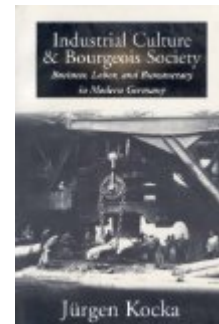


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jürgen Kocka. *Industrial Culture and Bourgeois Society: Business, Labor, and Bureaucracy in Modern Germany*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999. xvii + 325 pp. Index. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-158-5.

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Juergen Kocka is among the leading historians of German industrialization and its effect on German political and social development, and the essays in this collection, only a few of which have been previously published, demonstrate why, in their portrayal of his range and conceptual rigor as a scholar.[1]

The essays fall into several themes: the interaction of bourgeois society and the creation of the modern business organization, the relationship of bourgeois society to Germany's general economic and political development, the impact of that development in turn on bourgeois culture, and finally the relationship of bourgeois culture to "civil society".

One key subject for Kocka is the transition from the household firm to the modern, bureaucratized industrial enterprise, two quite different forms of social organization. Kocka notes that the family firm first facilitated industrialization by separating "work" from "home": economic activity became a separate sphere of social activity. It then enabled the development of larger-scale enterprises, by facilitating partnerships and providing continuity, concentrating capital, and turning social contacts into business contacts. Ultimately, however, the family firm reached its own logistical limits. As its business grew, for example, the Siemens family had to abandon paternalistic ties to its workers, as their growing numbers made such contacts impossible. The family was also less able to oversee all of the firm's operations; the firm ultimately could not prosper without the family giving more autonomy and control to managers and engineers. New relationships and procedures with all of the firm's employees had to be specified and clarified. In short, because successful industrialization required a specializa-

tion of tasks, it made formal rules and procedures more necessary, and created distinctions between professionals and worker which contributed to class-consciousness. German professionals accommodated readily to the new structures, Kocka argues, because German culture had long been familiar with the idea of an efficient bureaucracy. Indeed, since the firm's success was the measure of their own competence, they pursued it even more purposefully than family heads who had seen it often only as a means to another end (family prestige).

On a higher level of abstraction, Kocka discusses the relationship of Germany's economic backwardness to its political development. How did Germany modernize economically but not politically? Following Alexander Gerschenkron, Kocka argues that Germany could catch up with earlier industrializers only through the state's promotion of and support for larger-scale firms. This only served to reinforce the German bourgeoisie's approbation of a strong state, and weakened its interest in liberal-democratic institutions, especially if such might simply bring more socialists to power. In short, without a strong state, Germany would not have industrialized as quickly, but the price it paid was greater indifference among the bourgeoisie to democratization than one would have found (for example) in Britain. (Curiously, Kocka scarcely mentions the alternate "British" interpretation of Blackbourn and Eley, that this indifference to democratization was just as normal as the preference for it was in other western countries.)

Another recurring theme in these essays is the relationship of industrialization to bourgeois culture. Kocka notes that industrialization caused the very definition and composition of the middle-class to change, so that it

no longer could be equated with “bourgeois”. He argues for the fluidity of class structures and boundaries, noting that people might define themselves first through a common economic interest or a cultural identity (a “social class”), and only then become a “class in action” with formal organizations pursuing common interests. Because interests and identities can change, class boundaries were more porous and less defined than one had thought. The German bourgeoisie was defined as much by what it was not (aristocratic or “working-class”) as by what it was (bearers of a common, secular, and universalist Enlightenment culture). However, with both the extension of their culture “upward” into the aristocracy and “downward” into the working-classes, and with increased productivity erasing material differences, the class boundaries of the nineteenth century have lost their meaning; in a sense, everyone is middle-class now, though few would consider themselves bourgeois.

In the final chapter, however, Kocka notes that the bourgeoisie ironically only reluctantly accepted this change, and accepted the universal potential of the Enlightenment ideals which it espoused. Only as “lower” classes, women, and other marginalized groups challenged the bourgeoisie did this potential unfold toward what we would call “civil society”: a secular, tolerant, liberal-democratic and meritocratic order. Kocka sees the decisive moment for Germany as the 1860s and 1870s: while new laws eliminated the remnants of feudal privilege, industrialization generated new wealth (as well as new social classes and social conflicts). However, he argues, it is only in the Federal Republic that one finds an approximation of a German civil society. One might say, in other words, that only recently has Germany overcome the contradiction of economic modernity and political backwardness.

There is much more here than this brief summary can cover –discussions, for example, of social mobility, electrification, or the impact of World War I on class-relations and structures. The book, in short, is a tour de force of societal history, reminding one both of how many in-

sights Kocka has generated through application of Weberian analytical tools.

But it also makes one mindful of what societal history has *not* covered well. In its analysis of the creation and diffusion of formal organizations and rule-oriented behavior to which Weberian tools were ideally suited, societal history overlooked what was *not* formally organized, such as gender or symbolic systems: what has come to be examined in “the history of everyday life” or “the new cultural history”. Kocka himself agrees, referring to the “productive” challenge of cultural historians, but also denies their ability to explain the totality of history. His point is well-taken: indeed, many of the changes in everyday life, both material and cultural, result from the development, productivity, durability, conflicts and by-products of the systems and structures which Kocka analyzes. To dismiss them would be likewise to dismiss whole dimensions of the human experience. To study them, however, one could do much worse than to start with this book.

Note

[1]. These include *Unternehmensverwaltung und Angestelltenschaft am Beispiel Siemens, 1847-1914* (Stuttgart, 1969); *Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie: Zur politischen Sozialgeschichte der Angestellten: USA, 1890-1940 im internationalen Vergleich* (Goettingen, 1977), published in translation as *White Collar Workers in America: A Social-Political History in International Perspective* (London, 1980); *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg* (Goettingen, 1978), published in translation as *Facing Total War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); and *the editorship of Buerkertum im 19. Jahrhundert (3 vols., Munich, 1988), abridged in translation as Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe_* (1 vol., Oxford, 1993).

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