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Axel W.-O. Schmidt. *Der Rothe Doktor von Chicago: Ein Deutsch-Amerikanisches Auswandererschicksal: Biographie des Doktor Ernst Schmidt, 1830-1900, Arzt und Sozialrevolutionaer.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003. 602 pp. $79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-631-39635-3.

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The biography of an important German-American socialist is a welcome addition to the underexplored history of Germans in America. Even specialists in labor history and nineteenth-century America are unlikely to have heard of Ernst Schmidt.[1] The author taps the rich body of material written in German by German Americans relevant to U.S. history but seldom consulted by American historians. We should be grateful for the yeoman service he has done in assembling material–all the more difficult because much of it is in "German script," old forms of handwriting employed in German manuscripts until some sixty to seventy years ago and no longer taught in school in Germany. Unfortunately, the book provides also an object lesson in the pitfalls of writing history in general and biography in particular. Drawing heavily on the author's work, I shall present an overview of Schmidt's life with an occasional comment on the book. In the concluding section of the review, I shall discuss briefly the book's strengths and weaknesses.

Ernst Schmidt (1830-1900) led an exciting and fulfilling life enmeshed in some of the great events of the nineteenth century. The "Red Doctor" was born in Ebern, a small town in the Upper Franconian district of Bavaria. He came from a moderately affluent Catholic family. The instruction he received in Jesuit schools and a great uncle, a vociferous proponent of the French Revolution, provided the two poles of his early life. He opted for secularism, anticlericalism, and revolution. Only eighteen when the Revolution of 1848 broke out, Schmidt worked in the Upper Franconian countryside–trying to organize the peasantry against the nobility, and against state and church officials. Returning to Upper Franconia from brief exile in Switzerland in January 1850, he completed his medical studies at the University in WÃ¼rzburg with the equivalent of *summa cum laude*, only to find the road to advancement in medicine blocked by his record of political activity in 1848-49.

Schmidt became a "Forty Eighter." He decided to emigrate to the United States, as did many other participants on the revolutionary side. The Forty Eighters and their immediate predecessors changed the character of German immigration for more than a decade. Previous German immigrants had been overwhelmingly from the lower, although not the very lowest, strata of society. Peasants, craftsmen, and small businessmen had made up the bulk of German emigrants. Beginning in the 1830s and accelerating until a few years after 1848, highly politicized and cultured intellectuals, many of them from the more affluent sectors of society, and some of them radicals, came to America. To prepare for life in the New World, Schmidt spent six months working in a London hospital, after which he married a childhood acquain-

tance.

In 1857 the Schmidts settled in Chicago, which became their permanent home. Unlike many other Forty Eighters, Schmidt was further radicalized by his experiences in the United States. His large medical practice brought him into close contact with the poor and impoverished, while he remained open to the radical intellectual streams of the time and the place. Apparently he did not adopt a socialist stance prior to arrival in Chicago, but this is one of several basic points on which the author is unclear. Much of Schmidt's energy went into political activity. He was a prominent Abolitionist, worked with the "Underground Railroad," met and admired John Brown, campaigned for Lincoln's election in 1860 but soon turned against Lincoln as too moderate, and served for a few months with a German unit in a Missouri regiment at the beginning of the Civil War. From his early days in America he supported trade unions and other workers' organizations as well as newspapers addressed to workers. Unlike Carl Schurz and many other Forty Eighters who denied the existence of a "social problem" in America, Schmidt came to the conclusion that radical change, not mere reform, was necessary in the United States, as in Europe.

Honored in 1873 with the presidency of the Chicago Medical Society, he had become widely known in that city for both his medical and political activities. In 1879 he ran on the Socialist Labor ticket in Chicago's mayoralty contest and surprised the prognosticators of the day by garnering 20 percent of the vote. The author might have provided better documentation or argumentation for his reasonable conclusion that Schmidt ran, knowing full well he had no chance of winning but hoping to push the election to the Democrat Carter Harrison, which was indeed the result of Schmidt's campaign. Although he remained an anticlerical free thinker until the end of his life, he was sufficiently pragmatic to be a cofounder in 1867 of Chicago's (Catholic) Alexianer Brothers Hospital, later known as Grant Hospital.

There are other aspects of Schmidt's career that the author mentions without adequate explanation. Some examples follow. The degree to which many nineteenth-century German immigrants and their progeny participated in two cultural worlds, one German the other English speaking, is largely unknown today. Among the best general works on German Americans in the era of what might be termed "dual culture" from 1830 to 1917 are John A. Hawgood's *Tragedy of German-America* (1940) and Phyllis Keller's *States of Belonging: German-American Intellectuals and the First World War* (1979). Neither book appears in the author's bibliography. Many German immigrants became bilingual, although, like Schmidt, most of them felt more comfortable speaking and writing in German than English. Although integrated into American society, they were neither monolingual nor monocultural. And many of their children developed similarly. This is apparently true of all four of Schmidt's sons who survived childhood, one of whom studied medicine in Germany. All four made notable careers linked to medicine: two as physicians, one as a pharmacist, and another as an architect noted for the design of hospitals. Some, perhaps all four, retained ties to the German American community, but despite the inclusion of lengthy biographies of each, the author does not pursue the issue.

