



**Sabine Freitag.** *Friedrich Hecker: Biographie eines Republikaners.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998. 548 pp. EUR 50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-515-07296-0.



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### The Ideas of Friedrich Hecker

Friedrich Hecker, the German-American revolutionary, has been virtually forgotten in the United States. This is a pity, for like other German-Americans, he was an important publicist for antislavery and republican ideas. And his life in America was an important part of the German-American experience. Unfortunately, there is no standard biography of Hecker in English, and now Sabine Freitag, a German scholar, has written a new account in German.

Originally a doctoral dissertation, Dr. Freitag's book is based on an extensive examination of sources, both in America and Germany. Her wide use of German-American newspapers is praiseworthy, and she never neglects the unpublished papers of Hecker and his contemporaries. In addition, she has a thorough knowledge of both German and American history, which lends credence to her work.

Particularly interested in Hecker's ideology, she follows her subject from his 1811 birth in Eichersheim in the German state of Baden through his studies at the lyceum at Mannheim

and the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich (where he received his doctorate in law), to his travel to Paris and his practice of law in Mannheim. Stressing the influence of his professors, especially Friedrich Christoph Schlosser and Carl von Rotteck, she concentrates on Hecker's development into a firm believer in republican liberty, national unification, and particularly his persistent furthering of a middle class society based on a laissez faire economy. She emphasizes his election to the second chamber of the Baden legislature, where he soon emerged as an extreme leftist, and his attendance at Offenburg, where, together with Gustav Struve, Hecker published thirteen articles demanding revolutionary changes. Elected to the preliminary parliament in Frankfurt, he was unable to prevail with his radical ideas, and when the Baden government took energetic measures to stamp out the revolt, Hecker went to Constance and proclaimed a republic. Attempting to start a revolution with a small group of followers in southwestern Germany, he was quickly defeated and fled to Switzerland. Though elected to the national assembly in Frankfurt, he

was refused admission, and decided to immigrate to America.

As the author points out, he had always admired the Constitution of the United States as a realization of his dreams. Settling on a farm near Belleville, Illinois, he returned to Germany when the revolution seemed to break out again in Baden in 1849, only to return upon its failure. Thereafter he became a successful Latin Farmer, as the educated German immigrants in the area were called, and, true to his libertarian convictions, soon joined the Republican party and agitated against slavery. Though already 50 years old in 1861, he enlisted as a private, but soon was given a commission, and as colonel participated in the battles of Chancellorsville, where he was wounded, and Lookout Mountain. But because of his strong emphasis on discipline and his frequent reprimands, he experienced serious difficulties with some of his officers. After the war, he continued his activities as farmer, literary polemicist, and effective speaker for the German Forty-Eighters. Remaining true to his republican ideas, not even the creation of the new Reich with its imperial constitution was able to change his mind, and his trip to Germany in 1870 merely reinforced his loyalty to the United States. He remained a Republican until 1872, when he joined the Liberal Republicans, but refused to support Horace Greeley, only to return to the party in campaigning for Rutherford B. Hayes. He died at his farm in 1881.

The author's main emphasis is on Hecker's ideas. She stresses his unflinching belief in the necessity of avoiding the creation of a great gap between rich and poor, the support of a middle class society with the ability of all to rise, and the opposition to monarchs whether absolute or constitutional. In addition, she considers his unflinching anti-Catholicism. Though born a Catholic, he considered the papacy the main enemy of freedom, especially as Pius IX (to whom she surprisingly devotes little attention) was indeed opposed to lib-

eralism. And she shows how Hecker believed America to be as endangered by "Popery" as Europe. Surprisingly, the inveterate defender of human rights was opposed to women's suffrage, arguing that nature had differentiated the genders and that women's place was in the home and the family. His anti-Communism, evident during the railroad strikes of 1877, was the natural result of his belief in a free middle class society, and he never wavered in his opposition to the "red menace." But his belief in human rights made him denounce the growing anti-Semitism in Germany.

His radicalism illustrates in many ways the differences between the German-American Forty-Eighters--the "Greens"--and their compatriots who arrived earlier in the United States--the "Grays." Alienated by the anti-clericalism of the newcomers, the "Grays" very often abstained from supporting the Republican party; indeed, the German Catholics and many fundamentalist Protestants remained with the Democratic party, the party of the immigrants. And no matter how much radicals like Hecker attempted to dispel the idea of Republican nativism, they were unable to convince the "Grays."

Hecker's eventful career furnishes great opportunities for a biography. Unfortunately, however, Dr. Freitag is less interested in biographical details than in Hecker's ideas. The entire introduction is devoted to his beliefs, and throughout the book, frequent citations reinforce this emphasis. Whole chapters are devoted to his lectures, his anti-feminism, his violent anti-Catholicism, and his anti-Communism. This interest neglects the details of Hecker's life; we hardly read about his marriage, his children, or his experiences at Lookout Mountain. In fact, the last chapter deals entirely with his funeral, the following memorial services, and the establishment of monument to the deceased--a strange ending for a book that neglects biographical detail. In short, this is an intellectual treatment of Hecker rather than a real biography.

Whether this book can be successfully translated is questionable. Its stress on German ideologues totally unknown in America and its laudable repetition of the facts of American history well known in the United States but important in Germany make it probable that the book will be hard to sell. It is to be hoped that a good English language biography will soon be written.

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