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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Victor Klemperer. *Munich 1919: Diary of a Revolution.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017. 220 pp. $25.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5095-1058-0.

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Published on H-War (December, 2017)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Victor Klemperer's diary created quite a stir when first published in Germany in 1995. Klemperer's diary entries for the period 1933-45 have been used extensively by scholars of the Third Reich and the Holocaust to illustrate how Nazi ideology and racial policies affected even thoroughly assimilated, converted Jews. Klemperer, the son of a rabbi, was born in Wilhelmine Germany. His education, professional development, and life choices were thoroughly bourgeois, with Klemperer's conversion to Protestantism signaling his self-identification with German culture and his desire to assimilate. Klemperer attended *Gymnasium* in Berlin and Landsberg on the Warthe, studied German and Romance philology in Munich, Geneva, Paris, and Berlin, and completed a doctorate at the University of Munich in 1913. Klemperer served on the front in World War I, and after the war secured a professorship at Dresden's Technical University, where he lectured, wrote, and taught until the Nazis dismissed all Jews from public service in 1935. Klemperer's wartime service in the First World War, for which he was awarded the Royal Bavarian Cross of Merit 3rd class with swords, and his marriage to a non-Jewish German woman provided some protections against Nazi anti-Jewish legislation during the first years of the Third Reich, but as his diary attests, existence and eventually survival became an increasingly desperate struggle. Translated into English in 1998/99, his first-person reflections of life in the Third Reich have been used extensively by scholars such as Richad J. Evans, Saul Friedländer, and Omer Bartov.[1]

Klemperer's *Munich 1919: Diary of a Revolution* provides a remarkable eyewitness account of an earlier crisis in German history, one connected to the Third Reich by the myths and memories that ideologues on the far right exploited throughout the Weimar era. Two days before the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the declaration of a German Republic in Berlin on November 9, 1918, worker and soldier councils in Munich toppled the 738-year Wittelsbach dynasty in Bavaria. Kurt Eisner, a leader of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (the USPD), proclaimed a "Free State of Bavaria" on November 7, and was designated its first prime minister by council representatives. Over the course of the next five months, Bavarian politics veered erratically between extremes. Eisner organized elections to determine the people's will, discovering to his disappointment that the Bavarian populace was much more enthused by the vision of the mainstream Social Democratic Party (the SPD) and the conservative Bavarian People's Party than by the USPD's more radical agenda.[2] On his way to Parliament to announce his resignation on February 21, 1919,

Eisner was assassinated by Anton Graf von Arco auf Valley, a furloughed officer and university student associated with the anti-Semitic, anti-democratic Thule Society. Eisner's funeral attracted over 100,000 workers, tradesmen, and shopkeepers, intent on demonstrating that Munich's working population would not stand by and allow counterrevolutionaries to intimidate them. Representatives from the radical self-proclaimed worker and soldier councils soon seized power from the weak Bavarian State Parliament, which fled to Bamberg in April. In Munich, radical socialists proclaimed a Council Republic on April 7, initially led by anarchists, pacifists, and intellectuals such as Gustav Landauer, Erich Mühsam, and Ernst Toller. This radical circle of theorists, poets, essayists, and playwrights had little experience in either government or revolution, and were soon pushed from power by communist revolutionaries such as Eugen Leviné, Max Levien, and Rudolf Egelhofer. They attempted to communize factories, utilities, and schools; seize and control all food and cash; redistribute housing; and carry out a communist revolution. The short-lived Council or Soviet Republic lasted only three weeks. On May 3, 1919, troops loyal to the Berlin and Bavaria's State Parliament crushed the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Approximately 9,000 government troops participated in the action, with an additional 30,000 Freikorp volunteers playing a central role in defeating Egelhofer's outnumbered and poorly equipped Red Guards. Munich became the scene of bitter street- fighting, with government and Freikorps units killing and summarily executing approximately 1,000 actual or suspected communist fighters and sympathizers.[3] The government's dependence on Freikorps formations alienated the Left and stimulated the growth of right-wing paramilitaries and populist parties, with antidemocratic forces on the right staging their own coup attempt (the Munich Beer Hall Putsch) in 1923.

