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Ce volume représente un choix, et tout choix est arbitraire. L'éditeur s'en explique: la lecture historique et la valeur artistique de certaines caricatures ont influencé sa sélection; celle-ci doit néanmoins créer un tableau représentatif de 54 ans de l'histoire de l'Allemagne. Ces conditions nous semblent en effet bien remplies, même si l'on peut regretter l'absence de toute discussion sur la scission du mouvement ouvrier allemand ou sur les événements révolutionnaires de 1918/19.

Robert BECK, Le Mans

Alfred GOTTWALDT, *Deutsche Reichsbahn. Kulturgeschichte und Technik*, Berlin (Argon) 1994, 191 p.

The number of beautifully illustrated coffee-table books about railroads is, of course, legion. This volume surpasses the usual mediocrity of the genre by virtue of Gottwaldt's excellent iconographic selections and thoughtful texts. As director of the Railway Department in Munich's Museum für Verkehr und Technik, he is well placed to survey the long history of the Reichsbahn and to present it coherently in word and image.

Actually he tells three different stories. The first concerns Germany's patchwork of railway networks before their eventual consolidation in 1920. Gottwaldt wonders whether that event occurred 50 years too late. His question betrays a certain tendency to teleology, that is, to treat the pioneering years and the Second Empire merely as a prelude to nationalization. But that perspective unduly minimizes the vitality of particularism and capitalism in the various federal states before 1914, at a time when they collectively (but not uniformly) boasted almost 60000 kilometers of track and nearly half a million employees. The assumption is dubious that Germany's many separate state railway companies were in fact moving toward fusion on the eve of the First World War. A necessary precondition for that outcome, it can be plausibly argued, was the severe jolt of a protracted international conflict ending in defeat and revolution.

The second tale follows the Reichsbahn from its inception in 1920 to the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945. Despite all the economic troubles of the Weimar Republic, these were years of expansion, modernisation, and technological innovation. Accordingly, in 1933 the Nazi regime inherited one of the most proficient railway systems in the world and, as we well know, promptly put it to use. Gottwaldt does not fail to underscore the military utility of railroads nor to insist on their compliant role in the deportation and extermination of hundreds of thousands of European Jews in Auschwitz and elsewhere. »What happened there in Germany's name,« he writes, »would not have been possible without railway trains right to the gates.«

The third narrative relates the anticlimactic history of the so-called Reichsbahn during the four decades between 1949 and 1989. It was so called solely because of legal technicalities resulting from the political division of Germany. In the West engines and boxcars bearing symbols of the East German regime were inadmissible; hence the outdated anomalous designation. Whereas the Reichsbahn before 1945 had been in the technological vanguard, its latter-day successor fell increasingly into disrepair and disrepute by keeping ancient steam locomotives in service long after their prime. One should recall, as Gottwaldt does, that as late as 1930 only 3 percent of German railways were electrified. Thus to discard old machines and convert to electric power in the postwar period required very major infusions of capital for which the resources of the DDR were simply insufficient.

All in all, *Deutsche Reichsbahn* can be recommended for anyone's coffee table and, indeed, for reading.

Allan MITCHELL, San Diego