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Franziska Brüning. *Frankreich und Heinrich Brüning: Ein deutscher Kanzler in der französischen Wahrnehmung.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012. 462 S. $102.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-515-10096-0.

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Franziska Brüning (no relation to the German chancellor) has conducted extensive research into French discourse about Germany from 1930 to 1932 to analyze French preconceptions about the German people and the influence of those preconceptions on French government policy. This book is a German translation of a French doctoral dissertation written in 2007 by a student enrolled simultaneously at the universities of Mainz and Dijon; an abridged version was also published in French in 2010 as *La France et le Chancelier Brüning: Imaginaire et politique, 1930-32*. The German author has benefited greatly from programs to promote Franco-German understanding but proceeds from an old-fashioned premise about the role of the Versailles Treaty and French foreign policy as causes of the dissolution of the Weimar Republic. At the outset, she quotes an assertion by Konrad Adenauer that France had always imposed a "blockade" on Chancellor Brüning: "Under Brüning who always behaved well toward foreign countries, Germany was not given anything. In the first years of his chancellorship, the criminal [Adolf] Hitler was given almost everything he wanted" (p. 19). It should be pointed out that German politicians from the defeated democratic parties loved to blame the dissolution of the Weimar Republic on France's stubborn defense of an obviously unjust Versailles order (a major theme of many memoirs published in exile), but French malevolence has been largely discounted by historians as an explanation of Weimar's failure. Franziska Brüning endorses Adenauer's judgment without reservation nevertheless and hurls herself into the task of explaining why the French were so unreasonable when they dealt with Chancellor Brüning.

The author takes inspiration from a lecture by Karl Jaspers in 1931, who emphasized that we all have deformed images of reality in our minds (*Ab-Bilder*) that often do not conform to "reality in itself," and that the extent of distortion grows whenever we deal with foreign cultures (p. 21). To analyze the degree of distortion in French perceptions of Germany she studies four types of sources: scholarly publications about Germany by

French academics and intellectuals, articles in the popular press and magazines, speeches by French politicians in parliamentary debates about relations with Germany, and unpublished reports in the archive of the French Foreign Office and published memoirs by professional diplomats and military experts. Her database includes 4,157 newspaper and magazine articles from every position on the French political spectrum and transcripts of 45 extended parliamentary debates. A second fundamental flaw in her approach soon becomes apparent, however, when she declares that she will make no attempt to resolve the long-running debates about what Chancellor Brüning's actual policy objectives were. How can we measure the degree of distortion in French minds without seeking to define the "reality in itself"? This problem becomes obvious when the author discusses the hundreds of articles, confidential reports, and parliamentary speeches in which French observers alleged that the Brüning cabinet actually sought to rearm Germany, even though Chancellor Brüning's public speeches all appealed for worldwide disarmament. Franziska Brüning insinuates repeatedly that these French observers displayed neurotic bias against Germany, but their allegations were quite accurate. All experts on the policies of Chancellor Brüning now agree that he raised the demand for worldwide disarmament in the hope of shaming France into acceptance of "parity of rights" for Germany. During his last months in office, Chancellor Brüning sought frantically to repair his deteriorating relationship with President Paul Von Hindenburg and the army command through a diplomatic breakthrough at the Geneva World Disarmament Conference that would grant Germany the freedom to undertake substantial rearmament. Any French observer who caught the drift of this policy deserves praise.

