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Claudia Hiepel. *Arbeiterkatholizismus an der Ruhr: August Brust und der Gewerkverein christlicher Bergarbeiter.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1999. 261 pp. (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-17-015757-6.

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The Ruhr, the agglomeration of sprawling coal mines and steel factories in Western Germany that serves as the largest industrialized region in all of Europe, has traditionally been seen as a stronghold of Social Democracy and a hotbed of left wing radicalism. Because the Social Democratic party has dominated politics there since the end of the 1950s, historians have often presented their accounts of this area in a tendentious manner and underscore almost exclusively the role of the labor movements with ties to the Communist and Social Democratic parties. For many historians, then, *Revierkatholizismus*, or Catholicism in the coal mines, has been terra incognita, so to speak. Catholic institutions were, at best, dinosaurs destined for extinction as a result of the onward march of "modernization" and "secularization;" they were, at worst, a "social pathology," whose adherents were the victims of a "false consciousness."

Yet as Claudia Hiepel shows in her book, *Arbeiterkatholizismus an der Ruhr: August Brust und der Gewerkverein christlicher Bergarbeiter*, the history of this region is actually far more complex. Religious institutions, including the Center party and Christian trade unions actually played a central role in this region throughout the German Empire and at least until the end of the Weimar Republic. Even in the 1950s, Catholic institutions played a significant, if diminished, role in this dense proletarian quarter of West Germany. Industrialization and urbanization, in other words, did not necessarily go hand in hand with the disappearance of traditional religious institutions and mentalities.

Hiepel's focus is on the tensions and conflicts surrounding a Christian organization, the Gewerkverein christlicher Bergarbeiter (the union-club of Christian miners), which was founded by August Brust in 1894 in the aftermath of his involvement with two other unions. There is no exact equivalent in English for the word Gewerkverein, as it was something of a hybrid between a trade union and a workers' club. Hiepel provides valuable details concerning Brust's origins. Born in 1862, he was reared in a strong Catholic community in Hamm, but his father died in a mining accident, one of 197 such fatalities in the year 1870 alone. Miserable conditions, socially and economically, prefigured his own journey into the leadership into the Christian trade unions. As a teenager, he performed the grueling labor of a Schlepper, carrying the coal carts away from their source in the mines.

Frustrated by the economic downturn of 1888/89 and the aftershocks of a failed strike, Brust and others found their way to the union, Der Verband zur Wahrung und Frderung der bergmnnischen Interessen in Rheinland

und Westfalen, an organization which later was designated as the "old organization." Brust quickly became disillusioned with this organization, which never entirely lived up to its promises to be politically and religiously strictly neutral. To Brust, this organization had fallen into the hands of agitators for Social Democracy, who were openly scornful of Catholicism. Brust turned his energies to another association, the Glickauf Verband, which was intended to serve as an interconfessional Christian organization. This organization quickly collapsed, having never overcome its reputation as a bastion of ultramontanism, and, as a result,failing to attract many Protestants. Any successful organization, Brust realized, would have to have a stronger interconfessional foundation.

With such goals–interconfessionalism, the disassociation from Social Democracy–Brust played the key role in launching the Gewerkverein, which by 1903 numbered more than 40,000 members. This organization, however, was plagued by a number of significant structural deficiencies. To broaden the appeal of his organization, Brust had attempted to cater to Protestant workers' organizations, which were often quite conservative and put off by the specter of Catholic ultramontanism. At the same time, he had worked to overcome the suspicions of Catholics towards Protestantism at a time when the front-lines from the *Kulturkampf* had not yet completely dissolved. For church leaders from bourgeois or aristocratic backgrounds, however, the very notion of an interconfessional Christian trade union reeked of workers' radicalism. For one bishop, the *Gewerkverein* was an "empty shell," which could only benefit Social Democracy. The organization thus emerged as too radical for many in the Center Party and the church hierarchy, yet too timid for the broad masses of workers, who sought a tougher stance on strikes and agitation. In this sense, the *Gewerkverein* illustrates the larger dilemma in which Catholicism found itself by the turn of the century in rapidly industrializing regions like the Ruhr in which the Catholic church had once exerted an all powerful influence, save in its Protestant enclaves. There were simply too many interest groups and social classes represented in the Catholic fold to maintain cohesion.

