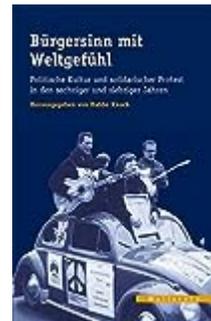


Habbo Knoch. *Bürgersinn mit Weltgefühl: Politische Moral und solidarischer Protest in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren.* Veröffentlichungen des Zeitgeschichtlichen Arbeitskreises Niedersachsen. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007. 334 pp. EUR 32.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-8353-0068-2.



Reviewed by Michael L. Hughes (Wake Forest University)

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Commissioned by Eve M. Duffy (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)

Citizenship as Activism and Authenticity

The Federal Republic of Germany, some scholars have argued, was re-founded in the 1960s and early 1970s as a more democratic, more “modern” country. In that spirit, Habbo Knoch’s collection of articles, most from a November 2005 conference, seeks to illuminate the 1960s/70s development in West Germany of fundamentally new forms of citizen (*bürgerliche*) engagement and participation. While all the articles are of some interest, this review will focus on those that seem most related to the themes the editor discusses.

Knoch’s stimulating introduction reviews some key conceptual issues in the FRG’s development of a new *Bürgerinn*, a new sense of the citizen and political citizenship. *Bürger* and its variants have covered various meanings for Germans, usually relating to the *Bürgertum* as a distinct and eventually predominant social class or stratum. Those meanings connoted by *citoyen* in French and citizen in English have often been irrelevant or subsidiary for Germans using the term *Bürger*. Only since the 1950s have republican and critical conceptions of the *Bürger* become central. Even

then, they did so only against 1960s leftist perceptions of the *Bürger* as capitalist and of *bürgerliche Herrschaft* as oppressive. One recent key, although contested, concept has been that of the *mündige Bürger*, of the politically mature, or perhaps self-reliant and active/activist, citizen. Not all Germans thought that the *mündige Bürger* should engage in active protest, with the SPD, for example, long seeing citizen participation as meaning support for institutions (such as the parties) and experts. For other Germans, however, active political engagement would come to be the defining characteristic of the politically mature citizen. And, indeed, the overarching issue for Knoch is the breadth and depth of the 1960s changes that resulted, *inter alia*, in the post-60s new social movements that engaged millions of citizens politically, often in various forms of protest. Knoch notes also the new role of the *Bürger* as consumer in a mass, commercial society, a development that convinced many Germans to demand authenticity and genuineness as primary virtues of good citizens..

Holger Nehring (writing on the anti-nuclear weapons

movement—or Easter Marchers—of the early 1960s) focuses on the role of individual conscience and moral protest in the development of the concept of the citizen. He notes that the Easter Marchers were both rational-argumentative and morally engaged. Appealing to morality was a strategic move, to legitimate protest against a democratic government’s decision. It also allowed protesters to frame issues so as to secure popular support, indeed even to make protest communication possible in the FRG’s media landscape. Some of these protesters could also insist that life and death issues were not subject to majority rule but could only be handled unanimously. Nehring’s discussion points out but does not (given the context) explore exhaustively a central issue for any *Bürger-sinn* or sense of citizenship. Indeed, the pre-1960s sense of *Bürgerlichkeit* tended to be *staaterhaltend*—it emphasized the citizen’s obligation to support the state. The new *Bürger-sinn* has tended to emphasize the individual citizen’s obligation to stand up whenever s/he finds existing, even state-sponsored or -supported, situations or choices erroneous or indeed immoral. However, the latter leaves open to debate just how far the individual should go, in a democratic society, in opposing the state, including what forms of protest, especially those involving *Gewalt* (as force or as violence), are acceptable.

Gabriele Metzler (on the 1950s/early 1960s roots of the Social-Liberal coalition’s policies) and Detlef Siegfried (on authenticity and political morality in leftist subcultures) discuss one sharp difference in *Bürger-sinn* between the ’45ers (who came of age during and immediately after World War II) and the ’68ers (who came of age in the mid to late 1960s). The ’68ers saw their often emotional political engagement and their commitment to community as indispensable for effective political action and for real democracy. The ’45ers saw the ’68ers’ political emotionalism, provocative protest forms, and commitment to community as dangerous, as ineffective barriers to neo-Nazism, or even as constituting or risking a Left fascism that could open the way for neo-Nazism.

Siegfried also emphasizes, as does Sven Reichardt (writing on authenticity and the body in alternative subcultures), the deep concern with authenticity among people on the Left. A widespread critique of consumer society, with its emphasis on things and, especially, its use of advertising to manufacture desires, included a repudiation of the falsity, artificiality, and coldness of that society. In contrast, many Germans demanded the authentic—the honorable, unfake, and real. Siegfried and Reichardt argue that the insistence on authenticity was

part of a politicization of the everyday by alternative subcultures that played a key role in calling into question traditional conceptions of the *bürgerliche* and in contributing to a new *Bürger-sinn*.

Nicolas Chasse discusses the ultimately unsuccessful effort by conservatives and the CDU/CSU to reverse the cultural transformation (revolution?) that the 1960s had produced. Threatened by what it saw as a re-founding of the FRG under SPD hegemony in the early 1970s, the Right sought to use the violence of 1970s terrorism to discredit not only the terrorists but also the entire political Left and even center. Those on the Right blamed the terrorism on the supposed license that the student movement had introduced and that the Social-Liberal coalition had cravenly failed to stop. They also resorted to a friend/enemy rhetoric reminiscent of Carl Schmitt to try to divide society in a way that would isolate the political Left as the enemies of order, duty, and stability. Chasse argues that the SPD and liberal offensive against such arguments ensured that Helmut Kohl’s hope for a fundamental *Tendenzwende* proved ideologically unsuccessful.

Not surprisingly, the authors, who are in many cases breaking new ground, are not able to answer every question they raise. Knoch chose to include *Weltgefühl* in the title of his book, but in fact the authors do almost nothing with this concept, except perhaps to drop that word or “transnational” into their final paragraphs. Chasse identifies a key issue, but he does not really explain why Kohl and the conservatives failed except by pointing to the rise of the new social movements. That rise will presumably be part of any ultimate answer, but by itself it raises the question of why the new social movements were able to flourish amid widespread popular anxiety, not only about terrorism, but about political activism more generally. A couple of the authors contrast the ideologically committed Left with the “hedonism” of the alternative subcultures. Many Germans (and others) in the 60s and 70s were committed, sometimes totally committed, to sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. Nonetheless, others do seem to have been sincerely concerned with authenticity or with establishing alternatives to the hedonism that consumer culture promoted, so that accusing them of hedonism seems at best misleading. The notion of consumer citizenship has become widespread, and not just in reference to Germany. Certainly consumption choices have often become politicized, as, for example, youth in late 1960s West Berlin discovered when anti-leftist counter-protesters beat them for wearing cords or rimless eyeglasses. And the personal could certainly be

or become the political, as Siegfried and Reichardt discuss here. Nonetheless, the concept of consumer citizen remains amorphous, with no clear differentiation from political citizenship more generally or as among superficial (such as clothing) and fundamental (for example, communal living) choices.

This collection addresses an issue of considerable importance for understanding recent German history. We can only talk of democratization, a central concept for

most histories of Germany in the twentieth century, if we specify what it might mean for a state and for citizens to be democratic. The *Bürgerinn* that Knoch and his team of authors discuss was an expression of various attempts to give content, beyond the form of putatively democratic institutions, to the democracy and the democratic citizenship that many Germans sought to realize after the horrible experience of National Socialism. This collection contributes substantially to an understanding of that important sense of citizenship.

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