

Kocka, Jürgen

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G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1982

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GORDON A. CRAIG. *The Germans*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1982. Pp. 350. \$15.95.

This book by Gordon A. Craig is both an informative introduction to the politics, society, and culture of West and East Germany today and a reliable, concise, and well-proportioned interpretation of major topics in German history reaching back to Tacitus and the Middle Ages but concentrating on the modern period. It consists of fourteen loosely connected chapters, from an outline of German history to reflections on "The Awful German Language." There are essays on religion, women, money, and soldiers in Germany's past and present. Craig deals with "Germans and Jews," "Professors and Students," "Democracy and Nationalism," and other topics. The book will appeal to readers outside the historical profession; it is written in a clear, even elegant prose, without footnotes and lengthy displays of scholarly erudition. But the specialist of German history as well will enjoy this combination of scholarly solidity and essayistic brevity, will discover things unknown to him before, and will find the volume useful for teaching purposes.

Craig is very familiar with his subject because of a lifetime of study and many personal encounters with German life; indeed, an account of his first encounter in 1935 introduces the book. But Craig also writes as an observer from the outside, and he makes good use of the relative distance and the comparative perspective implicit in this position. In spite of all his familiarity with German affairs, he maintains the ability to be a bit surprised about some of them, and this proves to be productive.

Craig presents a liberal interpretation of Germany's past and present. With usually implicit comparison with the West, he carefully stresses some German peculiarities: the destructive consequences of the Thirty Years' War and the resulting weakness of the middle class; the vitality of religion, partly in a very "rational" form; the limited impact of the Enlightenment and, correspondingly, the strength of philosophical and political romanticism, which later led to cultural pessimism; the belatedness of German nation building; the relatively late start and high speed of industrialization within an authoritarian political structure that resisted modernization; and the consequent deep social divisions and sharp ideological tensions. Craig stresses the continuity of certain traditions (for example, romanticism, antisemitism, the illiberalism of German universities, and militarism) from the nineteenth century to National Socialism. Although he perhaps underestimates the deep influence of World War I on German society, Craig convincingly argues that those long-term burdens of German history were decisively weakened or destroyed by the victory and the defeat of the Nazi dictatorship and by World

War II and its aftermath. He also notes the particular problems of the Federal Republic: problems of legitimacy and an insufficiently developed sense of proportion, both on the side of some protest movements in the "romantic" tradition and on the side of overreacting elites. (Surprisingly, Craig overreacts as well by equating the West German government's attempts to bar active communists from civil service positions in the 1970s with Metternich's suppression of oppositional intellectuals in the 1820s [pp. 188, 295].) But basically he emphasizes the achievements and stability of West German democracy. Bonn is not Weimar, and in most respects the Federal Republic has become a part of the West. In contrast, Craig stresses the authoritarian structure of the East German system. Perhaps he underestimates the long-term tensions implicit in the national question, that is, the existence of two German states in an age that does not seem to be moving beyond the principle of the nation-state. This may well be the beginning of a new German *Sonderweg* ("separate path").

On the whole, Craig's interpretation is convincing and forceful. It gives to National Socialism the weight it deserves in a synthesis of modern German history. Although it is quite clear that the German record would look different if compared with, let us say, Russia, it is legitimate (and, of course, natural for Craig) to choose Western countries as a basis for comparison. But I would like to make three qualifications. First, there are important elements in the German record that, in a comparative perspective, should be stressed more. The bureaucratic tradition is one such element. The strong role of the early established civil services deeply influenced many dimensions of German society, including the early development of the welfare state, quite in contrast to the Anglo-American world. Second, there are old and new foes of the liberal interpretation of German history (see, for example, Theodore S. Hamerow's review article in the *AHR*, 88 [1983]: 53-72). Craig's book will not convince them because—in spite of its comparative perspective—it stops short of explicit, systematic, international comparison. For example, Craig holds that discrimination against women in Germany was "more stubborn and protracted than in the advanced Western countries" (p. 147); only systematic comparison could prove the point. He writes about the extraordinarily high speed of German industrialization, but systematic comparison tends to raise doubts about this view (see, for instance, Hartmut Kaelble, "Der Mythos von der rapiden Industrialisierung in Deutschland," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 9 [1983]: 106-18). Third, Craig is a master at using the stories of important persons and significant incidents to shed light on structures and processes. This makes for excellent reading. Figures are rare in his account. He is at his best when utilizing his profound

familiarity with German culture—music and architecture, and philosophy and literature from Gryphius to Grass—for interpreting German history. But the book is limited when it comes to the history of work and family structures and to the patterns of social inequality, mobility, and economic growth. There is nothing on demography, and the lower classes are conspicuously absent. Is this the price to be paid for the elegance of the narrative? It may well be that a comparative study of these important dimensions of historical reality will modify the present view of the German divergence from (and partial return to) the West, which is, after all, the central theme of Craig's impressive book.

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