

Schustereit folgt mit seiner Kritik einer älteren, nicht umstrittenen Interpretationslinie, die außer acht läßt, daß eine Frontstellung der Partei gegen die Freien Gewerkschaften in der Frage der Arbeitslosenunterstützung schwerwiegende Legitimations- und Loyalitätsverluste der SPD in der sozialdemokratisch orientierten Arbeiterbewegung nach sich gezogen hätte. Überdies ist in Rechnung zu stellen, daß seit den Wahlen im Mai 1928 ein konservatives Interessenbündnis aus Bürokratie, Militär, Industrie und Großlandwirtschaft, das weit in das bürgerliche Parteispektrum hineinreichte, darauf bedacht war, jede Gelegenheit zur Aus schaltung der Sozialdemokratie und zum Umbau der Verfassung auszunützen. Gerade unter den Bedingungen der sich verschärfenden wirtschaftlichen Krise hätte ein Einlenken der SPD im Streit um die Sozialpolitik den grundsätzlichen Konflikt um das parlamentarische System und eine sozialgebundene Demokratie nur aufgeschoben, mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit aber nicht aufgehoben.

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James Diehl’s useful study offers an extensive survey of para-military organizations during the Weimar Republic. Though based on detailed archival research of its own, it is perhaps mainly a work of synthesis, bringing together a host of recent literature with the findings of the major monographs, of which the works of the DDR historians Könemann and Finker, Berghahn’s study of the Stahlhelm, Schulze’s of the Freikorps, Fenske’s of Bavaria, and Karl Rohe’s classic analysis of the Reichsbanner are the most important. In delimiting the terms of

his enquiry Diehl has taken three significant decisions. The first is chronological. The study extends from the foundation of the Republic through to 1930, with the reaction to the 1928 elections as the formal climax of the narrative. It abstains from discussing the years after 1930 on the grounds that "the militarization of German politics had been completed, the pattern of political violence that crippled the Republic was established, and the broad outlines of future para-military developments were already drawn" (p. X). Secondly, the study covers both the right and the left of the political spectrum, so that the republican Reichsbanner and the Communist Rot Frontkämpferbund are treated as well as the right-wing formations. Thirdly, the approach is both organizational and narrative, so that little space is given to structural analysis, whether for constructing a typology of the Verbände, locating them more exactly in the political system, laying bare their internal relations or exploring the content of their activities. Though each of these three decisions is defensible in its own terms, they also have certain consequences for the value of the analysis, as will become clear.

Within its chosen limits Diehl's book has many virtues. Most obviously it is useful to have information on the whole spectrum of para-military activity gathered together in a single volume. Diehl distinguishes lucidly between the different initiatives in 1919 — Freikorps, Zeitfreiwilligenverbände and Einwohnerwehren — and his account is now the best available in English. His discussion of the Einwohnerwehren (Civil Guards) is particularly useful in this respect. He is also good on the different phases of para-military activity, carefully explaining the processes of political adaptation which successive conjunctures demanded. Briefly he distinguishes four of these: the initial period of chaotic insurgency up to 1920; a period of consolidation when the failure of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920 imposed the adapted legal form of the Wehrerbünde and drove the more radical tendencies underground; the period of relative stability beginning in 1923—24, when the military associations gradually transformed themselves into politische Kampfbünde, of which the Stahlhelm, Jungdeutscher Orden and Bund Bayern und Reich were the most important; a final period began in 1928, when the indifferent success in influencing the right-wing parties and the disappointing outcome of the Reichstag election initiated a process of decomposition from which the SA eventually emerged as the beneficiary. A further feature of the period after 1923—24 was the formation of para-military organizations of the left, which helped consolidate the existing ideological fronts. On the whole Diehl leads us through a potentially confusing thicket of shifting organizational growths, though his touch is perhaps surer for the early than the later 1920s, when some of the threads tend to get lost (e. g. it is unclear what happens to Bund Bayern und Reich, which by contrast occupies a dominant place in the earlier discussion). The balance is good and Diehl commendably avoids the temptation to give undue attention to the NSDAP in the discussion of 1923. There are helpful discussions of the impact of para-military activity on the changing political style — the activist élan, the cult of the heroic, the importance of ritual, marching and ceremonial, the general aestheticization of politics — and the author communicates successfully how the para-military groups helped create a "state of latent civil war" (p. 194), even in the more stable conditions after 1924.

