

Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

People make their own history but not, as Karl Marx noted, in conditions of their choosing. Seldom has the truth of that observation been more clear than in the brief life of the German Republic which was born in the wake of war and revolution. Known as the Weimar Republic after the city of its formal birth, this republic lurched from crisis to crisis until being murdered by the Nazis. In this remarkable introduction to the German republic's all too short existence, Eric Weitz successfully brings to life Weimar Germany's innovation and richness woven into the tapestry of German history.

For a time Germany, most particularly Berlin, was arguably the most exciting, vibrant society on the planet. Weitz does a superb job of showing Weimar in all its nuances, from art and architecture to the sex reform movement. Above all, the reader can feel the sense of possibility that permeated Germany in those years (1919-1933). Change was in the air and even in the worst of times artists and artisans, proletarians and painters could all feel something unprecedented might soon happen. That this was to be Hitler's murderous Third Reich was not preordained. As the author of *Weimar Germany* makes clear, the republic did not die a natural death but was viciously murdered.

Nor was this institutional republicide the result of a majority of Germans clamoring for fascism. As the author documents, Hitler received less than two out of every five votes cast in the last truly free election. Significantly, that was at the peak of Nazi electoral support and soon after the Nazi's vote began to fall sharply. In refuting the widely-held myth that Germans freely chose Nazism, Weitz corrects a widespread, racist, misunderstanding that "Germans love taking orders thus..."

The circumstance that left the republic defenseless against Hitler was the fact that, in the words of a leftist saying popular in the 1920s, "the Kaiser went, and the Generals remain." Although the author is plainly reluctant to underline this fact, the German Social Democrats (SPD) bear a deep responsibility for this situation. Virtually handed office after the Kaiser fled into exile to Holland, the SPD failed to purge the old monarchist governmental apparatus, most of all the Imperial German army. This meant that the party in effect gave a pass to the old, embittered ruling classes who bided their time until they seized on Hitler as an unpleasant but reliable weapon to wield against democracy. Fixated on their enemies to the left, the Social Democratic Party that led the early Republic failed to democratize not only the army but also the courts and the civil service, not to mention the capitalist economy. Curiously, Weitz presents damning evidence to this effect yet hesitates to develop the logical conclusion of his own research.

There are other flaws in this generally excellent work. For example, the author has a curious (American?) antipathy toward the Weimar Republic's demo-

cratic system of proportional representation, repeating without evidence that this was a major source of weak governments. (What about, say, runaway inflation or the Great Depression?) Could a stronger government have changed the world economic crisis, let alone the devotion of the right to the use of violence to enforce its will? Weitz seems to make the common mistake of confusing being in office with being in power. Even a Social Democratic-led majority government did not change the fact that when the old ruling families, like the Krupps, felt the moment was right, the old order stuck back with violence, using Hitler as their instrument. This was possible as they had remained the ones truly in power.

It could be that, on some level, the author felt his story needed a hero. Once he ruled out this role as impossible for the Nazis, and politically incorrect for the Communists to fill, all he was left with was the SPD and those (few) bourgeois parties loyal to the republic. To steal a formulation from Bertolt Brecht, pity the author who needs heroes. Nonetheless, these are relatively minor flaws in an otherwise brilliant survey of Weimar Germany. Weitz is sensitive to the nuances of Weimar culture and politics all too rare in many treatments of this period. It is a tribute to the author that readers can feel they are actually walking through Berlin, not merely reading about it three-quarters of a century later. The strengths of this work far outweigh the imperfections and thus it is to be highly recommended.

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Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (Editors), *English Radicalism, 1550-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

“Class analysis of radicalism has not, so far, proved productive” (64). Thus writes Glenn Burgess in the recent collection of essays on English radicalism he co-edited with Matthew Festenstein. Burgess aimed this barb directly at the British historians Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson; it lands wide of the mark. Hill and Thompson’s work placed class and radicalism at the centre of British and many other historiographies for much of the last century, and continues to shape scholarship today despite the lingering and effete post-modernism heralded by Burgess and other contributors to this volume. With notable exceptions, Burgess’ misguided observation sounds an emblematic note for the tone and quality of the scholarship in the collection.

Inspired by the rise of the ‘linguistic turn’ in English political studies, Burgess and Festenstein take an agnostic approach to radicalism’s existence and a cold-eyed look at the concept’s historiographic record. First, compelled by the scholarship of contributors J.C.D. Clark and Conal Condren, the editors question the legitimacy of writing about ‘radicalism’, an allegedly modern concept, in the early modern period. Secondly, they question