Something can certainly be learned from this book. Brüning demonstrates a surprising degree of shared assumptions about Germany among representatives of high-, middle-, and low-brow intellectual culture, and on the political Left and Right. Those who sympathized with Chancellor Brüning all depicted him either as the foremost representative of a "Good Germany" of humanist culture which had long struggled with the militaristic "Bad Germany," or as an utterly "exceptional German" who diverged sharply from the norm. Both lines of argument reflected intense suspicion of the chauvinist and expansionist currents in Germany, and both could easily veer into hostility toward Chancellor Brüning, either because the Good Germany had proved weaker than the Bad, or because the "exceptional" Brüning had been exposed as a clever salesman of typically obnoxious German policies. The French Communist Party always denounced Brüning as a tool of state monopoly capitalism, but representatives of all other parties wrestled with the ambiguities implied by these two hypotheses, including extreme rightists in the ***Action Française*** and "Cross of Fire." Chancellor Brüning's most consistent French defenders were engaged Catholics in the small "Christian democratic" ***Parti Démocrate Populaire***, but many secularist French observers also treated Brüning's Catholic piety as a promising basis for Franco-German reconciliation. Regarding changes over time, the author demonstrates a clear pattern of initial sympathy toward Chancellor Brüning, giving way in the summer of 1930 to widespread criticism on the center and moderate Left of his decision to resort to government by presidential emergency decree, followed by a gradual revival of sympathy in response to the growth of the Nazi Party and Brüning's opposition to it. French attitudes toward Brüning were generally positive in May 1932, and his dismissal by President Hindenburg came as a shock.

Franziska Brüning presents the most striking evidence of bias against Germany in numerous French discussions of the Great Depression, including a few reports by members of the diplomatic corps, which argued either that there was no genuine economic distress or that Germany's problems resulted entirely from the spendthrift

extravagance of its people, who had long lived "above their means." One of the most interesting sections of this book examines five exemplary French politicians, ranging from Ambassador André François-Poncet on the Right to the greatest champion of Franco-German reconciliation on the moderate Left, Aristide Briand. She asks whether they merely "instrumentalized" the stereotypes about Germany in their public discourse or had truly "internalized" them. The author concludes that these stereotypes were largely internalized; i.e., they reflected deeply held beliefs. She also concludes that there was remarkably little disagreement about Germany between the best and worst informed French observers, because the press had succeeded at connecting opinion from the top to bottom and bottom to top of the French educational pyramid.

The core argument of this book fits nevertheless into an old pattern of German attempts to claim victimization at the hands of the French. Franziska Brüning concludes that French leaders resorted so often to tired old clichés about the German national character because "the politicians simply lacked any more persuasive arguments" to justify their bankrupt policies (p. 420). Their rigid diplomacy had isolated them in world public opinion, and their foolish generals had utterly failed to modernize the French army; they were baffled by the causes of the Great Depression and the rise of the Nazi Party and could only revive old stereotypes to explain these developments. Brüning briefly mentions the great victory by the moderate Left in the French parliamentary elections of May 1932, when Briand, Léon Blum, and the other humane advocates of reconciliation with Germany achieved a great political comeback just when German voters were stampeding toward the most vicious forms of extremism. The author dismisses the significance of this election, because it came too late to prevent Chancellor Brüning's fall, but she should have considered what it reveals about the French people's willingness to reexamine old stereotypes. Missing from this book is any clear explanation of what French leaders should have done to promote the stabilization of the Weimar Republic. They did agree to evacuate all French troops from the Rhineland by June 1930, well ahead of the deadline imposed by the Versailles Treaty. They did accept the one-year Hoover Moratorium on reparations payments in July 1931. As the German Banking Crisis worsened in that month, they suggested to the chancellor that they would extend generous credits to Germany in exchange for a "political moratorium" on attempts to undermine the Versailles Treaty, for example, a renunciation of any German-Austrian customs union, or perhaps simply an agreement to renounce for the time being any construction of a second pocket battleship by the German navy. Brüning rebuffed all such overtures, however, because he believed that he would be swept from office by a tidal wave of patriotic indignation if he made even the slightest political concession in exchange for French gold. In December 1931, the French government offered to prolong the Hoover Moratorium at once for an additional two or three years, without requesting any political concessions, but Brüning chose to reject any diplomatic conference until after the French election in May 1932, because he hoped to secure agreement then on the permanent abolition of all war reparations. French policy toward Germany in 1930-1932 was undoubtedly more conciliatory than German policy toward France, and this fact renders all of Franziska Brüning's efforts to explain why the French were so unreasonable rather puzzling.

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