

Szejnmann, Claus-Christian W.: *Nazism in Central Germany. The Brownshirts in 'Red' Saxony*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books 1999. ISBN: 1-57181-942-8; xxiv + 312 S., 12 Tafeln

Rezensiert von: Michael C. Schneider, Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung e.V., TU Dresden

Archive-based research concerning the middle-German state Saxony in the inter-war period and during the Second World War is only slowly gaining momentum, especially for the post-1933 period. To be sure, several collections have been published during the late 1990s which indicate that basic research is being done that may lead to more encompassing results in the years to come.¹ However, since such forays often entail essays with rather specific subjects, any more comprehensive study which tries to explain the rise of nazism in this region is to be welcomed. Especially so, as the history of this region in the 20th century is marked by economic disruption following the Great War and the world economic crisis. Until 1989, it has also been largely neglected by western historians due to the limited access to the then GDR archives. Since 1997, any survey attempts must be benchmarked against the book by Benjamin Lapp, „Revolution from the Right“², which presents a concise history of Saxony during the Weimar Republic. One of Lapp's central aims was to explain the rise of National Socialism, against the experience of a left-wing government until 1923, and during the severe economic crisis from 1929 onwards. Does Szejnmann, concentrating on this very question, present new results on the basis of new sources?

Szejnmann formulates the ambitious plan of dealing „with the complex relationship between Saxon society and Nazism“ (xviii), and to provide „a synthesis of the phenomenon

of Nazism in the context of social, cultural, economic and political developments“ (ibid.) In other words, the author's aim is to ascertain the mutual shape of the National Socialist movement and the surrounding society in order to explain why the NSDAP was able to attract a wide following during the last years of the Weimar Republic. His approach is to tackle these questions by scrutinising the efforts of the NSDAP to penetrate both the working class and the nationalist („bourgeois“) milieu. The time span covered reaches, according to the introduction, from the end of the 19th century until the end of World War II, but in fact the years after 1933/35 are only touched on in chapter 3, where the author deals with the attempts of the national socialists to win the working class. This has some justification in that, due to war losses, a comparatively small amount of official sources of those years has survived. But, on the other hand, given that the economic dimension is explicitly paid attention to, one could raise the question why not a single one of the abundant files of private enterprises, often covering the years until 1945 and easily accessible in the Saxon state archives, has been consulted?

Szejnmann's first chapter lays out a rough sketch of Saxon history from late 19th century until the Nazi seizure of power. It obviously serves as a background for the following chapters, and is based mainly on literature and published sources. This survey conveys the development of the exceptionally marked polarisation within the society between a strong working-class movement and an industrial elite which opposed the republic openly - a polarisation compounded by the absence of a centre party which could have bridged the gap between the centrifugal parts of the society. The account of events is reliable in most cases, and for the early 1920s the author emphasises correctly that even in South-West Saxony the NSDAP remained only one of several formations of the radical right. Unfortunately, the Saxon implications of the conflict between Otto Strasser (with the Saxon NSDAP-parliamentarian von Muecke following the policy of the group around Otto Strasser) and Hitler 1929/30 are not analysed in greater detail. From 1935 onwards the description can hardly be called exhaustive, due

¹ See e.g. Werner Bramke/Ulrich Hess (Hg.): *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in Sachsen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1998, or Pommerin, Rainer (Hg.): *Dresden unterm Hakenkreuz*, Koeln/Weimar/Wien 1998.

² Lapp, Benjamin: *Revolution from the Right: Politics, Class, and the Rise of Nazism in Saxony, 1919-1933*. Studies in Central European Histories. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1997.

to the incomplete state of research.

Szejnmann's findings regarding the effects of the economic crisis on the successes of the NSDAP remain rather general, which is in part a result of an emphasis on qualitative sources and contemporary official reports. Unemployment figures are used more in an illustrative sense, rather than to look for correlations with election results. It is only in chapter V (iii), which delivers a „Social Profile of the Saxon NSDAP Voters“ by Dirk Haenisch, that this fruitful question (among others) is dealt with following the standards of modern electoral research. A further concern of this chapter is the influence of Nazi propaganda on election results. The district of Schwarzenberg was chosen to illuminate this relationship more closely. The findings - there can be identified a strong correlation between electoral successes and intensive propagandist activity - are more convincing. However, one main source: monthly secret reports by the district officials could have been used with more care, since they are obviously biased against the working class parties, especially the KPD (see e.g. quotation p. 57).

In the next two chapters, Szejnmann turns to those two social strata and their relationship to national socialism, the polarisation of which can be identified as the main reason for the instability of the parliamentary system especially in Saxony: the working class or the worker's milieu, and the nationalist milieu. The chapter concerning the working class is based mainly on existing literature and published sources. The contents of the Sopade-reports, from which the analysis of the years after 1933 is mainly drawn, are taken at face value, without any critical assessment of this potentially lucrative, but not easy to use source. The authoritative work of Bernd Stoever³ on this subject is regretfully absent in the bibliography. The chapter concerned with the relationship of national socialism and the nationalist milieu highlights interesting issues such as the significant role of the bourgeois press during the rise of the NSDAP since 1930. The fifth and last chapter deals with several leading persons of the NS-movement (written

by Szejnmann), the social composition of the NSDAP before 1933 (by Detlef Muehlberger), and the aforementioned passages examining the social profile of the Saxon NSDAP voters (by Dirk Haenisch). The book closes with an appendix of selected documents.

Despite making several interesting points, the book is subject to some general criticisms. First, there are extremely widespread cross-references, which lend the book an unfunctional structure. In fact, since the last chapter, V, is the one most frequently referred to, the reader might question whether the information might have been better placed at the beginning. Occasionally, there are logical flaws: What else, for instance, could 22 of 40 seats in the Saxon Agricultural Chamber be other than an absolute majority? (p. 78). A more severe deficit is the selective reception of the existing literature. As a consequence, the chance to compare systematically the development in Saxony with the Reich and/or with other regions has been missed for long stretches. Some problematic propositions indicate at times a slightly superficial approach: that in 1936 „Saxony became fully integrated in the Nazis' Four-Year-Plan“ (p. 7) is true at most for the north-western sub-region around Leipzig, but certainly not for the area around Chemnitz, and the proposition of a disintegrating administration at the end of the Weimar Republic is supported only by the non-prosecution of a doctor who neglected his duty, and by quoting a SA leader who expressed his opinion that the Saxon administration was „in the process of disintegration“ (p. 181).

In summary, the book offers little in terms of new evidence, compared with the overview provided by Lapp, but in parts provides a more detailed account of certain aspects of the rise to power of the NSDAP.

Michael C. Schneider über Szejnmann, Claus-Christian W.: *Nazism in Central Germany. The Brownshirts in 'Red' Saxony*. New York/Oxford 1999. In: H-Soz-u-Kult 16.06.2000.

³Stoever, Bernd: *Volksgemeinschaft im Dritten Reich. Die Konsensbereitschaft der Deutschen aus der Sicht sozialistischer Exilberichte*, Duesseldorf 1993, esp. pp. 102-114.