

Planert, Ute: *Antifeminismus im Kaiserreich. Diskurs, soziale Formation und politische Mentalität*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1998. ISBN: 3-525-35787-7; 447 S.

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Ute Planert's book begins with a list of gains the German women's movement could claim by the early 1900s - access to higher education, expanded work opportunities, a rich associational life, and so on. But in proportion to feminism's advances, an antifeminist movement was taking shape. Planert explores this counter-force, focusing on the German League to Combat Female Emancipation, which entered the public stage in 1912 under the motto, „true masculinity for man, true femininity [Weiblichkeit] for woman.“ Her work also aims to be a broad history of antifeminism in the Kaiserreich, defined as institutionalized opposition to all emancipatory demands voiced by the various strains of the women's movement since the 1890s. While antifeminism's chief target was the Bund deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF), its ultimate aim was a rollback of every change in gender relations wrought by modernity. Planert's study, based on her dissertation, charts this antifeminist discourse, locates it socially, and aims to convey a sense of its broad import in Wilhelmine Germany.

Limiting her scope to the bourgeois milieu that produced the antifeminist League, Planert reconstructs a network that encompassed organizations from the conservative-nationalist and volkisch spectrum. This movement included a broad cross-section of the Kaiserreich's middle and upper classes: professors and university students, civil servants and lawyers, doctors and racial hygienists, officers and landowners, politicians and clergy. The League, specifically, was aggressively Protestant and largely northern. Of its 375 identifiable members, one-fourth were women who defined themselves primarily as „housewives,“ even though some were teachers, belletrists, and, in one case, a physician. The League allied itself tightly with the Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfenverband (DHV) and Bund Deutscher Militäeran-

waerter. Members were also active in organizations like the Bund deutscher Landwirte (BdL), Innere Mission, or antisemitic groups like the German Society for Race Hygiene. Politically, members had ties not only to conservative parties but also the National Liberals. Tracing the course of individual members such as Arnold Ruge and Marie Diers, Planert reveals a dense organizational web that, in her view, made antifeminist resentments thoroughly respectable in national-conservative and volkisch circles by the 1900s.

This study draws heavily on publications of the League and its allies (including dailies such as the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*), as well as the press archives of groups ranging from the Hamburg police to the BDF and the BdL. Chapter one draws on the work of Hausen, Frevert, and Gerhard to illustrate nineteenth century attempts to fix the notion of separate gender spheres. The public, the political became self-evidently male already by the late 1830s, as reflected among other things by this notion's appearance in the popular lexica consumed by the bourgeoisie. As bourgeois feminism coalesced later in the century to question this order, it spawned the broad antifeminist movement outlined in chapter two - a movement that from the start linked antifeminist, antimodernist, and antisemitic discourses. Chapter three zeroes in on the organization and personnel of the League itself, while chapter four details key battles between the League and the BDF during 1912-14. Chapter five follows both groups into the war, as antifeminists played down female contributions to the war effort to preserve the fiction of war as the preeminent masculine domain. Defeat and revolution forced the League to reinvent itself, as discussed in chapter six. That it failed to take root in Weimar and dissolved itself in other volkisch organizations (including the NSDAP) informs the final chapter's exploration of organized antifeminism as a proto-fascist movement. Planert ultimately argues that the attractiveness of volkisch-national ideas rested not only in their pledge to restore German greatness, but their promise to reestablish male political dominance and stabilize male identity as a whole.

The book's most interesting and original in-

sights emerge in sections outlining the composition of the League, its fights with the BDF, and the various concerns of groups that embraced antifeminist language before the war. Planert effectively links antifeminist discourse to political, economic, and social trends such as declining fertility, the end of restrictions on female membership in political organizations, and the SPD's 1912 Reichstag victory. But she is also at great pains to show that the antifeminism of men in particular could not simply be reduced to fears of economic competition - rather, it was rooted in sweeping anxieties about modernity and its attendant crisis of masculinity. Antifeminists legitimized their opposition to any „feminization“ of the public sphere within contexts that made sense to them: „clergymen invoked the divine, lawyers and Beamte the secular order....Historians summoned up the past, physiologists the immanent logic of nature. Elites fretted about culture, politicians about the state's ability to act, and occupational groups the fate of their male clientele should women win greater influence. Antisemites saw the 'race,' chauvinists the nation in peril.“ [16] The League itself was born in 1912 after the first national election in which women could serve as party activists yielded a decisive SPD triumph, which was read as proof of a „feminization“ of politics. The League defined itself as a reactionary movement, nurtured by changes in public life it attributed to the BDF. During 1912-14, its main phase of activity, the League waged a press war that kept the BDF on the defensive. While these attacks contributed to the BDF's flight from „radical“ egalitarianism, they also appear to have invigorated it. Interestingly, Planert observes that antifeminists opposed most virulently not the radical feminists, but the moderates who gained a demonstrable degree of public support for „legitimate“ feminist demands and social motherhood. Particularly after 1916, the League was fighting a losing battle, too rigid to accept even a figure like Evangelical women's leader Paula Mueller because she supported women's right to vote in local church councils. The League's all-or-nothing stance guaranteed its obsolescence.

Planert also traces the connections between

antifeminism and antisemitism first pointed out by Pulzer. These ties were not only ideological, but organizational and personal. The DHV, a close League ally, linked Jews and women in a nexus of „dirty competition,“ using arguments about the „moral dangers“ women workers faced in department stores to discredit both female workers and Jewish owners. Economic arguments shaded into eugenic ones, as the DHV and League press agitated for female education in motherhood or jobs with „domestic“ content. Biological and racial concerns were in fact keystones of antifeminist discourse, Planert argues.

This study enhances what we already know about the politicization of German life since the 1890s. This trend did not stop at conservative or voelkisch women, themselves politicized through their „work for national protection,“ despite their denial that their activities were political. Indeed, the same dynamic that drew women out of the private sphere they were mobilizing to protect, sealed the League's ultimate obsolescence just as much as its rigidity, as Planert perceptively notes. It is unfortunate that Planert does not do more with formal politics, looking more closely, say, at how antifeminist rhetoric penetrated party political discourses beyond the obvious voelkisch connections. While Weimar's granting of female suffrage undercut the League's existence, the parties' acceptance of a political role for women certainly did not preclude a simultaneous embrace of much antifeminist language.

When it focuses on the League itself, Planert's study is tight and largely convincing. But her definition of antifeminism at times becomes so elastic as to lose all shape. This becomes a problem particularly when the League unravels as an organization after 1914. For example, once the Burgfrieden collapsed, there was plenty of misogynist discourse circulating on the home front. But how far this was attributable to League influence is questionable. Indeed, the organization's wartime actions, such as petition drives urging state governments to protect civil servants from female competition, were dismal failures, begging the question of how powerful the League really was. Planert does not tackle the difficult issue of the extent to which the League and its

allies reflected, as opposed to shaped, public opinion on gender issues. The study also provides almost no national comparisons, leaving doubt as to how much antifeminist discourse was uniquely German (or *voelkisch*). The great deal of time spent summarizing issues already explored by other historians (particularly wartime developments or the discussion of Theweleit that concludes the book) could have been used instead to explore more directly the question of the League's influence.

Despite these shortcomings, this is an informative study that contributes to our understanding of the milieu originally outlined by Chickering and Eley, among others. This engagingly written work makes clear that to understand those „men [and women] who feel most German,” we must understand how they conceptualized gender.

Julia Sneeringer über Planert, Ute: *Antifeminismus im Kaiserreich. Diskurs, soziale Formation und politische Mentalität*. Göttingen 1998, in: H-Soz-Kult 11.03.1999.