Klemperer's observations of Munich during the turbulent period November 1918-May 1919 provide a gripping, firsthand account of the city's sharp turn to the left and of the forcible suppression of the Bavarian Soviet Republic by Freikorps units. His perspective is unique, combining bourgeois distrust of the leftward drift of Bavarian politics along with sensibility and aversion to Bavarian particularism and the anti-Semitism of the Right. His chronicle of the Munich revolution is deeply erudite, with frequent allusions to German, French, and Latin authors, poems, and works of literature. Yet these professorial asides enhance rather than detract from Klemperer's account of history in the making. Kurt Eisner, for example, is compared to mad king Ludwig, with Eisner's claim to be "a visionary, a dreamer, a poet!" echoing Ludwig II's penchant for building "extravagant fairytale castles" (p. 31). Klemperer portrays Munich's revolutionary atmosphere in early 1919 as "carnevelesque" in spirit, more bohemian and artistic than Marxist and political. His sketches of Eisner, Mühsam, and Levien are priceless, and his account of the proceedings of the "Political Council of Intellectual Workers" is droll and cutting. Meeting in an elegant hall in the Bayerische Hof hotel, the council consisted of a "half dozen literary types" sitting at a podium before some two hundred intellectuals, academics, and artists who had more in common with the bohemians of Munich's Schwabing district that the working proletariat with whom they ostensibly identified.

While Klemperer could dismiss the Council Republic run by Landauer, Mühsam, and Toller as utopian, ineffectual, and amateurish, his attitude toward the hardcore communists who took over is unrelentingly hostile. While he recognized that many of the horror stories about Red brutality were untrue, he characterized the rule of the Reds as one marked by "arbitrary arrests, hostage-taking, house searches that degenerate into the basest looting, and always, always, incitement of the worst, bloodiest, most heinous kind against the now defenseless, completely disenfranchised, completely beaten populace" (p. 107). While Klem-

perer understood that the brutal suppression of the Munich Soviet was creating "circles of people here whose grinding hatred for 'bourgeoisie' and 'Whites' is boundless" (p. 120), the people of Munich cheered on government troops and Freikorps units as liberators, according to Klemperer. Reading between the lines, one senses that Klemperer himself was relieved that bourgeois order had been restored though the human costs of ending the Munich Soviet Republic appalled him.

Klemperer's diary provides an invaluable, unique perspective on the creation and suppression of the Munich Soviet Republic. Observing and recording how events unfolded from his university perch, Klemperer's account conveys the sense of confusion, of isolation, and of uncertainty that pervaded. Rumors abounded, council proclamations were distrusted, and information about who was in charge, what was happening outside of Munich, and about military operations was lacking. Born in Prussia to Jewish parents, Klemperer uneasily records how Bavarian particularism blurred anti-Prussianism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Bolshevism into a toxic brew of resentment, fear, and loathing. Klemperer's ***Munich 1919. Diary of a Revolution*** will become essential reading for those interested in the Weimar Republic, Bavarian identity, and the backstory to the rise of Hitler and National Socialism.

The structure of the book lends itself to both specialists and generalists. The book's appendix includes a short historical essay on "The German Revolution of 1918-1919" that situates the events in Munich in the broader context of war termination, revolution, and the struggle on the left between mainstream socialists, independent socialists, and communists. Written by Wolfram Wette, who made his reputation as a military historian at the West German Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt in Freiburg, the essay does a fine job connecting developments in Berlin and Germany as a whole with those in Bavaria. In addition, the monograph includes a chronology of Klemperer's life, and most importantly, extensive notes. These are extremely valuable, providing explanatory information on literary references, biographical summaries of major figures, and descriptive accounts of events taking place elsewhere in Germany. The amplifying notes are a delight to read. One wishes the publisher had not relegated them to the end and located them where they belong, at the foot of the text.

Notes

[1]. Victor Klemperer, ***I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, 1933–4***1 and ***To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, 1942–1945***, translated by Martin Chalmers (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998-9).

[2]. The SPD won 33 percent, the BVP 35 percent, and the USPD only 2.52 percent of the popular vote, respectively. Wolfram Wette, well known for his work as a military historian and peace researcher at the West German Military History Research Office (the MGFA) in Freiburg, provides a very useful overview of what was happening in Germany as a whole and in Bavaria itself in the volume's appendix (pp. 135-48).

[3]. Christopher Clark, the volume's editor, writes that "an estimated 2,000 of [the council republic's] supporters--both actual and alleged --- were murdered, summarily shot or sentenced to imprisonment." Elaborating in a later footnote, he notes that "from the start of the fighting to the defeat of the Council Republic, 606 casualties were reported, 38 of whom were members of the government forces and Freikorps; another 400 people were subsequently shot and killed, including 52 Russian prisoners of war who were executed by Freikorps members in a gravel pit near Gräfelfing" (pp. viii-ix, 182n203).

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Citation: Douglas Peifer. Review of Klemperer, Victor. *Munich 1919: Diary of a Revolution.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. December, 2017.

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