

EDITORS' REMARKS

The prominence of German Social Democracy in charting ostensible roads to working-class power for the industrialized world did not come to an end with the wars and revolutions of 1914–19. During the 1920s and again since 1950 strategies based on German experience have influenced socialist debates everywhere. Moreover, as David Abraham argues in this issue's Scholarly Controversy, the programs advanced in Germany have displayed significant continuity from the Weimar Republic to the present. Socialist efforts of the twenties to couple the collective amelioration of working-class life to expanding "organized capitalism" prefigured the redistributive thrust of the Bad Godesberg program, though it was Keynesianism that provided a persuasive theoretical link between the growth of workers' incomes and society's general welfare. When the stagflation of the 1970s weakened the electorate's faith in that formula, Abraham continues, much of the European and North American left turned to projects for economic democracy, which also had precedents in German Socialists' proposals of the 1920s for using the democratic state to "explode capitalism." Through this argument Abraham has both introduced an important historical dimension to current socialists' debates and returned discussion of German workers' movements from a mental shelf designated "unique national experience" to the larger context of the industrialized world.

The three discussants welcome Abraham's taking German Social Democracy seriously and lifting the level of analysis of its role above the partisan charges and counter-charges that surround the Nazis' rise to power. Leo Panitch seconds Abraham's insistence that class struggle must be incorporated into our analysis of the causes, as well as the effects, of economic crises, and that the state's autonomous role has been simultaneously important and limited. Both before and since World War II, Panitch contends, plans for gradual democratization of economic life have been frustrated at critical junctures by the effective resistance of capital. Geoff Eley and Dick Geary share this positive assessment of Abraham's essay, but both of them suggest that its analytical structure is too narrowly economic. Eley contrasts the SPD's lack of a useable past in both the twenties and the fifties with the ability of Italian Communists to root their conception of working-class hegemony over national progress in their country's struggle against fascism, and he uses this comparison to warn against basing historical analysis primarily on economic programs. Geary argues that the political ideology of non-working-class strata in Weimar Germany weighed more heavily in shaping their responses to the depression than did the economic influence of labor. He also raises doubts that the labor movement was as powerful as Abraham contends or that the role of the German

working class itself can be comprehended by an approach which virtually omits the Communist presence.

It is clear that putting behind us myths and charges over who killed Weimar by no means diminishes the importance of the German experience in shaping our century. The profound issues raised by the Scholarly Controversy find strong echoes in reviews by Andrei Markovits and Larry Peterson. They also reappear in two review essays dealing with British history. Jonathan Schneer's careful assessment of the origins of Britain's welfare state links it inseparably to the Labour Party's prewar experience and debates, and especially to the political contexts of world war and cold war. The relationship of the working class to "the people" also appears, in one of its earliest manifestations, at stage center in James Epstein's commentary on Dorothy Thompson's study of the Chartists.

Our pleasure and instruction in reading these creative essays reminds us of our recent loss in the death of Herbert G. Gutman. More than any other figure of the American academic scene Gutman inspired a generation of historians to examine working people as those people had historically understood themselves and their world. He demonstrated how to wring from workers' own letters, testimony, and journalism a comprehension of values and aspirations very different from those of yesterday's dominant classes, and from those which now pervade the social atmosphere as well. His energy, imagination, and the enthusiasm for the past he revealed to us charged the air wherever he went. He was unique, and his sudden death staggered us all. But his disciples are everywhere.

D. M. and H. G.