In what is the most compelling section of the book, Hiepel describes the manner in which the Gewerkverein fell short in efforts to reach Polish miners, who made up a sizeable minority in cities like Bottrop and Gelsenkirchen. In theory, this Christian organization should have been in an ideal situation to mobilize the Poles. The Gewerkverein, and even Brust, were never able to rise above their own suspicions and stereotypes of the Poles as economic competitors who drove down wages and as culturally inferior to the Germans. Many Polish workers, however, turned their back on the *Gewerkverein* and opted instead to build their own organization.

Hiepel ultimately regards the *Gewerkverein* as a bridge between a traditional premodern Catholic world and the modern world. Although it strove to protect workers from the temptations and vices of modern industrial society, and in particular, from Social Democracy, it nonetheless contributed to their own emancipation from the Catholic milieu. Confronted with the realities of oppression at the workplace, workers sought to improve their lot, culturally, politically and economically. Such a course of action, however, put them and their own organization on a collision course with the more conservative minded elements within the Center Party and the Catholic church itself. Brust was ultimately forced to distance himself and his own organization from the church hierarchy as a result. And here, Hiepel's arguments are similar to those used by other historians in describing such institutions as the *Volksverein fur das katholische Deutschland*. This organization, for instance, was established in the wake of the *Kulturkampf* to represent Catholic institutions on a national level and protect the flock, but, as Thomas Nipperdey has argued, ultimately served as the avenue into the modern world.

Hiepel's narrative, which serves as an organizational history, occasionally bogs down in onerous details of the various organizations in which Brust took part. She might have provided more color and, above all, descriptions of individual workers who made up the organization at the grass level, instead of focusing almost exclusively on the role of its leader. It may be that the relatively limited sources available to her did not allow her to address these questions. Her narrative, moreover, stops abruptly, at the point when Brust stepped down from his leadership role in the *Gewerkverein*, or to be more accurate, was forced out, at which point he became the first coal miner to be elected to a seat in the Prussian parliament, the *Preussisches Abgeordnetenhaus*. It is somewhat inexplicable why she terminated her account of the trade union at this particular moment of crisis, as the union's membership grew rapidly from this point onward. Left unanswered is the question of what factors accounted for the increase in fortunes of the Christian trade unions in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Most importantly, her book frequently lacks the larger context of the emerging Socialist workers' movement and unions.

Parallels to Socialism, would, in turn, shed much greater light on how the Christian unions themselves developed and strengthen her account.

One would also have liked a more complete portrait of the organization's leader. The ever august Brust apparently alienated many co-workers because of his somewhat authoritarian personality, but one would like some greater explanations for the factors which shaped his own personality and subsequent career. Was Brust's somewhat authoritarian bent merely a product of his time, of the mentality of the German empire? Although Hiepel describes Brust's formative years more than adequately, the details of Brust's personal life virtually cease upon his ascent to the helm of the *Gewerkverein*. It is thus not entirely clear whether the focus of this book is on Brust or the *Gewerkverein* itself–depicted are merely the places where the two intersected.

In spite of these caveats, this book provides important insights into the history of the Ruhr, the Christian unions and the Catholic milieu itself. At its heart are the contradictions and tensions at the heart of this subculture at the point at which German society was undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization. Although this milieu ultimately collapsed in this region, Hiepel's book reminds us that the milieu lasted far longer in such regions than is commonly recognized. The *Gewerkverein* served, then, as an intermediate stage in the transformation of parts of this most populous region of Germany from a Catholic to a Social Democratic stronghold. Hiepel's work provides us a valuable service in reminding us that the history of this region is far more complicated than it is usually portrayed.

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