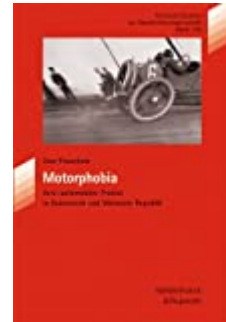


Uwe Fraunholz. *Motorphobia: Anti-Automobiler Protest in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000. 318 pp. EUR 34.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-525-35137-6.



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Uwe Fraunholz's revised dissertation on the opposition to automobiles in Germany, from the first decade of the twentieth century to the end of the Weimar Republic, has three objectives. First, Fraunholz argues that the increased use of automobiles during the first third of the twentieth century produced bitter and often violent counter protests that did not subside until the National Socialists took power. He thus challenges those previous histories of the automobile which have attributed its growing popularity to the advance of technological innovation.

By focusing instead on the resistance to the "progress" that the automobile represented for its enthusiasts, Fraunholz argues that the motorcar's contested dissemination embodied modernity's "ambivalence" (p. 12), in which rapid technological development confronted serious cultural and social adjustment. Second, following such pioneers in the scholarship of social protest as Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, and George Rude, the author finds that anti-auto protests articulate the collective values affronted by motorcar fans. Yet Fraunholz does not focus solely on popular protest or even upon the hostility of conservative publicists toward the automobile. He also assesses how the German state, imperial and republican, national and local, exacerbated or contained anti-motorcar violence. Third, the author

uses his subject to question Germany's "deviation" (*Sonderweg*) from the west. Although Fraunholz maintains that "motorphobia" lasted longer in German-speaking Central Europe than in other industrialized nations, he presents a nuanced assessment of Germany's similarity to and departure from the experiences of other countries. In addition to drawing material from federal and regional archives, Fraunholz relies extensively on the reports of anti-motor car protests in the periodicals of the German automobile clubs, especially the General German Automobile Club (ADAC), and the German Automobile Club, known as the Imperial Auto Club (KAC) during the Kaiserreich.

Despite Germany's late start in the manufacture of automobiles, motorcars began to proliferate after 1901 when Mercedes introduced the first German auto without the traditional carriage. Although consumers could soon choose from a variety of models, manufacturers' adherence to high quality craftsmanship meant that only the wealthy could afford an auto. Nevertheless, the growing number of auto enthusiasts encouraged the formation of regional and national associations to represent their interests. Although the auto clubs attracted different constituencies (for example, the ADAC appealed to professionals who used their motorcars primarily in the course of their work), generally they spoke for an elite

that encompassed aristocrats, industrialists, civil servants, officers, as well as professionals. The clubs' periodicals championed the motorcar as a beacon of progress and a source of freedom and mobility, while casting its opponents as benighted reactionaries. To be sure, as late as 1932 Germany lagged behind France, England, Belgium, Switzerland and the United States in automobile ownership, even though during the interwar period German automobile manufacturers adopted mass production to lower the cost and increase distribution. Nonetheless, the number of autos on roads ill-equipped to accommodate them, the alarming accident rate, and the aggressive promotion of the automobile clubs, invited angry popular counter attacks. Motorists confronted obstacles that sought to discourage the intrusion of motorcars either by damaging cars or injuring, even killing, drivers. Laying barricades and nails, throwing stones, the use of whips, and even stringing wire across roads, raised high enough to decapitate unsuspecting motorists, signified collective outrage.

Anti-automobile sentiment existed in Germany's cities, particularly among workers, for whom parked cars represented inviting targets as symbols of class inequality. Yet on the whole, urban populations proved more accepting of motorcars, and not just because middle and upper class automobile enthusiasts lived in cities. Even before World War I, the SPD objected less to autos than to the social exclusivity of motorists, advocating, in turn, the manufacture and distribution of models that ordinary Germans could afford. As such, the position of most working-class representatives contributed immeasurably to a non-violent protest that addressed the negative consequences of autos, high speed and noise. The motorization of fire prevention, sanitation, the police, and particularly public transportation, which granted workers fast, inexpensive, and relatively safe mobility, also weakened the narrow class connotations that bedeviled motorized vehicles and acclimatized urban dwellers to their presence.

