

Karin Hartewig, *Das unberechenbare Jahrzehnt. Bergarbeiter und ihre Familien im Ruhrgebiet 1914–1924*, Beck Verlag, München 1993, 485 S., brosch., 46 DM.

Before World War I, the Ruhr displayed all the demographic signs of an industrial boom region – mass migration, high population turnover, unrestrained urban growth, more men than women, a youthful population. By 1924, the population of the Ruhr was smaller, more geographically stable, more female and older. In this excellent book, Karin Hartewig shows that this demographic transformation was a reflection of the profound, economic, social and political crisis which ravaged Germany's most important industrial region in the years between 1914 and 1924.

During the war, hunger became a mass-experience; yet peace did not bring relief. The continuation of the Allied blockade after the armistice, post-war transportation problems, the disruption of food shipments to the Ruhr during the Franco-Belgian occupation of 1923, the dismantling of state rationing and the effects of soaring inflation produced a decade-long deterioration of nutritional standards and a chronic lack of other basic necessities. Miners and their families had to grow their own food, repair their old clothes and form joint households with other mining families. Some resorted to stealing food from farmers' unguarded fields and pilfering materials or equipment from the mines to trade on the black market. At the same time that they were investing more of their time and energy in this »subsistence economy«, women were also forced to seek wage labor outside the home.

Until 1924, when the introduction of a new currency made the provision of food and other basic necessities more predictable, the grievances of consumers generated food riots, popular price-setting at marketplaces, hunger marches, or the outright plundering of shops. But this »consumer revolt« served to reinforce, rather than to displace, industrial militance. And Hartewig shows that neither consumers' protests nor industrial militance can be explained solely with reference to the obviously desperate material conditions experienced by miners and their families, at home and on the job. The formulation of grievances and aspirations depended upon a language of popular justice and hopes for a better future. And the miners' ability to engage in collective protest reflected their relative strength in the labor market, a product of the German coal industry's isolation from world markets and the artificial post-war inflationary boom. The decade from 1914 to 1924 was an especially stormy phase of a conflict-ridden history which stretched back to the first great miners' strike in 1889. But it was also a final episode; after the Ruhr Occupation, mines began to close down and mass unemployment made Ruhr miners much more reluctant to engage in collective action.

Many of the miners who lost their jobs after 1924, were new recruits who were unsympathetic to the trade unions' campaigns for industry-wide agreements with employers. These miners preferred decentralised forms of collective action, aimed at a single mine or enterprise and sometimes bordering on the revolutionary-wildcat strikes, collective refusal to work more than six or seven hours per shift, and local struggles for workers' control. Yet, Hartewig argues that these »spontaneous« industrial revolts tended to reinforce, rather than to undercut, the trade unions' attempts to squeeze concessions from the employers.

But Hartewig's most intriguing discovery is that the popular radicalism which fueled consumer protests and industrial militance was diffuse and volatile, assuming a bewildering succession of contradictory political expressions in the years between 1914 and 1924: nationalistic patriotism at the beginning of the war and during the Ruhr occupation; radical-democratic antimilitarism during the mass strikes of 1919 and in reaction to the Kapp Putsch of 1920. And though this popular radicalism might embrace visions of social revolution, it did not exclude anti-semitism and sympathy for the early Nazi movement.

Hartewig's book shows that ordinary Germans experienced the early years of the Weimar

Republic, not as a new beginning, but as a continuation of the deprivation and misery endured on the homefront during the war. Unfortunately, the author does not ask whether men and women constructed this experience in different ways or whether family members struggled with each other, as well as with employers and the state, over the appropriation of vital necessities. Nevertheless, Hartewig has made an important contribution to our understanding of Weimar's troubled beginnings which encourages us to ask what role the painful memories of the »unberechenbare Jahrzehnt« which extended from 1914 to 1924, may have played, a few years later, in the short-lived republic's final crisis.

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Sabine Pich, Zwischen Fabrik- und Feldarbeit. Tabakanbau und Zigarrenindustrie in der Geschichte von St. Leon-Rot, Verlag Regionalkultur, Ubstadt-Weiher 1991, 99 S., kart., 28 DM.

Das anzuzeigende Bändchen entstand im Umfeld der Vorarbeiten zum Konzept des Heimatmuseums der Gemeinde St. Leon-Rot. Die dazu notwendigen Informationen ermittelte die Autorin insbesondere in Gemeindearchiven, in der ortsgeschichtlichen Literatur sowie in Gesprächen mit heimatkundlich versierten Bürgern. Übersichtlich gegliedert, verständlich geschrieben und angereichert um zahlreiche Abbildungen, bietet die Arbeit eine gelungene regionalgeschichtliche Dokumentation zum Thema Tabakanbau und Zigarrenindustrie. Dabei macht Pich zunächst die Bedeutung des um die Jahrhundertwende sprichwörtlich als »badisches Gewächs« bezeichneten Tabaks für die Region deutlich. Sie weist nach, daß der Tabakanbau in den beiden nordbadischen Dörfern St. Leon und Rot, die heute eine »Doppelgemeinde« bilden, bereits seit dem 18. Jahrhundert verbreitet war. Immerhin entfielen 42 % der Tabakerzeugung im Deutschen Reich auf Baden.

Der Akzent des Bändchens liegt jedoch weniger auf einer lokalen Wirtschaftsgeschichte, als vielmehr auf der lokalen Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte von Tabakanbau und -verarbeitung. So treten die vielfältigen Aspekte auch von Tabakhandel und Zigarrenindustrie hervor, beleuchtet Pich die ersten Fabrikgründungen, den Arbeitsalltag, die Arbeitsbedingungen und damit die Lebenssituation der Tabakarbeiter und -arbeiterinnen. Fragen der Arbeits- wie der gewerkschaftlichen Organisation, auch hygienische Maßnahmen am Arbeitsplatz und Folgen der Fabrikarbeit werden streiflichtartig behandelt. Bestimmende überregionale Einflußfaktoren und Entwicklungen wie technische Fortschritte bei der Erzeugung und Weiterverarbeitung und der nach 1914 kriegsbedingt beschleunigte Übergang in der Tabakverarbeitungsbranche zur »typischen Frauenindustrie« (S. 59) werden in das beschriebene lokale Geschehen eingebunden.

Im Anhang finden sich überdies noch einige besonders aussagekräftige Quellen abgedruckt (u. a. Krankenkassenstatuten und Arbeitsordnung in einer Zigarrenfabrik). Damit leistet das auf den ersten Blick unscheinbare Bändchen einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Sicherung einer regional bestimmenden vergangenen Arbeits- und Lebenskultur, der für andere Gemeinden beispielgebend sein sollte.

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