

BOOK REVIEW

Beyond the Barricades: Government and State-Building in Post-Revolutionary Prussia, 1848–1858, by Anna Ross (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2019; pp. 256. £60).

It is fair to say that Prussia has an image problem. After the Second World War it became fashionable to argue that the Junkers and the authoritarian heritage of the Hohenzollern monarchy had set up German democracy to fail. Even before the Nazi dictatorship, a plethora of critics, ranging from Social Democrats and the Catholic Church to British propaganda in the First World War, saw in Prussia the spiritual home of 'militarism'. However, thanks in large part to newer scholarship in the vein of Abigail Green's *Fatherlands* (2001; rev. ante, cxviii [2003], 1,018–20), Siegfried Weichlein's *Nation und Region* (2004) and Christopher Clark's *Iron Kingdom* (2006), German state-building in the nineteenth century has undergone a reassessment. Many impulses for reform in areas such as the construction of railway networks, industrial development and mass education emanated precisely from conservative governments that were long viewed as impediments to modernisation. The period between the 1848 revolutions and German unification in the 1860s has attracted particular interest in this regard. In a seminal article published in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* in 2012, Clark contended that the momentum for change in the wake of the 1848 convulsions constituted nothing less than a revolution in government across Europe.

Picking up Clark's argument, his former Ph.D. student, Anna Ross, homes in on the transformative impact of the policies enacted by the Prussian government in the 1850s. Her monograph comprises six chapters which correlate with the principal domains of state activity: the attempts of the Ministry of State under Count Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg and Baron Otto Theodor von Manteuffel to consolidate constitutional rule (not infrequently against ultra-conservative opposition), improvements in demographic information gathering, criminal justice reform, economic (de-) regulation, urban planning and, finally, press management. In studying these phenomena, Ross pursues several interrelated claims. Firstly, she echoes the findings of the recently completed 'Prussia as a State of Culture Project' at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences in positing that reform initiatives were designed to strengthen contact between state and population. That the bureaucracy, but also representative institutions, were allowed to expand at the expense of Junker intermediaries undergirds Ross's conclusion that conservative statesmen 'were in fact able to administer legal, economic, social and cultural affairs in broadly acceptable ways' (p. 5). Secondly, Ross emphasises the two-way communication at the heart of state-building, as the realisation of many governmental policies would not have come to fruition without the involvement of the business class. By the same token, Manteuffel and other key officials such as the Prussian police president Carl von Hinckeldey compiled ever more sophisticated social statistics—less for surveillance purposes (although that was also a consideration, to be sure) and more to ground their decision-making scientifically in a way that benefited

society at large and facilitated dialogue with experts elsewhere. The input of lawyers, businessmen, doctors, amateur statisticians and newspaper editors became vital. Thirdly, Ross makes clear that instead of seeing in parliament, the *Landtag*, a threat to the authority of the executive, pragmatic moderates such as Manteuffel increasingly welcomed the wheeling and dealing of party politics as a means of decreasing their reliance on any one faction, including the ultraconservative *camarilla* at court centred on the Gerlach brothers.

Ross's analysis is at its strongest and most original where it traces the debates behind important initiatives. She makes clear that, rather than speaking with one voice, senior government officials often disagreed on the right course of action. In one amusing vignette, for instance, we learn that Commerce Minister von der Heydt sought to open up commercial uses for Prussia's first state-owned telegraph line, and consequently charged the police for the privilege of tapping this versatile resource, leading an exasperated Hinckeldey to complain 'When someone here is beaten to death and the murderer should be pursued through the telegraph, I cannot pay, every time, the costs to the telegraph administration beforehand' (p. 126). Heydt remained unmoved, though. Despite this defeat, Hinckeldey went on to make a name for himself in the unlikely role of urban planner in Berlin. Ross excels at subverting received notions about policing in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions. Besides keeping an eye on fugitives and riotous democrats, the police president took an active hand in the construction of housing, streets and city extensions. His lasting impact as a reformer of aesthetics is nicely illustrated by the proliferation of advertising columns (the later ubiquitous *Litfass-Säulen*) during his time in office.

At 203 pages of text, this is a slim volume. While its brevity does not *per se* detract from the value of Ross's findings, the discussion would have benefited from more historical context. While it shows how the reforms of the 1850s (e.g. Manteuffel's Municipal Ordinance) were in certain respects the capstone of the work begun by Stein and Hardenberg, the significance of the Reform Era could have been flagged up more prominently, especially in Chapter One. This omission perhaps explains why the seminal contributions of Matthew Levinger, Hans Boldt and Robert Berdahl to Prussian political history do not appear in the bibliography. Nevertheless, all in all, Ross has produced a fresh and well-written re-interpretation of Prussia's post-revolutionary moment. Her study is thus a very valuable addition to the latest scholarship on German state-building, which foregrounds transnational entanglements and a capacity for change.

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