

creation of a Prussian-German federal state, failed because Prussia was not strong enough to implement this program by peaceful means. He claims that the path closed by Otto von Bismarck was constructively initiated by the reformist conservative counterrevolutionary government in 1848, which with the transition to a constitutional monarchy in Prussia not only achieved an important intermediate result, but also introduced a promising strategic perspective for the future in terms of achieving a Prussian-German federal state.

Konrad Canis undoubtedly provides the best currently available analysis of Prussian politics in 1848–1851, and this will long remain the case. His arguments are based on extensive research of unpublished government acts and estate documents kept in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, and in the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden, alongside published sources, newspapers, and secondary literature. Like all works of high complexity, this book includes a number of points which might have been stronger. It would certainly have been helpful to readers if Canis had written an introduction to his book giving the current state of research on the topic. The writing is very dense, and although Canis's evidence is compelling, his arguments can sometimes get lost in the writing. These weaknesses, however, do not detract from the value of the book. *Konstruktiv gegen die Revolution* is an important contribution to nineteenth-century Prussian and German history, plugging a previous gap in historical research.

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The Kaiser, Hitler and the Jewish Department Store: The Reich's Retailer

By John F. Mueller. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Pp. 239. Hardcover \$115.00. ISBN 978-1350141773.

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In the decades leading up to the Holocaust, department stores were targets of antisemitic rage. From the *Kaiserreich* through the Nazi years, right-wing shopkeepers and politicians saw these emporiums – almost all owned by Jewish families – as symbols of rapacious capitalism and unbridled modernity. Or so historians have long assumed. In his elegant and deeply researched book, John F. Mueller complicates this narrative. If department stores were so reviled, he asks, then how do we explain their success during the fifty years preceding National Socialism?

Mueller answers this question by reconstructing the histories of these companies and the families that built and owned them: Schocken, Wronker, Tietz, Knopf, Wertheim, Karstadt. Drawing on an impressive twenty-one archives, Mueller shows that these businesses were not primarily objects of hatred but rather were highly regarded economic and social players in Imperial and Weimar Germany. Except for Karstadt, they had their origins in the Jewish merchant traditions of the 1870s and 1880s. Most families hailed not from Berlin or Munich but from provincial towns. From there, they expanded across the German Empire. Marketing acumen, favorable economic conditions, high demand, and local support led to an explosion of department stores. These new businesses created jobs, enabled expanded

foot traffic on the high streets of growing cities like Freiburg, Mannheim, and Karlsruhe, and even drew the praise of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the King of Siam.

Mueller acknowledges that members of the *Mittelstand* feared and envied these newcomers. They worried that these massive stores would drive out independent retailers by procuring bulk goods directly from manufacturers and by undercutting small retailers with lower prices. And the author does not dispute that anti-department-store screeds were anti-semitic. But as he recounts the stories of glamorous merchandise displays, Jewish proprietors dining with the Emperor, and local officials unwilling to levy extra taxes on these “Jewish” businesses, he reminds us that department stores were highly popular institutions, particularly in the decade before World War I. Owners and managers paid little attention to the anti-department-store jeremiads which, Mueller suggests, were not as sustained as scholars have assumed.

The picture that emerges is one in which the new department stores were simultaneously family dynasties, employers of young saleswomen trained to intuit a customer’s purchasing inclinations, architectural modernizers, and sites where both the working class and the wealthy could shop. German department stores were embedded in the political and economic upheavals of the twentieth century. During World War I, the German high command depended on Wertheim and Knopf to procure a high volume of goods. During the Kapp Putsch of 1920, Tietz and Knopf were stormed and damaged. In the Great Inflation of 1923, the stores had trouble unloading their merchandise. During the Great Depression, banks took control of Karstadt and Wronker, and the latter family had to withdraw from the business altogether. During the “Third Reich”, the Nazis – who had called for the seizure of department stores in their 1920 platform (a fact curiously not cited by Mueller) – realized that closing these businesses would lead to the loss of too many jobs. Instead of shuttering these companies, the Nazis drove Jews from their management and forced their “Aryanization” as their owners fled abroad.

This study serves as an important corrective to the dominant view that department stores were uniformly deemed unwelcome intruders onto the German commercial landscape. Published antisemitic literature is easier to access than the now-destroyed internal records of the companies, and Mueller strategically deemphasizes the former. This allows him to tell a larger story about the successful assimilation of German Jews in the early twentieth century and to remind us that the Nazi assault on Jewish businesses was not a foregone conclusion. We must avoid writing teleological histories of German department stores that move backwards from the Holocaust.

One is left wondering, however, whether Mueller’s depiction is too sanguine. With a deft hand, he challenges the static image of the maligned Jewish department store. Yet the German-Jewish symbiosis reflected in, say, Kaiser Wilhelm II dining with Georg Wertheim in 1909 was perhaps more transactional than Mueller acknowledges. It is worth revisiting the perspective of Paul Lerner, against whose study of antisemitism and department stores Mueller forcefully positions his own book. Lerner explored the denunciations of these stores, as myriad voices warned of their deleterious social effects, including seducing women into buying – or stealing – goods that their husbands could not afford. Mueller rejects this cultural approach to the subject, but it is undeniable that the tirades against “Jewish capitalism” traced by Lerner were foreboding. If we bring together Lerner’s and Mueller’s interpretations, we can see that the department store emerged as an object of both celebration and resentment. Before World War II, the Wertheims, Schockens, Knopfs, and Tietzes were decorated for providing goods and services to the public. But they were also hated and resented for the wealth the new emporiums generated. When the conditions were right, the department store was weaponized against German Jews with deadly results.

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