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Dieter Kastner. *Kinderarbeit im Rheinland: Entstehung und Wirkung des ersten preußischen Gesetzes gegen die Arbeit von Kindern in Fabriken von 1839.* Köln: SH-Verlag, 2004. 303 pp. EUR 29.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-89498-129-7.

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The Machinery of Reform

Around the world today there are laws prohibiting and regulating the use of child labor, a practice widely considered to be abhorrent. This stance is actually of recent provenance, and for most of history childhood and work have gone hand in hand. Dieter Kastner's work *Kinderarbeit in Rheinland* takes up the question of how laws toward child labor changed by narrating the story of Prussia's first law against child labor, passed in 1839.

Kastner deliberately organizes his narrative around the political and bureaucratic processes that produced the law, seeing it more as the result of evolving circumstances and negotiations between different actors, rather than just the inevitable result of changing definitions of children and childhood. Above all, he wants to give agency to the Prussian officials who crafted the law and treat it as the result of specific actions and compromises, rather than just "falling out of the sky." Throughout his work, Kastner juxtaposes his narrative to that of East German historians who wrote on the child labor laws, especially Jürgen Kuczynski, who he claims set the tone for the historiography of the issue in both the East and West. In the first place, Kuczynski claimed that the laws had little effect, and that they were passed so that the Prussian army would have a fitter pool of young men from which to draw. Kastner sarcastically labels this latter claim "the cannon fodder thesis." In contrast, Kastner argues that the Prussian bureaucracy regulated child labor to ensure universal education, and secondarily for reasons of public health and morality. Furthermore, he asserts that the laws had a much more positive effect than other historians have given them credit for.

In the first part of the book, Kastner lays out the background to the anti-child labor laws, especially the attempts to ensure universal elementary education in Prussia after 1825. According to Kastner, eighteenth-century pedagogues who held children in high esteem still did not consider child labor to be anathema, but rather an important element in a child's education. However, factory work changed these ideas, as the longer hours demanded by the mills left no time for education. Quite simply, the goals of universal education could not coexist with a factory system where children toiled for twelve hours per day. Initially, the Prussian state accepted factory schools as an alternative to placing child laborers in regular schools. Kastner argues that this compromise became unworkable because children who worked long hours were just too tired or too hungry to get much out of their classes, and also because factory owners generally made the upkeep of their schools a predictably low priority.

The inability of factory schools to meet educational needs dovetailed with increasing criticism of working conditions for child workers. Kastner effectively uses the words of Ernst Christian August Keller to offer a window into child factory labor. Keller, a Prussian official who toured Rheinland factories in 1837, reported the long hours and unhealthy conditions in graphic detail. Kastner also links Keller's investigation to a growing consciousness of child labor engendered by the passage of the 1833 Factory Act in Britain. Keller's findings prompted action by Ernst von Bodelschwingh, the governor of Prussia's Rhenish provinces, who proposed a law that would ban factory work for children under the age of nine, and limit children under fourteen to ten hours per day. At the same time, debates over child labor entered the public sphere. Kastner spotlights Barmen factory owner Johannes Schuchard, who wrote a widely read article attacking child labor on moral grounds and which elicited maximum pathos by relating the story of a girl who committed suicide because her pay had been docked and she feared the punishment of her parents. Kastner continually emphasizes the agency of men like Keller, Bodelschwingh, and Schuchard in the push for

anti-child labor legislation, arguing that no laws would have emerged had not these men taken initiative.

After negotiation and changes in language, the Prussian government laid down restrictions on child labor in 1839. Most important, children under the age of nine were banned from factory labor, children needed to have had at least three years of schooling before working, and children under the age of sixteen could work no more than ten hours per day. Other provisions included mandated rest times and a total ban on night work for children. In interpreting the motivation for the law, Kastner argues that the desire to have children educated predominated, followed by concerns over the physical and moral well-being of child laborers. He makes it clear that the law's authors did not think in terms of human rights, but befitting their conservative orientation, they desired the protection of social order and public health.

After laying out the genesis of the 1839 law, Kastner then goes on to make an admirably balanced assessment of its effectiveness. In the first place, he acknowledges the stiff opposition to it in some quarters. While one would expect factory owners to protest the laws, many workers did as well. Children's wages helped augment family incomes, and reducing hours meant less take home pay for laboring families. In addition, some industries, like printing, flouted the law, and transgressors often went without punishment for breaking the law. Despite those difficulties, Kastner sees the law in a much more positive light than his predecessors. In the first place, he argues that the Prussian law prompted similar regulations in the rest of German speaking Europe. He further asserts that it helped establish better educational opportunities for children. On this point Kastner effectively uses the example of Aachen, a city with pitifully low levels of school attendance before 1839 where the laws against child labor led to the building of more schools and dramatic increases in the number of students. In the ensuing years, regulations against child labor in Prussia would get even tighter. A new law in 1853 banned factory work for children under the age of twelve, and limited children under the age of fourteen to working six hour days.

The main benefit of Kastner's study is his ability to enlarge our understanding of how laws against child labor came to be, and especially how those laws grew out of legislative initiative and negotiation. Instead of attributing them merely to changing attitudes about children or stereotypical claims of Prussian militarism, Kastner inserts the agency of politicians and reformers while never taking the outcome for granted. Unfortunately, there could be much more done to reveal the agency and working conditions of the children themselves, whose voices are oddly absent from the account. While the sources for their voices might be lacking, there should have at least been more of an effort to address the issue of child workers' agency. Furthermore, Kastner does little to explain shifting attitudes about children that led reformers to value the schooling of children above all other factors. Overall, while the focus on the political process behind the 1839 laws yields results, the author sometimes needed to offer a wider perspective on these developments. That being said, *Kinderarbeit im Rheinland* chronicles an important but little understood legal change and is a useful work for those interested in the history of children and social reform in nineteenth-century Germany.

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