

pretation of the Wilhelmine age. They stress the spontaneous and independent political activism of the German masses. We are reasonably familiar with the politicization of the German working class through the union movement and the SPD. What is new is the complementary claim that other significant minorities in Germany became politically conscious and active and changed German politics prior to 1914. Peasants, artisans, women, the petty bourgeoisie all developed wills and goals of their own. The simplistic concept of the unpolitical German being cleverly manipulated by precapitalist elites has been laid to rest.

*Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* brings together some of the latest suggestive scholarship. It demonstrates the vitality, complexity and confusion of Imperial Germany. It was a fascinating era but in no way a dress-rehearsal for National Socialism. Juergen Doerr

Fritz Stern, Gold und Eisen. Bismarck and sein Bankier Bleichröder, Ullstein-Verlag, Berlin 1978, pp. 754, clothbound, 68 DM.

Stern has fulfilled two expectations with this book. He has presented a superbly written study which reads well even in the German translation. In addition, he has supplemented his earlier views on Imperial Germany's illiberal and anti-Semitic nature. These two aspects dominate the study, perhaps to the extent that historical analysis is sacrificed to telling an interesting story and to overemphasizing the German Jew as victim.

The information in this study adds much to understanding Germany's past. The fortunes of the Bleichröder family, on whom and what they depended, are outlined for the first time. The financing of Bismarck's personal fortune in keeping with the 19th century concept of conflict of interest — to let nothing conflict with one's interests — is demonstrated. The financing of Prussia's wars of the 1860s is more fully presented than previously. The close relations between Bismarck and his private banker, confidant and useful parvenu are detailed on the basis of private letters and other novel archival materials. If Bismarck appears more life-like and the dominant personality it reflects the two men's relationship according to Stern.

Not the fine lines of the two giants which Stern presents but rather the larger picture should be questioned. Can a present-day historian really claim that »Ihr Leben, ihre Karrieren sind für das Wesen und den Betrieb der neuen Gesellschaft instruktiv, deren repräsentative Persönlichkeiten sie waren«? (12-13) Whereas Brecht might have asked whether one cook had accompanied Caesar, we might ask whether Bebel and Bassermann were not also representative, or Börsig and Bernstorff or Bernhardi and ... to mention only socialist labour, political liberalism, heavy industry, state bureaucracy and the military as representative groups in addition to Stern's two categories of political-aristocratic and financial-Semitic. The role of labour in particular suggests that Stern's rich Jew, who was excluded from a few salons but who helped shape an empire which systematically stigmatized a whole class, can hardly be considered as excluded from German society and power in the fashion Stern would have us believe. The relationship between Germans and Jews in Imperial Germany is presented without any of the subtleties which Peter Gay has brought to this subject. Similarly, the monied interests' influence on politics is denied whereas the evidence presented on that issue leaves the question open. The type of lobbying which the Ballins, Bosches or Bleichröders undertook by direct and indirect means is partly revealed by the mere fact that the politicians moved almost exclusively in those circles.

Stern's enjoyable style, his thorough research and his control over extensive material are in contrast to his one-sided approach to Imperial Germany's history, even as a corrective to previous historians' overconcern with Bismarck.

D. K. Buse