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Martin Liepach. *Das Wahlverhalten der jüdischen Bevölkerung: Zur politischen Orientierung der Juden in der Weimarer Republik.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996. xiv + 333 S. (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-16-146542-0.

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M. Liepach: Wahlverhalten der jüdischen Bevölkerung

Much of the history of the Weimar Republic has been written within the context of its rapid collapse under the onslaught of National Socialism. The Weimar years are often portrayed as an important chapter in a larger, darker history between 1918 and 1945. Historians, sociologists and others have examined the voting patterns of German citizens during the Weimar years in an effort to understand the nature and course of the Third Reich. An understanding of the social, political and confessional profiles of those who voted for the Nazis during the Weimar years have given us important tools to this end.

The consideration of voting patterns of German citizens during the Weimar Republic tends to place German Jews on their own separate historical track. Jews, of course, did not vote for the Nazis, nor was the relatively small German Jewish community large enough to constitute a serious anti-Nazi voting bloc. Indeed, there are two increasingly parallel histories between 1918 and 1945: the non-Jewish and the Jewish. The growing support of substantial numbers of non-Jewish Germans for Hitler was part of a steady erosion of German liberalism. German Jews, of course, could not be part of that process. Indeed, the literature on German-Jewish history during the Weimar Republic reflects an enormous paradox: while Jews were more economically, socially, and culturally assimilated, and more politically active in German political life than ever before, they were also more aware of their own distinctiveness and vulnerability as a group apart from the larger populace. Notwithstanding the political and ideological differences and conflicts between assimilationists and Zionists, or the cultural differences between German Jews and *Ostjuden*, Jews in Germany were forced increasingly to fall back on their own Jewish organizations and institutions in the face of mounting antisemitism and its assault on the system. In other words, German Jews during the Weimar Republic were at once more assimilated and yet more isolated from non-Jewish Germans than they had been in recent memory.

Martin Liepach's new book is an important addition to the literature on the history of German Jewry during the Weimar period. It represents the first comprehensive, quantitative study of Jewish voting behavior during those years, with countless tables and other statistical materials on virtually every facet of Jewish life in Germany before 1933. He draws on the previous work of Peter Pulzer, Arnold Paucker, and a few others whose studies of German-Jewish history provide a more cursory treatment of the question of Jewish voting behavior during the Weimar Republic. Liepach considers Jewish voting in the Reichstag elections between 1924 and 1932, as well as in two Landtag elections (Baden and Hesse) and in the Berlin communal elections in 1925 and 1929. His primary sources are the major Jewish newspapers in Germany such as the *C-V Zeitung*, the *Juedische Rundschau*, *Der Schild*, and *Das Israelitische Familienblatt*, as well as the important liberal daily newspapers such as the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Vossische Zeitung*. The purpose is as much to provide insights into voter/election research methodology as to contribute to our understanding of German-Jewish history during the Weimar Republic. If his conclusions are not entirely new, his assessment of the meaning and significance of those conclusions is original.

The author both confirms and contradicts earlier assumptions in the literature. He reaffirms the well-known position that Jewish voters were overwhelmingly lib-

eral, and usually supportive of the left-of-center *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (DDP) before 1930. Exceptions to the rule were, of course, the followers of Max Naumann and the *Verband Nationaldeutscher Juden* who usually identified with the conservative DNVP. Liepach clearly demonstrates that considerable numbers of Jews did not support the parties on the right, such as the DNVP or even the DVP. He echoes the view of the *Israelitisches Familienblatt* in 1927 that there were so few Jews left in these parties that they could be considered "judenrein" (300).

Liepach is interested in why this was so – why Jewish political culture and voting behavior during the Weimar years was not different. Indeed, he uses Jewish voting behavior to get at a better understanding of Jewish history during the Weimar Republic. He refuses to consider it as *Vorgeschichte* to the Holocaust or as *Erfolgsgeschichte* for German Jews. He deems the traditional periods in Weimar history (the bad years 1918-1923, the good years 1924-1929, and the bad years 1930-1933) as inapplicable to the Jewish community. The reality of the antisemitic threat during the Weimar period was very different from that of the *Kaiserzeit*; in the former it sought nothing less than the destruction of liberalism and the democratic system, whereas in the latter its ambitions were not nearly so comprehensive. Thus, the liberalism that Jews in Germany had traditionally supported and relied upon was being continually eroded throughout the Weimar years, even during the so-called "good years," and Jews responded to this process with a fairly clear and systematic voting strategy. Its purpose was to save the system and preserve its constitutional guarantees without which Jewish life in Germany could not be sustained. While there seemed little practical alternative to supporting the DDP prior to 1930, there emerged a post-1930 strategy of periodic support for the DDP's successor *Deutsche Staatspartei*, a fusion in July 1930 of elements of the DDP and the previously right-wing *Jungdeutscher Orden*.

The author's analysis of Jewish voting patterns during the two years between the elections of July 1930 and July 1932 is particularly illuminating. He discerns a voting strategy aimed at preventing Nazi gains and, ultimately, the collapse of the Weimar Republic. At the forefront of this strategy stood the major Jewish newspapers, which provided a very active and visible vehicle for the dissemination of opinion, election news and information. Jews tended to support the *Staatspartei* or, in areas where it had little chance of success, the Centre Party or the Social Democrats. That the strategy failed and never had much of a chance for success is not surprising. However its existence would indicate a Jewish community that was neither passive, nor rudderless, nor simply resigned to the disaster that ultimately befell it. Rather the picture that emerges of Jewish life in Weimar Germany is one of a surprisingly early realization of the nature of the emergency and a determination to struggle against the onslaught.

Das Wahlverhalten der juedischen Bevoelkerung in der Weimarer Republik is an important study of German-Jewish history. It is invaluable as a reference book (it contains considerably more statistical information – tables, charts, graphs, etc. – of virtually every facet of Jewish life in Germany than anything that has preceded it); more importantly, it is a significant contribution to an ongoing reconsideration of German-Jewish history during the interwar period. The Jewish community in Germany is depicted as an active defender of Weimar democracy and Jewish equality in Germany rather than as a group of confused, passive victims, incapable of defending themselves, who were destined to be the proverbial sheep led to the slaughter of the "Final Solution." It recognizes the dangers of allowing hindsight to substitute for a clear understanding of the past: what hindsight tells us was utter futility during the Weimar years was not necessarily the way German Jews saw things at the time.

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