

Daniela Gasteiger, Kuno von Westarp (1864–1945). Parlamentarismus, Monarchismus und Herrschaftsutopien im deutschen Konservatismus, München (De Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2018, X–521 S. (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte, 117), ISBN 978-3-11-052905-0, EUR 64,95

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The history of the German right during the Weimar era has recently become the object of renewed interest, particularly the way it found institutional expression in the German-National People's Party (DNVP). The consolidation, parliamentary maneuvers, and subsequent fragmentation and dissolution of this party have produced a rich collection of scholarship from the pens of Larry Jones (the doyen of this field), Wolfram Pyta, Maik Ohnesorg, Philipp Nielsen, Maximilian Terhalle, and Johannes Leicht, among others. The appearance of this work has, however, accentuated the curious anomaly that the arguably most influential and interesting figure in the DNVP's history, Kuno von Westarp, has not been the subject of a serious biography. The impressive new study by Daniela Gasteiger, a revised version of her dissertation at the LMU in Munich, has now rectified this problem.

Kuno von Westarp was born in Posen and pursued a bureaucratic career that culminated when he was named to the Prussian *Oberverwaltungsgericht* in Berlin. He was then elected to the Reichstag in 1908 and quickly rose to a position of leadership in the German Conservative Party, where he became head of the parliamentary caucus in 1913. His ascent reflected his deep Prussian conservatism, his uncompromising monarchism, and his growing hostility to Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who he believed was too weak for his job. During the war Westarp's positions radicalized. He became a loud advocate of expansionist war aims and militant resistance to democratic reform at home. In this role, he moved into the orbit of the Pan-Germans, while his criticism of the civilian leadership extended toward the monarch.

By the war's end his positions had made him broadly unpopular as a *Kriegsverlängerer*, as well as a liability to his political colleagues as they sought to regroup in opposition to the new republic. Stripped of his leadership positions, Westarp fought nevertheless to bring the remnants of the Conservative Party into the DNVP in hopes of ensuring the hegemony of conservative values in the new party. In Westarp's eyes these values featured a continuing commitment to monarchism, deep-seated hostility to the new republican regime, and reestablishment of authoritarian rule. In the turmoil of the early 1920s these commitments were consistent with the program of the DNVP, and Westarp rose again to a position of leadership. In early 1925 he became parliamentary leader of the DNVP in the Reichstag, and the next year he was named party chairman.



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Gasteiger's lucid account of Westarp's political fortunes is based on exhaustive archival work, particularly in Westarp's papers in Berlin and Gärtringen (Wuerttemberg). Her study makes it clear that, despite the militancy that drove him during the war and early postwar era, his political assets included negotiating skills, patient attention to detail, and an ability to forge compromises. That the DNVP managed to bring together an uneasy alliance of old conservatives, radical nationalists, Protestant blue- and white-collar unions, and agrarian and industrial interest groups was due in no small part to his efforts. These efforts reflected in turn his belief that achieving conservative goals in the new political circumstances of the republic required broad popular support, that conservatism needed the institutional framework of a *Volkspartei* if it were to exploit Germany's new parliamentary institutions to antiparliamentary ends.

This paradox defined the rest of Westarp's political career and constitutes the thematic core of Gasteiger's analysis. His intellectual struggles with the paradox are the subject of a penetrating and nuanced discussion. Westarp's political aspirations modulated once the immediate prospects for establishing a counterrevolutionary dictatorship by force failed in 1920 and again in 1923. In 1924 the DNVP became the largest party in the Reichstag, suggesting a strategy of gradual, legal erosion of parliamentarianism – a prospect that both the absence of a credible pretender to the Hohenzollern throne and the election in 1925 of Paul von Hindenburg as president of the republic seemed to encourage. This strategy also appeared, however, to recommend that the DNVP join in a governing coalition – an outcome that was attractive particularly to the agrarian and industrial lobbies in the party, which expected immediate and tangible material gains from participation in power. Westarp, too, was an advocate of this approach, and he marshalled enough support for it within his caucus that the DNVP joined two center-right coalitions between 1925 and 1928.

