

Daniela Liebscher. *Freude und Arbeit: Zur internationalen Freizeit- und Sozialpolitik des faschistischen Italien und des NS-Regimes.* Köln: SH-Verlag, 2009. 693 S. EUR 49.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-89498-181-5.



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Published on H-German (June, 2010)

Commissioned by Benita Blessing (Oregon State University)

Fascist and Nazi Leisure: Transnational Collaboration and Bilateral Rivalry

Focusing on Italian Fascist and National Socialist leisure programs, Daniela Liebscher's *Freude und Arbeit* (Joy and Work) offers more than an exercise in comparative fascism. Instead, her study examines the bilateral exchanges and competition between the two regimes as they positioned themselves in the interwar transnational debate over social policy that coalesced in the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva. To complement their struggle against the post-World War I peace settlement, the Fascist and Nazi regimes advanced their social policies as the only viable alternative to social conflict, and as the basis of a new order in Europe. Their competition, the collectivism of the Soviet Union, the American New Deal, the reformism of socialists in Belgium and France, and finally the reformist social planning pursued by technocrats affiliated with the ILO, all wrestled with the question of how to improve working-class living standards and end class conflict. For the fascist regimes, however, neither social reformism, nor Bolshevik-style collectivism, nor the American model of raising wages and encouraging individual consumption held the key

to a better standard of living. That objective would be achieved in two ways: curtailing consumption in favor of rearmament, and conquering new territories in order to provide natural resources and labor to ensure future abundance. Organized leisure and pacified workplaces became crucial to this agenda, for they would instill a common national identity and a common rejection of the postwar order. They would also compensate for wage controls and low consumption.

Founded in 1937, the International Central Bureau of Joy and Work represented Fascist Italy's and Nazi Germany's social policy "axis" to parallel its political-diplomatic alliance. As the institutional embodiment of "totalitarian internationalism," the Central Bureau explicitly rejected Genevan reformism, which included support of democratized and individualized leisure. Yet like the diplomatic axis, the social policy alliance involved as much conflict as collaboration and transfer. The authoritarian structures and productivist assumptions of the German Labor Front (DAF) and its leisure organization, Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude, KdF),

borrowed extensively from Fascist models of class collaboration and the Fascist mass leisure organization Dopolavoro. The DAF, however, rejected the corporatist representation of economic interests promoted by the Fascists, (which included labor, however weakly) as inferior to its classless and racially homogenous *Volksgemeinschaft*. During the twenties, the Fascist regime promoted a “third way” between capitalism and communism through the ILO to boost its prestige and reduce the influence of anti-Fascist exiles. Its ideas became increasingly attractive with the onset of the Depression, while reformist proposals for the eight-hour day and individual consumption lost traction. By contrast, the DAF followed Nazi Germany’s withdrawal from the League of Nations in the fall of 1933 by launching “anti-Geneva” initiatives. Kraft durch Freude tourism commenced in 1934 with organized trips to the contested border regions in western Germany. Despite the favorable attention that the Fascist “third way” drew across the political spectrum under the Weimar Republic, persistent stereotypes of Italian inferiority became overtly racist assumptions among Labor Front leaders and publicists. Ultimately, the international context necessitated the ensuing collaboration. The creation of the Central Bureau as the alternative to Geneva, and the agreement between the DAF’s leader Robert Ley and Tullio Cianetti, the leader of the Fascist confederation of employers and workers—which promoted tourism between Italy and Germany—occurred as the Depression encouraged autarky. Simultaneously, the Soviet-inspired international popular front emerged to resist the spread of fascism. The two-week paid vacation, the signature legislation of the French Popular Front, directly challenged the extreme productivism and authoritarianism of Italy and Germany. In the end, however, the Third Reich’s determination to dominate Europe undermined Fascist-Nazi bilateral social policy. Its Labor Front trumpeted the superiority of its Beauty of Labor projects and its KdF tourism in central and southeastern Europe at the expense of Italian interests, while quietly

dismissing its roots in the one-time admiration of the Fascist “third way.”

Freude und Arbeit is a detailed and intricately argued work that, despite its formidable length, will reward those who are patient with it. Liebscher operates on two levels, the transnational and bilateral, and across three distinct phases in the international debate on labor and leisure policy that Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany contributed to. She successfully argues that the international context, particularly the rival proposals to assure social peace in the workplace within leisure, shaped Fascist and Nazi constructions of their own programs. Moreover, Liebscher effectively highlights the transnational exchanges through the ILO that at times exposed commonalities that cut across political regimes even as they sharpened differences, as well as those between Italy and Germany. The author has much to say about the professionalization of policymaking at the national and international levels. She thereby reveals continuities in personnel and ideas that cut across periods that historians usually use to subdivide the era between World War I and the end of World War II. Nevertheless, Liebscher is careful to recognize the rupture that the National Socialist regime signified: its imperialist ambitions and racism both reflected and contributed to the breakdown of the international order. This thoroughly researched work shows a deep understanding of the internal politics of Italy and Germany and their implications for international debates on social policy. Liebscher explains compellingly why Nazi Germany, partially because it learned from the difficulties that the Fascists faced in consolidating their power, elevated the *Volksgemeinschaft* over corporatism. Finally, her treatment of Dopolavoro and Kraft durch Freude, however crassly they structured tours to achieve the revisionist and expansionist goals of their respective regimes, will certainly interest scholars of tourism, who are increasingly focusing on the relationship between tourism and imperialism.

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Citation: Shelley O. Baranowski. Review of Liebscher, Daniela, *Freude und Arbeit: Zur internationalen Freizeit- und Sozialpolitik des faschistischen Italien und des NS-Regimes*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2010.

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