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Stephanie MERKENICH, *Grüne Front gegen Weimar. Reichs-Landbund und agrarischer Lobbyismus 1918–1933*, Düsseldorf (Droste) 1998, 424 p. (Beiträge zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien, 113).

When, in 1945, Junker families were driven out of Poland and expropriated in the Soviet Occupation Zone, the process was summary and brutal. No doubt many individual crimes and injustices were committed. However, a read of Merkenich's account of Junker politics in the Weimar Republic cannot but help put those later events into context. The men of the *Reichs-Landbund* were as unpleasant a bunch of self-important, selfish bigots as one would ever have the misfortune to meet. It is true that they and the whole of German agriculture faced desperate problems in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but their response was invariably to blame anybody other than themselves: socialists, liberals, Jews, foreigners, and even those conservatives amongst their number who took governmental responsibility and were genuinely trying to find solutions to a major crisis. In the pungent rhetoric of the *Reichs-Landbund* there was much talk about values and nobility. Little of either was in evidence in the vicious squabbling that tore the agrarian lobby – such as it was – apart, and paved the way for Hitler and Richard Walther Darré.

Merkenich has in effect provided a condensed and authoritative account of the huge range of work produced in recent decades on the politics and economy of German agriculture in the Weimar Republic. By focusing usefully on the organization of the *Reichs-Landbund* itself she also introduces a range of archival and other documentary material, particularly – but not only – from the eastern parts of the Reich. Her work is an excellent supplement to that of Hans-Jürgen Puhle's earlier study of the precursor of the *Reichs-Landbund*, the *Bund der Landwirte*, to that of Martin Schumacher and Dieter Gessner on agrarian parties and high politics in the Republic, and to that of more recent writers on regional agrarian politics in Germany. Wolfram Pyta's work on Protestant rural Germany, for instance, is cited throughout.

Adopting an approach to political history which she describes as »social history orientated« and »integrative«, Merkenich gives a broadly – but not entirely – chronological account of the history of the *Reichs-Landbund*. There is a good sense throughout of the regional differentiation of German agriculture, though because of the subject-matter, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, and East Prussia receive the most attention. The main historical actors – Hepp, Hindenburg, Hugenberg, Kalckreuth, Oldenburg-Januschau, Roesicke, Schiele, Wangenheim, Westarp, and Wilmowsky amongst them – are given plenty of space to air their views, though none appears as a rounded character. After an initial concise survey of matters agrarian before the First World War, Merkenich provides a detailed treatment and analysis of the creation of the *Reichs-Landbund* in 1921, its structure, ideology and methods. It is made clear that the revolution – especially the painful loss of Prussia to the Social Democrats – and the post-war radical challenge of new peasant leagues and associations throughout the Reich forced the Junker leadership of the *Bund der Landwirte* to adopt a more decentralized, nominally more peasant-orientated stance. In fact, of course, the large landowners remained in charge.

The remainder of the Republic is then dealt with in two substantial chapters, the first from 1920 to 1927, the second taking the dismal story up to 1933. There is discussion of the agrarians' complicity in the Kapp-Putsch of 1920, particularly the compromised position of Conrad von Wangenheim. The economic problems of the inflation years – which have been covered at some length in other literature – receive sensible summary. The policy of the *Reichs-Landbund* towards agricultural workers is then discussed in interesting detail, tying in with the earlier research of Jens Flemming. The middle 1920s are approached in a particularly strong section on the disputes over foreign trade treaties, protectionism, and domestic taxation. By the late 1920s the situation was notoriously dreadful for both small farmers and for at least the profligate amongst the Junkers. Foreign competition had asserted itself

once more after the inflation, taxes were biting, debt levels had risen, and prices were falling. The result was an explosion of peasant disturbance across the Reich, seizing the headlines in Schleswig-Holstein but scarcely less disruptive elsewhere. The crisis led to the foundation of the Green Front in 1929, an attempt to consolidate the voice of German agriculture which – bearing in mind the title of the book – is dealt with rather cursorily. What followed – the infamous Eastern Aid and the accusation against Brüning of »agrarian bolshevism« – is horribly familiar but needs to be related. The detail on the fragmentation of the agrarian lobby in the late 1920s and early 1930s is presented through the disputes between the *Reichs-Landbund* and DNVP leaders – Martin Schiele, Karl Hepp, Alfred Hugenberg, and others – and the turmoil at local level in Baden, Brandenburg, and Thuringia, and the infiltration of the *Reichs-Landbund* by National Socialists such as Werner Willikens at Reich level and many other petty figures in the villages and country towns.

Along the way, due credit is given to the supportive activities of the *Reichs-Landbund* for its members. It did provide a sense of social involvement and practical advice on taxes and agricultural methods. As a network incorporating small farmers and noble estate-owners across most of the Reich, it was a significant organization, but one which proved itself very fragile in the face of severe economic difficulty. As Merkenich tells us, it had its ceremonies and its songs, including the »Landbundlied«, which, somewhat unimaginatively, was sung to the tune of the »Deutschlandlied«. It was about Germany and God and the peasantry, but it was also about »enemies«, »evil«, »need«, »death«, »mockery«, and »struggle«. Every other word spoke of resentment, anger and hostility. All this rhetoric dropped away when Hitler was appointed Chancellor. On 22 March 1933 the *Reichs-Landbund* leadership made a declaration to him, which ended with the words »Dienst am Vaterlande. Unser Acker ist Deutschland!« All one can say is that they did not serve it or plough it well.

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Stefan FEUCHT, *Die Haltung der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands zur Außenpolitik während der Weimarer Republik (1918–1933)*, Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, Bern et al. (Peter Lang) 1998, 565 p. (Moderne Geschichte und Politik, 10).

From the National Assembly elections in January 1919 to the eve of the Reichstag elections in July 1932 the SPD was the largest parliamentary party in Germany. However, it only furnished the Reich Chancellor in 1919–1920 and 1928–30 and the Foreign Minister for an even briefer period from June 1919 to June 1920. Hermann Müller was that person until he nominated Adolf Köster to take the portfolio in his short-lived first cabinet. One might therefore be forgiven for thinking that the foreign policy of the SPD in the Weimar Republic is of only marginal historical interest. This would be mistaken, since the party played an important stabilising role during the tenure of the Foreign Ministry by Gustav Stresemann from 1923 to 1929.

Feucht certainly believes that a study of the SPD's approach to foreign affairs is instructive, not just about the missed opportunities of the years after the First World War, but also in terms of current debates about social democratic foreign policy. He mentions the question of intervention abroad by democratic powers, and in the light of the later Iraq situation his observations are even more pertinent today. His main concern, however, is to explore the development of Social Democratic thinking from the years of the Kaiserreich, through the approval of war credits in 1914, the early crises of the Republic, the period of Locarno, to the strident debates about foreign policy in the years leading up to the National Socialist seizure of power. He does so on a sound basis of archival and published sources.

The first quarter of the book sets out the broad framework of Social Democratic foreign policy, with an emphasis on its democratic, pacific, and internationalist tone. The SPD in