A major portion of Gasteiger's account analyses the consequences of a decision that never enjoyed the support of the full caucus. The difficulties revolved around what the author calls the »code of hostility to the republic« (»Code der Republikfeindlichkeit«), which implied strict limits to collaboration in a parliamentary system that most conservatives, including Westarp, continued to reject in principle. This problem surfaced in nearly every political question that came before the cabinet, particularly when foreign policy was at issue, for most of the DNVP also rejected Stresemann's diplomatic initiatives. Still, collaboration brought benefits to major constituencies of the DNVP, particularly in tariff legislation, tax policy, and public support for agriculture. As chairman of the caucus, Westarp played a vital part in these successes, which provided further illustration of his political skills. In fact, to many observers, the adaptation of the DNVP to parliamentary practices suggested what Thomas Mergel has called the party's »quiet republicanization«, its growing, if grudging acceptance of Weimar's legitimacy in response to the institutional dynamics of parliamentary government itself.



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That this might indeed be the case was a constant nightmare in the DNVP; and Gasteiger shows that Westarp shared it. Her account thus contains some gentle criticism of Mergel's argument, and, at least with respect to Westarp, it is persuasive. The most striking passages in Gasteiger's biography address the hard core of Westarp's value system, which might well be called antediluvian. Its points of reference lay in 18th-century Prussia. The models for Westarp's ideal of »Kargheit« (frugality) were Frederick the Great and the »lean« monarchy he built by his determination. Gasteiger characterizes Westarp's ideas about social and political entitlement as a »utopia of subordination« (p. 120), which drew from Adam Müller, Joseph DeMaistre, and other classical theorists of counterrevolutionary thought. Westarp's visceral abomination of parliamentary democracy, the rule of the masses, became outspoken during the war, when he sought the »consequential exclusion of Social Democracy from the national community« (p. 122). For the unequal material burdens that the war imposed on the underprivileged he had no understanding, let alone sympathy. It became more difficult to give voice to sentiments like these after the war, but he never abandoned them entirely, nor did he ever accept the republic. The representatives of the Christian-social labor movement in his own party he regarded as little better than Social Democrats. Because of his personal integrity he enjoyed the broad respect of his parliamentary colleagues, but Westarp was no *Vernunftrepublikaner* like Stresemann, nor did he represent a realistic alternative trajectory to the »tragedy of German conservatism«. His parliamentary collaboration rested instead on tactical and rhetorical calculation, while his ultimate goals remained riveted to the restoration of an authoritarian monarchy.

Others in the DNVP were less politically astute than he, more rigid in their anti-republicanism; and in 1928, once the agrarian crisis and the DNVP's heavy electoral losses made Westarp's more moderate position untenable, they coalesced behind Alfred Hugenberg and took control of the party. As the crisis of the republic deepened, Westarp drifted into political isolation, leaving the party and, in 1932, the Reichstag. His last major role was as an advisor to Heinrich Brüning, whose governments represented in Westarp's mind a final hope that the president's executive powers might become a vehicle to the kind of authoritarian, monarchical rule that he desired. After the seizure of power by the Nazis, whom he feared as socialists, Westarp retreated into his private reflections, which he could not publish in the Third Reich. He died in 1945, shortly after the conclusion of the war.

Daniela Gasteiger has produced a splendid study. With great skill and sensitivity, she has illuminated Westarp's political and intellectual world, his private life, his hopes and disappointments, strengths and limitations, successes and failures. The biography is set almost exclusively in Berlin, so it leaves questions open about the broader institutional sources of his power within the German Conservative party and the DNVP. Quite apart from a dearth of sources on these questions, pursuing them would require a much longer book. We can be grateful for the one she has written.



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