Instead the countryside became the primary setting for violent anti-automobile protests, especially villages close to Berlin, Munich, Cologne, and Frankfurt, which became inviting destinations for motorized urban tourists. The tendency of autos to stir up dust and frighten the horses that drew peasant wagons, not to mention the proclivity of drivers to ruin crops and run over livestock, meant the violation of rural values, property, and livelihood. The perpetrators of the attacks included a strikingly high number of youths, who could more easily elude prosecution, partially because local au-

thorities sympathized with rural protestors, while seeking draconian punishments against offending drivers. The targets of attackers represented a cross section of the motorized elite, with emphasis on the professional and industrial middle classes. Individual attackers, notably enraged carriage men who used their whips against drivers, acted with the assurance of community support. That automobile owners used their possessions as sport vehicles to demonstrate their speed and prowess only inflamed popular rural enmity, for it recalled the injustices associated with aristocratic hunts. Hand wringing by conservative intellectuals and publicists regarding the rampant individualism that the auto encouraged, much of it explicitly anti-Semitic, helped to sustain the anti-automobile sentiment. Although that hostility abated after World War I, it nonetheless remained remarkably durable. Fraunholz suggests that auto periodicals were not wrong to see rural protesters as, in some sense, anti-modern, for long-standing cultural practices and the rhythms of the agricultural calendar differed significantly from life in the cities. Attacks on motorcars largely conformed to long-standing patterns of rural protest. Nevertheless, the author also makes clear that abstractions such as "anti-modern" go only so far in accounting for the rage of peasants against vehicles that signified the contempt for their dignity and culture.

Yet, as Fraunholz argues, the production of more affordable cars after World War I, which made the auto less socially exclusive, and the increasingly determined efforts (especially at the national level) to codify safe automobile practices, establish traffic rules and institute uniform licensing procedures, modified motorphobia. To be sure, auto club periodicals often fought tenaciously against such regulations, particularly the attempt to impose stringent liabilities against motorists involved in accidents. Nevertheless, automobile and traffic regulations worked to the advantage of automobilists, since they overcame disparities in local regulations that encouraged local protesters. Moreover, motorphobia was hardly confined to Germany, or even to German-speaking Central Europe, for it also ran rampant in western Europe and the United States, if for shorter periods of time. If Germany distinguished itself in the duration of anti-automobile protests, as compared to France, Britain, and even Italy, the real divergence lay with the United States which, after an initial spate of motorphobia, accepted the automobile with a fervor unmatched in Europe until the 1960s. The neglect of public transportation in favor of private car ownership is the American *Sonderweg*.

Motorphobia provides a rich analysis of the antago-

nism toward motorcars in Germany, which accomplishes Fraunholz's objective of complicating teleological histories of the development of the automobile. In addition to offering extensive detail on the kinds of collective actions, the regional and temporal variations in their appearance, the social and age composition of the perpetrators, and the social makeup of the victims of motorphobic attack, the author also lucidly discusses the intellectual opponents of cars. He particularly illuminates the manner in which the mobility of the auto reinforced the persistent stereotype of Jews as "nomads," especially in the aftermath of war, revolution and hyper-inflation. Finally, although Fraunholz's conclusion regarding the distinctiveness of the American path to motorization is hardly surprising, his comparative analysis is informative and insightful. For example, despite the commonality of fascism in Italy and Germany, motorphobia was less entrenched in Italy because that country's relative under urbanization and its fewer autos meant that rural folk looked upon motor cars as curiosities rather than as destructive intrusions. The major weakness of this monograph, however, lies in its reluctance to engage

with broader political and social developments during the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic. The urban-rural divide is a well-known theme in German history, which Fraunholz confirms through a novel subject, namely a modern consumer good, yet we learn little about what, if anything, motorphobia contributed to the larger political choices of agrarian populations, particularly the intensely anti-urban right radicalism that exploded in the 1920s. The author suggests that the Nazis finally overcame the resistance to autos, not because it democratized motorcar ownership but because it effectively sold the promise of popular motorization. Yet given the Nazis' extraordinary success in rural areas, it would have been interesting to know how the party finessed rural motorphobia.

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