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Conan Fischer, ed. *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany.* Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996. viii + 248 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-915-4.

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In the past fifteen years, the long-entrenched thesis that National Socialism represented the revolt of the *Mittelstand* has undergone decisive revision. Although few historians would deny the Nazi party's success among the German middle classes in recruiting party members and drawing voters, sophisticated statistical work, much of it drawn from newly-explored regional archives, has shown that the Nazi constituency was much more diverse than once imagined. Recent scholarship now argues that support for the Hitler movement extended to all social classes. Moreover, although the Nazi party performed especially well in Protestant regions, it did not fail to attract Catholics. In short, National Socialism evolved into a genuine *Volkspartei* that transcended the class and milieu-based politics of the Weimar period. The implications of demonstrating the integrative character of National Socialism go beyond providing a more nuanced understanding of who voted for Hitler, who joined the Nazi party, and why. This collection of essays illustrates how newer work on the social composition of Nazism has underwritten the trend away from class-based approaches, Marxist or otherwise, that once defined the debates on the rise and stabilization of Nazism.

Most of the contributors to *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes* are well-known to the field, having published extensively on the social bases of the Hitler movement. Detlef Muehlberger, Gunther Mai, William Brustein, Helen Boak, and Oded Heilbronner are all represented here, in addition to the editor of the collection, Conan Fischer, and Juergen Falter, whose massive work, *Hitlers Waehler*, epitomizes the assault on inherited views of the Nazi constituency. Taken together, the articles hone in on one of the most durable conceptions, the alleged immunity of workers to Nazism. In the process, they provide an easily-accessible sampling of the methodologies and arguments that now shape the discussion on the Nazi constituency. One new face appears, that of Claus Szejnmann, whose essay, "The Rise of the Nazi Party in the Working-Class Milieu of Saxony," arises from his forthcoming book on the SA in the same region.

Although the essays deal with different facets of the Nazi movement, they so clearly address the same agenda that it is profitable to treat their contributions as a unit. The most important arguments that arise are, first, that the Nazi party never abandoned its efforts to attract workers, not even after 1928 when it devoted more attention to the countryside, where the agrarian crisis soured peasants, estate owners, and agricultural laborers against the Republic. The platforms of the party and its union, the NSBO, appealed directly to the material and status concerns of workers, evoking the symbols, concepts, slogans, and enemies (high finance, capitalists) of the left. Brustein's and Mai's essays, as well as Boak's piece on working-class women, delineate the promises that the Nazis marshalled, such as job creation, the resettlement of bankrupt estates, autarky, the eight-hour day, the extension of social security, and economic security for families.

Second, forty percent of the Nazi electorate consisted of workers, the biggest contingent of whom were laborers from heavily Protestant rural districts. Moreover, workers joined the party and its affiliated organizations–the SA and NSBO–in large numbers, although among the new members skilled and semi-skilled workers from such secondary sector industries as construction, wood working, metal works and transport predominated. In no way were Nazi workers "marginal" or "atypical" of their class, the authors of these essays collectively insist. On the one hand, the variables of gender and religious affiliation, as well as the diversity of occupations and places of residence, demand that we not limit our conception of "worker" to those in large-scale urban industries. On the other hand, even "classical" industrial workers showed a striking propensity to join the SA, as Conan Fischer and Detlev Muehlberger indicate.

Finally, the editor's conclusion identifies what Fischer believes is the most significant implication of recent research. Despite proposals that the party become

specifically geared to workers, "class political objectives of the old style" played little role in the formation of the Nazi working-class constituency. Instead, the party's *voelkisch* ideology stressed social harmony rather than class struggle. The Nazi party's long-underrated ability to attract working class voters and members demonstrates that "class and sectional politics, whether middle or working class, reached the end of the road in Germany during the closing years of the Weimar Republic." The Hitler movement thus anticipated what would become the dominant pattern after 1945–integrationist, consensus-forming parties that transcended the particular interests that so fractured Weimar politics (pp. 242-3).

These essays conveniently package the sort of evidence that has shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Nazis, unlike other German political parties up to that time, cut across class, regional, and religious lines. Juergen Falter's computer-generated statistical analyses, and his and Brustein's exploration of 42,000 party files from the Berlin Document Center–to give two examples–give us a more precise picture of the range of the Nazi appeal, and in particular, of the workers who either voted for the party or joined it. Recent research pushes beyond the argument of Thomas Childers that the Nazi party was a "catchall" protest movement, for Childers primarily emphasized the "old" *Mittelstand*, while accepting the marginality of Nazism's working-class supporters. For the scholars in this collection, workers may still have been under-represented in the party's membership and electorate (although over represented in the SA's rank and file), but the degree of under-representation was much smaller than once assumed.

Less successful are the attempts to discern the reasons why workers chose Nazism. This problem is clearest in Brustein's piece, in which the author asserts, with no compelling evidence to support him, the social aspirations of workers that the Nazis supposedly met. His rational choice model proceeds from the premise that Nazi platforms strove to address working-class concerns, particularly those of workers employed in the stagnant, heavy industrial sector. Yet even if one accepts Brustein's assessment of the party's strategy, can one really interpret party platforms as a straightforward reflection of their constituencies' wishes?

The main difficulty of this collection, however, lies less in the weaknesses of the individual essays than in the significance that it asks us to derive from the totality of its contents. However obvious its importance, focusing exclusively on the Nazi party's mass support risks overlooking the complex negotiations between the party and Germany's elites, undoubtedly aided by the party's electoral decline in the November 1932 elections, as well as the muting of the party's "socialism" at crucial moments. To be sure, Nazism's mass support was indispensable in transforming Hitler into a serious candidate for chancellor because no other party could command such broad-based support. Furthermore, the diversity among workers that causes the contributors of this volume, Falter especially, to downgrade class as a reliable predictor of affinity to Nazism, does help to explain the German left's weaknesses in the face of the Nazi onslaught. Nevertheless, the management-labor conflicts over unemployment compensation that precipitated the breakup of the Mueller cabinet, the resistance of estate owners to rural settlements, the army's exploitation of the SA, and the dumping of Schleicher in part because of his overtures to trade unions, contributed more to the disintegration of parliamentary government and the formation of the conservative-Nazi government in 1933 than the party's blandishments to workers.

Moreover, Fischer's argument that class and sectional politics reached a dead end as the Republic disintegrated reduces the Third Reich to a mere blip on the screen–a slight interruption in the continuity between Weimar and Bonn. If Fischer is correct, how should we interpret the Nazi terror after the "seizure" of power? Szejnmann's and Heilbronner's essays reinforce a crucial point: the Nazi party's success in working class and/or Catholic areas varied according to the strength of the parties and institutions that had anchored those milieus. According to Szejnmann, the Hitler movement performed poorly in regions of Saxony where Social Democratic institutions, especially cultural ones, were firmly entrenched. The Nazis themselves concluded that the still-formidable competition of the left required a dictatorial and terroristic antidote. Emergency legislation, *Gleichschaltung*, the violent destruction of the parties of the left and the trade unions, and the concentration camps are all inconceivable if we do not acknowledge that the Communists and Socialists spoke for a significant portion of the working class. Furthermore, the Nazi "racial state" grew from the apparatus of terror that the regime mobilized against the left. The terror and the consequences of the war that the Nazi regime started led to the dismantling of milieu-based politics, not the Nazi electorate.

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