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Author

Nissen, Karen J.

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MARY NOLAN. *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

THE ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION of German industry and the roles which Fordism and Americanism assumed in shaping this process during the Weimar Republic comprise the focus of *Visions of Modernity*. Although not the first work to examine how American economic models and thinking influenced German industrial reconstruction and development after the First World War, Nolan's is perhaps the most successful in explaining how Germany rationalized and modernized specific industries (mining, iron and steel, machine making) and segments of its society without substantially "Americanizing" them. She attributes the resulting and seemingly odd combination of economic modernity and cultural traditionalism to Germany's selective adoption of American economic theories and systems, which were then reshaped by conflicting political agendas, German traditions, and postwar conditions.

In the first half of her book, Nolan recounts the visions and debates which German observations of America produced after 1924. Interested in reviving a sagging postwar capitalist economy, industrialists, engineers, labor leaders, and Social Democrats looked to the United States for ways to transform German industry. All agreed that some degree of American-style modernization was necessary for economic renewal. As Nolan notes, America "provided a working version of modernity from which Germans could pick and choose...as they strove to imagine not an ideal future, but at least an updated one." (p. 9)

The auto industry stood out as the most prominent example of American economic modernity and prosperity. Beginning in 1924, Germans from diverse social and economic strata traveled to River Rouge and Highland Park to observe and study Fordism and Americanism at work. Nolan shows that most of these Germans had already begun their study of Fordism at home after 1923 when Henry Ford's autobiography, *My Life and Work*, appeared in German translation. By the end of the decade the book had sold over 200,000 copies and had been extensively reviewed and critiqued in daily newspapers, popular journals, and trade publications.

Ford employed new production methods such as the assembly line and standardization to rationalize his factories and increase productivity and profits. He achieved these goals in spite of raising wages to an unheard of five dollars per day and decreasing the work week. He also implemented the installment plan as a means of mass marketing his products among eager consumers. Sustained productivity and profits, Ford asserted, could only be maintained by encouraging mass consumption and leisure. For many Germans, Fordism provided the

best example of the benefits of rationalized industry; for others, it represented Americanism at both its best (prosperity, leisure, consumer goods) and worst (materialism, uniformity, dehumanized labor, democratized consumption).

Deciding which aspects of Americanism were responsible for America's prosperity, and determining the extent to which these elements could and should be imported to Germany, sparked heated debates amongst industrialists, engineers, and Social Democrats. From their separate vantage points, each argued for a specific appropriation of Americanism and charted their own preferred course for German rationalization and capitalism. Nolan eloquently reconstructs these divisive debates and asserts that they contributed significantly to increased class conflict in the Weimar Republic. In spite of their distinct visions, however, all believed that fullscale emulation of Americanism was neither possible nor desirable.

Germany's reluctance stemmed from deep anxieties regarding modernity as well as from devoted adherence to traditional economic practices such as the employment of skilled labor and production of custom quality products. In order for industrialists, engineers, and trade unionists to more easily appropriate and implement crucial elements of Fordism and Americanism, they first had to "Germanicize" them. Thus, according to Nolan, modernizing Germans spoke in terms of "rationalization" instead of "Americanization."

How and to what extent Germany actually rationalized aspects of its economy and society without "Americanizing" them are questions addressed in the second half of Nolan's book. Concentrating on industries hard-hit by reparations and the Versailles Treaty, Nolan discusses the inherent problems selective appropriation produced. Here statistical charts and figures are employed to demonstrate how overall production rose in both the mining and the iron and steel industries. Since increased productivity was unaccompanied by other essential elements of Fordism, however, rationalization fell short of the many results desired by its diverse proponents. By the end of the decade, increased unemployment, overproduction, and limited profits began to cast widespread doubt on the wisdom of pursuing rationalization in Germany.

Nolan's final chapters are devoted to illustrating how right-wing industrialists and, to an even larger extent, engineers attempted to bolster the flagging movement while extending rationalization to the social realm. Both groups proposed and partially implemented vocational, educational, and social engineering programs which were targeted at workers and their families. These programs were designed to create a new working class that was modern in its work habits yet traditional in its willingness to obey authority, respect hierarchy, and work towards the good of the national economy instead of pursuing individual

gain. Such programs were heavily criticized by trade unionists and Social Democrats, but their protests proved largely ineffective. As a result, Nolan concludes that overall, "the economic visions of industrialists and social aims of engineers...shaped the contours of the rationalization movement in the mid and late 1920s more forcefully than the optimistic images of Americanism projected by Social Democrats. (p. 10)

Although the Great Depression dealt a heavy blow to the modernization movement in Germany after 1929, rationalization was not completely repudiated. Instead, its proponents on the German right insisted that it needed to assume a more uniquely German form in order to succeed. This new and more Germanicized form would be provided by the National Socialists after 1933.

Overall, Nolan successfully recounts the visions which Germans constructed of American life and production. However, due to the necessarily skewed sample of travel records, trade journals, and scholarly tomes that she uses to reconstruct these images, Nolan somewhat erroneously concludes that most Germans who traveled to America after 1924 remained east of the Mississippi River. A large number did, in fact, venture west to California and the Pacific Northwest to study other facets of rationalization and Americanism. Nevertheless, *Visions of Modernity* is well-researched and provides a deeper understanding of Americanism and the roles which it assumed in shaping both the economic modernization of Germany as well as the course of the Weimar Republic.

—KAREN J. NISSEN
University of California, Los Angeles