach for many graduate students. Hopefully a paperback edition will be issued in the future.

The editors and contributors to this volume have provided fresh interpretations of the SPD and KPD, and have set a high standard for present and future scholars.

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