Another matter begging for elucidation for a contemporary audience is Schmidt's participation in the development of Jewish hospitals. In the nineteenth century, and even into the twentieth, the German community in the United States consisted of Freethinkers, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. German Jews, unlike their more numerous Eastern European brethren, who began to arrive in great numbers in the 1880s and 90s, were not large in number, but were generally regarded, by themselves and others, as German Americans. Thus it is not surprising that Schmidt was the cofounder in 1869 of Chicago's first Jewish hospital, which was built under the auspices of the United Hebrew Relief Association. The successor to this medical facility is Michael Reese Hospital and Medical Center.

The highpoint of Schmidt's political career was his role in the defense of the "Haymarket" defendants from 1886 to 1893. If he is remembered at all today by Americans, it is for this activity, in which he served as treasurer of the defense committee and, according to the author, provided its moving spirit.

The Haymarket Affair was a notable milestone in the class struggle in the United States. During a small demonstration in Chicago's Haymarket Square protesting the deaths of 3 strikers, and in the presence of some 180 policemen, a bomb exploded on May 4, 1886. The policemen, many armed with two revolvers, responded with a hail of bullets in the direction of the demonstrators. Some seventy policemen and over a hundred working men were killed or injured. The bomber was never found. The authorities blamed the incident on a conspiracy by militant socialists, who, in keeping with a trend at the time, generally designated themselves "anarchists."

Most of the defendants were Germans, a disproportionate number even taking into account the large number of German workers in Chicago and their very visible role in the socialist, labor, and anarchist movements.

Schmidt and many others, both then and later, saw the affair mainly as an attempt on the part of Chicago's power structure to smash the rising labor movement through massive intimidation. Despite large-scale police actions disrupting workers' districts and organizations, only thirty-one men, many of them leading anarchists or socialists, were indicted, and even fewer, eight, were convicted of murder–on the basis of no tangible evidence except their political ideas. Of the convicted, one killed himself in his cell, four were hanged in 1887, and the remainder did not receive a death sentence or had it reduced through appeals to the governor of Illinois. Three of the "Haymarket martyrs" remained in prison until 1893, when a more understanding governor, John P. Altgeld, pardoned them after continuing pressure from their defenders.

Reading this book is frustrating. The basic difficulty is that we are not presented with a coherent interpretation of Schmidt's life and political development in historical context. The author's apparent aim of using the term "Forty Eighter" as a central thread fails for lack of attention to the historical issue of who is to be considered part of this group. Schmidt's biography is neither problematized nor employed to raise broader questions such as the relationship of bourgeois intellectuals to lower-class movements, or the place of Schmidt and other Germans in the history of American socialism. The author presents us with the equivalent of an enormous scrapbook, with overlapping pictures confusingly arranged and without adequate captions. There are numerous repetitions. Minor but disconcerting discrepancies exist between the text and a very useful chronological chart (pp. 19-22). The author frequently interrupts himself to go off on a tangent. The worst such incident is the sixty-seven page digression on the lives of Schmidt's sons mentioned above. Closely related to the problem of digressions is another. At the mention of a topic we are often inundated by irrelevancies. For example, the author has little to say about the emigrant voyage of Schmidt and his bride from Bremen to New York, but he distracts us with a very detailed description of the ship drawn from a recent publication.

Finally, there is the matter of numerous long quotes, many running three to four pages each, and some to ten or more. Although drawn from primary sources, these quotations are not analyzed. Unlike the book's other failings, the quotations–or rather some of them–have a redeeming dimension. A few stand out like diamonds: Schmidt reflecting on the last twenty-four hours before the execution of the Haymarket martyrs (pp. 363-371), a memoir on Haymarket published by Schmidt in 1897 (pp. 374-389), his reflections on the Revolution of 1848 fifty years later (pp. 396-413), and his obituary written for the principal New York German socialist newspaper, the *Volks-Zeitung*, by his comrade Eugen Dietzgen (pp. 431-439). These treasures repay the patient reader, but most of them are in the last third of the book.

Note

[1]. Presumably the author of this biography, Axel W.-O. Schmidt, is not related to his subject, Ernst Schmidt, but rather simply shares with him a common German surname. For the sake of clarity, "Schmidt" in this review refers to the subject of the biography and "the author" refers to Axel W.-O. Schmidt.

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