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Young Workers in Imperial Germany

Derek S. Linton

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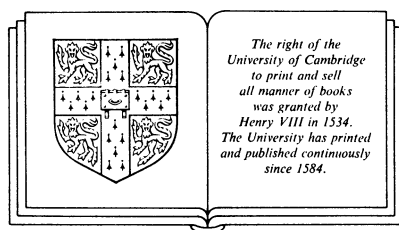
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“WHO HAS THE YOUTH, HAS THE FUTURE”

THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE YOUNG WORKERS
IN IMPERIAL GERMANY

DEREK S. LINTON

Hobart and William Smith Colleges



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Since the turn of the century various discourses on the “youth problem” – whether on delinquency, educational deficiencies, rebelliousness, or lack of adequate vocational skills – have never ceased to flow from the tongues and pens of welfare workers, sociologists, and public officials. This book traces the original construction of young laborers as an official social problem in Imperial Germany around 1900. It explores the ways that middle-class social reformers and government officials labeled young workers a social problem and then set about erecting a new institutional framework that would encompass these youth and embody a new disciplining and socializing regime. Also examined are the manner in which the reformers implemented their policies and the effectiveness of the new discourses and institutions in achieving their goals.

This book grew out of a dissertation. I embarked on research almost a decade ago in an attempt to resolve a central debate in German labor history, the debate over the degree of integration of workers, especially Social Democratic workers, in the Wilhelmine polity. This debate arose from conflicting evaluations of the German Social Democratic party’s decision to support the Imperial state by voting for war credits in August 1914. Was this vote a heinous betrayal of the party’s previously principled opposition to militarism, as leftist critics have maintained, or did it simply register the patriotic sentiment widespread in the German working class, as the party’s defenders have replied? I expected to approach the problem of the “nationalization of the masses” by investigating the socialization of young workers in the prewar era and their responses to the war itself.

In the course of research, however, the focus of investigation changed. Although the question of social and political integration

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continued to loom large, the central focus gradually shifted from the youth themselves to the campaign and institutions designed to make them loyal and productive mainstays of the Empire. In part this shift was prompted by practical considerations. A moral crusade conducted by articulate and literate clergy, public officials, and teachers had churned out mounds of documentation, whereas young laborers had little opportunity or inclination to express their loyalty or opposition to the Empire directly. Their positions can only be inferred from faint traces usually recorded by others. In part, however, focusing on young workers' responses to the outbreak of the war increasingly struck me as overly constraining, since these responses proved to be incomprehensible without a broader examination of age and social relations in the prewar era. Youth savers had designated young laborers an official social problem well before the war. Moreover, many of the institutions founded as a result of the battle for youth outlasted the war. To have made the entire research project converge on the war as a kind of inevitable terminus ad quem would have meant stressing the militarization of youth policy and youthful radicalization, exceptional moments in a long-term process, rather than the process itself. As the focus of investigation changed, so, too, did my intellectual commitments. Although a spirit of theoretical and methodological eclecticism still presides over the work, the proportions in this eclectic mixture have changed, with larger measures of Weber and Foucault and a smaller measure of Gramsci than in the earlier dissertation.

Like all books that began their lives as dissertations, however radically transformed they might be, this one could not have been brought to completion without substantial assistance from numerous individuals and institutions. First, thanks go to Arno J. Mayer, who supervised the dissertation and offered both constructive criticism and encouragement. I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, including John Gillis, David Abraham, and Michael A. Bernstein, all of whom provided excellent counsel on how to convert a ramshackle edifice into a publishable monograph. If I have often failed to heed their valuable advice, it has largely been due to a lack of time and resources. I am also extremely grateful for the careful reading given the manuscript by the outside readers for Cambridge University Press, James C. Albisetti and an anonymous reviewer. Both saved me from a number of embarrassing mistakes and suggested a number of well-conceived revisions. Needless to say, all earlier readers are absolved for any errors or shortcomings remaining in the final text.

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Most of the archival research for this book was undertaken in the Lower Rhine and Ruhr regions of the Federal Republic of Germany during 1979–81. Few scholars who have worked in German archives can fail to be impressed by the competence, hospitality, and efficiency of their staffs. I would like to thank the staff of the Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (Zweig Kalkum) and those of the municipal archives in Essen and Solingen. Special thanks to Dr. Weidenhaupt and the staff of the Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf for making a lengthy period of research both productive and pleasant. Several religious archives made their collections available, including the Historisches Archiv des Erzbistums Köln and the Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland in Düsseldorf. Thanks to the staffs of the Stadtbibliothek MönchenGladbach, the Archiv des deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes in Düsseldorf and the library of the CVJM (the German YMCA) in Wuppertal, who made it possible for me to read through many of the pamphlets on youth policy collected by the Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland, the periodicals of the Arbeiterjugendbewegung, and the press of various Protestant youth groups. The industrial archives of the Krupp firm (Werkarchiv Krupp–Villa Hügel) and Mannesmann in Düsseldorf cordially placed their collections at my disposal. Research and reference librarians at Düsseldorf, Bielefeld, Bonn, Köln, Princeton, and Cornell Universities were unfailingly helpful in tracking down obscure references, books, articles, conference papers, and tracts, as were the librarians at the New York Public Library. Initial funding came from an eighteen-month predoctoral grant from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), funding that made the entire project possible. When piggybacked on a Fulbright seminar in Germany, a small Hewlett Mellon research grant administered by Hobart and William Smith Colleges permitted me to conduct two additional weeks of archival research during the summer of 1986, and a Hewlett Mellon writing grant from the same source enabled me to take a ten-week leave from teaching in order to write during the fall of 1987. An earlier version of Chapter 8 appeared as an article entitled “Between School and Marriage, Workshop and Household: Young Working Women as a Social Problem in Late Imperial Germany,” in *European History Quarterly*, 18, no. 4 (October 1988). I am grateful to SAGE Publications for permitting me to make use of and recast this earlier article.

Geneva, New York

Derek S. Linton