

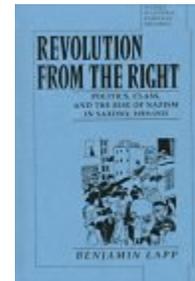
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Benjamin Lapp. *Revolution from the Right: Politics, Class, and the Rise of Nazism in Saxony, 1919-1933*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1997. xv + 248 pp.p. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-04027-4.

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Lapp's study skillfully combines an analysis of Saxony's political life from 1919 to 1933 with a case study of politics in the Weimar Republic. Two factors are most important for Saxony: the almost total absence of the Center Party from politics and the strength of the socialist parties. Both factors contributed to a radical and hostile tone of politics, remarkable even by Weimar standards.

Lapp delineates the structure of Saxon industry, which tended to be older and more concentrated in smaller businesses than in other industrial regions of Germany. The type of industry represented in Saxony was also particularly vulnerable to crisis. Already at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, much of it was in comparatively bad shape. Even the "better" years after 1923 did not bring much recovery, and the depression after 1929 quickly wrought disaster. Most desolate was the situation of such older industries as toy making and the production of musical instruments, for which the *Vogtland* and *Erzgebirge* were (and are) famous.

As Lapp shows with respect to the first years of Saxony's history in the Weimar period, the state does prove to be a good case study of what might have happened had the Socialists in Germany been a bit more radical and had the German Revolution gone a little farther than it did. When the socialist parties dominated Saxon politics (until October 1923), they enacted reforms many historians would have wished them to impose on the Reich as well: they replaced anti-democratic officials, made 9 November—the day of the overthrow of Germany's monarchy in 1918—a state holiday (along with 1 May), repressed the rightist paramilitary leagues, and pursued an anticlerical policy in education. Saxony here went farther than neighboring Prussia, as Dietrich Orlow's study

on Prussia has shown. The left-wing Saxon government in 1921-23 took up the momentum for reform that had been blocked in the Reich in 1919. Yet this was possible only through an uneasy alliance of the strong Social Democratic Party (SPD) with the Independent Socialists (USPD) and the Communists (KPD). Instead of a broad Weimar coalition (consisting of SPD, Democratic Party, and Center Party), a working-class government dominated state politics in the early years and caused an extraordinary polarization. The Saxon *Buergerium* reacted with hatred and resentment, so that it enthusiastically welcomed the Reich intervention in October 1923 that put an end to these policies.

Given its composition and dependence on the KPD, the left-wing government combined honest democratization efforts with specifically proletarian interests, symbolized by the introduction of the 1 May state holiday. This made the *Buergerium* feel subjected to a proletarian dictatorship. Given the strong following of the socialist parties in most areas of the state, even greater democratization was quickly seen as proletarian class rule by the burghers. Lapp shows how this confrontation was often carried out in a personal way: an employer might be forced to march through town holding a red flag, and violence against the *Buergerium* and farmers was widespread.

The powerlessness the *Buergerium* felt before the Reich intervention undermined the structures of traditional bourgeois party politics. Already during the chaotic revolutionary days, the nationalist leagues with their weapons seemed better suited as a defender of bourgeois interests than the parties. The ill-fated attempts to form a bourgeois unity list for the state elections revealed the

weakness of the bourgeois parties and the fragmentation of their interests. Only virulent anti-socialism held them together. As a consequence, the special interest parties made a particularly strong showing, and bourgeois disillusionment swept the NSDAP to its first big success in state elections (September 1930). Lapp analyzes the preconditions of this success and points out how much the Nazis managed to break into the working-class electorate. Although relying primarily on a particularly anti-socialist and embittered *Buerkertum*, the Nazis did fulfill their promise to cut across class and party political lines. Red Saxony had turned largely brown in 1932.

Lapp's study is a welcome addition to the literature on the German states in the interwar period. It is well-researched and thoughtfully argued. Almost every chapter puts the Saxon issues in a perspective relevant for the whole Weimar Republic. The author weaves new literature on Weimar's political culture into his account and checks it against the Saxon situation. There are many interesting vignettes of information, such as the chapter on the nationalist secession from the SPD, the *Alte Sozialdemokratische Partei*, which for a while seemed to fulfill bourgeois hopes of drawing the workers to a nationalist position but failed miserably after a few years.

Despite such rich exposition and analysis, there are a few holes and some debatable aspects. The author, after having analyzed the preconditions for the rise of the Nazis, says little about the months preceding the formation of the Hitler cabinet in Berlin and about the Saxon reaction to it. The account gets thin after the middle of 1932. It also seems that Lapp exaggerates the success of the Nazis in attracting former Marxist voters: in only one of the three Saxon electoral districts did the combined Marxist vote go down significantly from September 1930

to July 1932 (by 4.8 percent), and that was in Chemnitz-Zwickau, the area with the least advanced industry and with a comparatively low number of unionized workers. In the districts Dresden-Bautzen and Leipzig, the combined losses of the SPD and KPD were marginal (1.7 and 0.3 percent respectively). Moreover, although the author makes great efforts to remain fair to both sides, his depiction of socialist unrest in 1923 makes the situation of the harassed and intimidated *Buerkertum* more understandable than the rage of the workers. A more detailed picture of the widespread misery and the appeal of revolutionary measures to the workers would have been welcome. I would also have wished for a slightly more thorough discussion of the implications of Saxony's left-wing policies until 1923 for the debate on the incompleteness of the German Revolution of 1918-19. Clearly, these efforts to advance the Revolution beyond the point where it had stopped in 1919 confirmed the worst bourgeois fears about democracy and led to a civil war situation. Finally, the copy editing of the book could at times have been more careful, although the typos never distort the meaning of the text.

Altogether, this book is a good contribution not only to the literature on the rise of the Nazis but also to our understanding of the political culture of the Weimar Republic. It confirms much of the new research on the fragmentation of Weimar politics and the militant mobilization of the *Buerkertum* and offers a wealth of information on politics in an important German state. It achieves these aims in a tight and clear format.

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