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Axel Kellmann. *Anton Erkelenz: Ein Sozialliberaler im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik.* Berlin/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007. 245 pp. EUR 24.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8258-0343-8.

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Advocate of an Orphan Ideology

This is a book that likely would not be written, or if written, certainly not published, in the American historical discipline. What prospect would there be for a book about a largely forgotten, failed union leader and politician whose two career high points involved his expulsion and later voluntary departure from the institutions to which he had committed his life's work? Yet Axel Kellmann's book makes an interesting contribution to the history of left liberalism in Germany, rescuing from obscurity a figure remarkable for his exceptionalism rather than his typicality, and highlighting the conundrums of social liberalism before the postwar advent of the welfare state. Kellmann uses the career of Anton Erkelenz to map the promise and limits of the left liberalism of *Kaiserreich* and Weimar and to demonstrate the fundamental contradictions that prevented its success.

Anton Erkelenz was born in NeuÃ in 1878 to a Catholic craftsman's family. His father owned a metalworking shop (*Schlosserbetrieb*), which apparently destined Anton to succeed to the leadership of the small business and to a lifetime's adherence to the *Zentrum*, to craftsmen's associations or the Catholic unions, and to the Volksverein fÃ¼r das katholische Deutschland. Instead, Anton departed from his childhood religion and artisan social background and at nineteen joined the left-liberal Hirsch-Duncker metalworkers' union (Gewerkverein der deutschen Maschinenbauer und Metallarbeiter of the Verband der Deutschen Gewerkvereine). A winning personality and charismatic leader, Erkelenz rose in local union leadership, moving to DÃ¼sseldorf, emerging as an officer of the local union, and gaining a political education through the union and from the left-liberal political milieu. At first a relative radical, in 1903-04, Erkelenz advocated that the Hirsch-Duncker unions abandon their party-political neutrality to form a liberal workers' party. Although he lost that struggle, actually being expelled from the national leadership of the metalworkers' union in November 1903, his DÃ¼sseldorf local remained a hotbed of left activism within the Verband. Erkelenz then turned his efforts toward political activity in the left-liberal Freisinnige Vereinigung, supporting himself by work as a functionary of his union

and as a political journalist. By the time the three left-liberal parties merged in 1910 to form the Fortschrittliche Volkspartei, Erkelenz was a recognized leader who was elected to the leadership of the new party, where he advocated for reforms to democratize factory management and governance. His role in the party was to attempt to secure a mass electoral basis from among workers.

After wartime service in 1914-18, Erkelenz resumed his political and union activity in the run-up to the revolution and the tumultuous foundation of the Deutsche Demokratische Partei (DDP) and the Weimar Republic. Elected on January 19, 1919, to the National Assembly at the apogee of left-liberal political success, Erkelenz settled into a decade of leadership in the DDP and political activity as a member of the Reichstag. Throughout the decade, Erkelenz promoted the importance of a left-liberal presence in German politics, opposing proposals to merge with the Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP), and at the same time opposing socialization plans put forward by the Social Democratic Party (SPD). By this point the leading representative of the union- and worker-based branch of left liberalism, Erkelenz maintained a powerful voice in party councils until he lost his leadership positions in 1929 as a result of intra-party struggle after the electoral disaster of 1928, combined with his own absence from the scene caused by ill health. Not content to be sidelined, he left the DDP rather than remain within the new Deutsche Staatspartei, and joined his long-term opponent party, the SPD, where he received an equivocal welcome and never rose to leadership positions. Kellmann devotes little attention to Erkelenz's life under National Socialism and during the war, for Erkelenz avoided public political activity, surviving without incident until killed by Soviet soldiers in Berlin during the final days of the war in April 1945.

In Kellmann's account, Erkelenz's importance is his commitment to the inclusion of industrial workers as a social and electoral mass constituency for a liberalism based upon the individual rather than upon class. The mature Erkelenz viewed the Weimar Republic as a second chance to unify German workers and the middle class into a non-socialist reform movement that would build a "democratic state of social justice" (*demokratischer Staat des sozialen Rechts*, p. 127). With this mass base of workers, Erkelenz argued that the DDP would serve as the key political actor whose solution to social and economic tensions would lie between the state-directed economy sought by the Left and the "old-style capitalism" of the Right of his own party and the DVP. But three important facts thwarted Erkelenz's hopes. First, the leaders of the right wing of his own party, and its crucial funding sources among liberal industrialists, *preferred* old-style capitalism, albeit with a paternalist, human face. Second, the workers themselves, isolated by state and society into what Vernon Lidtke called "the alternative culture," found themselves more comfortable in socially homogeneous political organizations such as the SPD and German Communist Party (or in the case of Catholics, in a party held together by an ideology more powerful, persuasive, and promising than liberalism) than as the second-fiddle mass base expected to defer to their fellow-party social betters. And third, the continued practice by the DDP of *Honoratiorenpolitik* as its fundamental organizational principle confirmed the workers' sense of social exclusion. So despite Erkelenz's lifetime of efforts, he proved unable to establish a really meaningful mass basis for left liberalism among the working class, so that by 1928 when the middle classes also abandoned the DDP, its social and electoral basis had shrunk to insignificance.

Kellmann transparently and in his conclusion explicitly draws a direct line from Erkelenz to the post-Bad Godesberg SPD. The planks in Erkelenz's political platform trace the social-liberal SPD's policies almost completely: integration of workers into the state by guaranteeing the liberty of every individual while granting the state an active role in social policy; industrial democracy through co-determination; militant democracy (*wehrhafte Demokratie*) to protect the republic from enemies on both the Left and Right; and a preference for social self-administration rather than state administration of social policy ("keine Zwangsversicherung, aber Versicherungszwang," p. 187). Why then the difference in outcome of the social-liberal government of 1969-82 and Erkelenz's hopes in the *Kaiserreich* and Weimar Republic? Kellmann rightly blames the rigidity of the Marxism of the Weimar-era SPD and the social myopia of the *bÃ¼rgerlich* leaders of the DDP other than Erkelenz, combined with the tumultuous context of Weimar economic disruptions and foreign policy fixations. But beyond these factors, the real difference is the post-World War II European and German consensus on the social welfare state, ranging from Christian Democracy to the post-1959 SPD, which brought substantive social consensus to the formal liberty of liberalism, and a more egalitarian society which softened the cultural differences of class position, which provided the space for the individual rights focus so central to Erkelenz's thought to gain broad purchase among workers and bourgeoisie alike. Viewed from this perspective, the life and career of Anton Erkelenz, and his failure during his lifetime, illustrate how radical the transition had to be before both classes could enact Erkelenz's orphan ideas.

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