However, there are also some potential weaknesses. Most importantly in this respect, Diehl is virtually committed to a holistic notion of political culture, which assigns exaggerated causal significance to structured patterns of behaviour that are held to exist independently of the situations and movements that bear them, and which themselves determine political 

militarism during the Weimar Republic have been published since Diehl's work was completed, both of which anticipate future monographs: Richard Bessel, Militarismus im innenpolitischen Leben der Weimarer Republik: Von den Freikorps zur SA, and Eva Rosenhaft, Gewalt in der Politik: Zum Problem des »Sozialen Militarismus«, both in: Klaus-Jürgen Müller/Eckardt Opitz (Eds.), Militär und Militarismus in der Weimarer Republik, Düsseldorf 1978, pp. 193—222, and 237—260.
actions. When tied to a particular conjuncture this is not so far removed from the inessential notion of \textit{Zeitgeist} or spirit of the age. Thus when Diehl speaks of »the militarization of German political life following the First World War« and »the rise and normalization of political violence« (p. IX), he is explicitly characterizing the Weimar polity as a whole. Militarized styles of politics are held to have permeated the political culture in general, infecting the very language of public discourse and creating a brutalized intellectual climate, so that the adoption of para-military forms is itself taken to explain the Republic’s collapse. This emerges particularly clearly from Diehl’s inclusion of the leftist organizations in his study, for this tends to strengthen the central implication of his argument, namely that there is an \textit{essential} logic to the para-military style which is inimical to democracy, that by forming their own para-military groups the left were simply submitting to the logic of »anti-democratic thought« and playing into the hands of the right, and that this directly prepared the victory of the Nazis. There is clearly something in this. The circumstances of the Republic’s birth — popular-democratic mobilization, counter-revolutionary violence, working-class insurgency, and civil war — certainly established a new context for political life, as did the collapse of nationalist hopes in the successive traumas of defeat and Versailles. However, Diehl goes further than this, strongly implying that it was the recourse to violence itself which was at fault, irrespective of the interests it served and the uses to which it was put. Lurking within this is the familiar — but historically bogus — liberal antithesis of reason and violence, and it is arguable whether this abstract moral-political principle can adequately theorize the use of political violence in specific situations, its legitimacy, and its relation to different forms of social stability and political order. That violence has occurred in certain historical situations may be regretted, but its necessity for political objectives (whether authoritarian, democratic or socialist) cannot be judged solely on a moral plain. Thus it is far from clear that para-military forms can \textit{in themselves} bear the weight of explanatory importance that Diehl implicitly assigns them. This is partly a matter of theoretical ambiguity, for the author devotes insufficient attention to the problem of exactly what kind of contradictions the militarization of politics embodied. The fact that the latter became institutionalized during the period of relative stability after 1923—24 was more a symptom of the Republic’s continuing structural weakness than its cause, and thus far more of a problem for further investigation than Diehl’s analysis perhaps conceives, for he treats it very much as a given factor. The persistence of right-wing para-military activity which expressly disputed the legitimacy of the republican state was — as Diehl naturally recognizes — compelling evidence of that state’s inability to organize political consent on a broad enough basis. To that extent the tardy recourse to the \textit{Reichsbanner} as a republican version of the same kind of activity was an admission of weakness, for though by that time the credibility of the Republic urgently required such a militant response, it also confirmed formally the existing polarization of allegiance. But to explain how the right could still mobilize such violent antipathy to the Republic in the mid-1920s we need to move beyond Diehl’s chosen organizational perspective. On the one hand we need to know far more about the ideology of the para-military formations, not as a description of their formal beliefs for Diehl provides much of this already (e. g. the discussion of »front ideology«, pp. 211 ff.), but as an analysis of the material practices and social relations that bound the loyalties of the membership together. To understand the resilience of the para-military opposition, that is, we must imagine what it actually meant to be a member, and for that the whole internal life of the movement must be patiently reconstructed. But on the other hand the \textit{Wehrverbände} must be carefully situated in the larger milieu of right-wing politics, at the very least in relation to

\footnote{2 See the comments of \textit{Anthony Arblaster}, What is Violence?, in: The Socialist Register 1975, London 1975, pp. 224—249.}
the DNVP, the Wirtschaftspartei and the Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei. For to a great extent the survival of the combat leagues as independent para-military formations reflected the failure of the right-wing parties to consolidate their own leadership. The Republic's crisis of legitimacy was subtly reproduced in the persistent disunity of the right and its uncertain relation to parliamentary practice.

In other words, Diehl doesn't really press his enquiry deeply enough. He certainly recognizes the basic dilemma of the para-military right — their espousal of extra-parliamentary goals in the parliamentary state — but too often the analysis is separated from a necessary larger context. The neglect of the party-political right has already been intimated, and for every particular reference which the text actually makes (e.g. the relations with the Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände, the campaign against Locarno, the vexed relations with the DNVP, or Wulle's Kampfblock of 1928) equally important omissions may also be found (e.g. how did the para-military coalescence represented by Orgesch relate to the sub-party völkisch activity best exemplified by the Deutschvölkische Schutz- und Trutzbund?). Again this is largely a factor of Diehl's chosen approach, for to situate the para-military milieu in the overall history of the Weimar we need to examine how para-military activities were inserted into the latter primarily at a local level. As already suggested, it was the disorganization of the right after 1918 that provided the basic conditions for an independent para-military practice, and the dynamics of that disunity before the advent of the triumphant NSDAP badly need illuminating. At several points Diehl refers to important ideological contradictions — e.g. the drift from restorative conservatism after March 1920, the divisions between bourgeois-conservative and völkisch tendencies in Bavaria, similar differences in the Stahlhelm, incipient disillusionment with the DNVP and the older »Wilhelmine« nationalism of the VVVD, and so on — and these are potentially the most interesting parts of his analysis. But to establish the real importance of these antagonisms considerably more detail was needed.

Finally, this raises the most important of the book's weaknesses, namely its lack of clarity on the question of Nazism. The disunity of the right before 1930 leads to this directly, for the success of the NSDAP was precisely its discovery of how the different elements of the right could be combined together on a more stable basis. Unfortunately, the relationship between the para-military right before 1930 and the success of the Nazis after that date — above all the specificity of the latter — is never systematically tackled, and at the end the reader is left in some uncertainty. Diehl offers the general arguments concerning the role of the para-military groups in preparing the »intellectual climate« and »the physical environment in which such a violent political movement could come to power« (p. IX), but it is difficult to see exactly what explanatory value is being intended. At its worst the argument simply presents Nazism as a natural destination, the final answer to »the long search for an effective organizational and electoral counter-weight to the well-organized German working-class movement that had begun in the 1890s« (p. 22). Similarly, Diehl expressly describes the emergence of the SS police state as the »historical and logical, though not inevitable, conclusion to the practice of para-military politics« inaugurated at the start of the 1920s (p. 291). As it stands this provides no means of distinguishing theoretically between fascism and less virulent forms of right-wing politics. This is clearly a question of major historical importance for students of the period, and deserves to have been treated more fully.

However, these misgivings should not detract too much from the value of Diehl's book. Within the limits of its chosen perspective it remains a lucid guide to the shape of its subject and will serve as a reliable synthesis for future students.