Alexander Gallus, ed., *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 247pp., ISBN: 9783525363867, €27,99

Amidst the congested historiography of 20th century Germany the literature on the 'forgotten' Revolution of November 1918 remains remarkably sparse, despite the fact that this event brought an end to the First World War and ushered in the Weimar Republic. The tendency to overlook and ignore the German Revolution has a long history, as Alexander Gallus explains in the opening chapter of this collection of essays, published four years ago to mark its 90th anniversary. As Gallus shows, few wanted to lay claim to the Revolution even in the Weimar Republic: for the left, it was an uncomfortable reminder of the bloody 'war of brothers' that had pitted a Social Democratic government against revolutionary extremists, whereas for the right it was inextricably associated with the ignominious loss of the war. After 1945, it was overshadowed by the catastrophe of the Third Reich, and what scholarship there was tended to focus squarely on the relationship between the Social Democratic government and the 'revolutionary' Soldiers' and Workers' Councils that sprang up across Germany.

This particular volume, however, bills itself as an attempt to cast the net wider rather than rehash old debates about the SPD and the Councils. One example of this more enterprising approach is Kathleen Canning's essay on the role of women during the Revolution – an under-researched topic even in this field. One of the first acts of the revolutionary government was to give German women the vote, but Canning argues here that the real 'emancipation' occurred during the war, when female labour became a critical component of the German war economy, and when women played a leading role in popular unrest. But this thesis is not entirely convincing: Benjamin Ziemann has argued much more plausibly that 'the war's consequences in the field of gender relations' were 'utterly con-

servative' and presented considerable evidence that women did not, in fact, interpret their experiences as an 'emancipation'.

Alongside women, the Revolution's enemies on the political Right have also generally taken a backseat in the historiography. This volume contains two articles that look to redress that balance. Lothar Machtan focuses on the regional aristocracy and asks why these formerly powerful individuals – the local counts, dukes and princes who still played a leading role in pre-war politics – abdicated almost unanimously and without resistance in November 1918. He argues that most aristocrats, still convinced of their God-given right to rule, had made few adjustments to the demands of mass politics. This was possible before 1914, but the spirit of collective suffering engendered by the war rendered their sense of royal entitlement distinctly unfashionable, to say the least, and they had few defenders by November 1918. On the whole, this is a plausible argument, though some regional studies have shown that local monarchs still enjoyed residues of support among the nationalist Bürgertum even after the end of the war. Thus, the collapse of the regional aristocracy is perhaps also indicative of the temporary disablement of the entire political right in the first months of the Revolution.

Boris Barth's chapter builds on his excellent 2003 book 'Dolchstosslegenden und politische Desintegration,' which dealt with the central narrative developed by the Right to explain Germany's defeat in the war: the 'Stab in the Back', the idea that the army, on the verge of ultimate triumph in 1918, had been sabotaged by civilian Revolutionaries. In his contribution to this collection, Barth shows how this 'legend' was grasped with both hands by those in the military looking to avoid culpability for Germany's defeat, as well as leading figures in the Protestant Church for whom November 1918 constituted a spiritual catastrophe. Most sinister of all was the singular emphasis put on this narra-

tive by the Far Right, who held that those plunging the knife into the German army's back were invariably Jewish.

The political left - and especially the extreme left - does not escape attention in this volume either. Werner Muller's impressively detailed contribution focuses on the early development of the German Communist Party, long before it became the disciplined and ideologically monolithic movement of the later Weimar period. As expected, many in the party were radical Marxists who had been directly involved in, and survived, the bloody civil strife in early 1919 which claimed the lives of Spartacist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. More surprising is that this faction first had to contend with anarchist and syndicalist elements within the party before their plans for a rigidly centralised and disciplined Bolshevik-style 'revolutionary vanguard' could be implemented. Detlef Siegfried, meanwhile, focuses on left-wing academics at the 'Institute for World Economics' in Kiel. The naval mutiny here had been the spark that first lit the fires of the German Revolution, so it is no surprise that this institute effectively functioned as a leftist think tank. Siegfried seems reluctant to describe some of the pronouncements emanating from the institute as 'totalitarian' but, based on the evidence he presents, it would not be too much of a stretch to do so.

Heiko Bollmeyer's eye-opening chapter offers a legal and conceptual analysis of the idea of the '*Volk*' (or 'People') that found its way into the Weimar Constitution. According to Bollmeyer, a good many Weimar-era politicians still had difficulty conceiving of the '*Volk*' as an internally divided and complex mass of different groups whose conflicting interests were intended to be mediated by parliamentary politics. The idea of a single, homogeneous, internally united 'People' still had considerable purchase after the First World War, which is partly why the constitution provided for an elected President – the true representative of 'the will of the *Volk*'. The continuities between this

undifferentiated concept of the 'demos' and that propounded during the Third Reich are all too apparent.

Other essays deal with the historicisation of the German Revolution. Axel Schildt raises the question of when it can really be said to have ended - bloody uprisings of both right and left were still occurring as late as autumn 1923, and it was only in 1924 that the Weimar Republic really entered a period of – as it turned out, temporary – 'stability'. Michael Geyer's essay, one of the most thought provoking this reviewer has read on the German Revolution, argues that historians have too often divorced events in the Reich from the wider continental issues of war and revolution. It is easy for historians to say that the SPD-leadership 'overreacted' to what was really a fairly marginal threat from the extreme left, but in the volatile autumn of 1918 much of Europe seemed to be succumbing to revolution, and by new year the Red Army was at the Prussian frontier. With millions of soldiers to demobilise, an economy to stabilise, and even the prospect that hostilities might resume, the government perhaps had less room for manoeuvre than a simple focus on domestic developments might suggest.

This volume sets out to address previously neglected areas of an already under-researched topic. It succeeds in this endeavour, but so uncharted is some of the territory that many of the essays read like calls for new research on these topics; a call which resonates even four years after publication.

Alex Burkhardt[1]

University of St. Andrews

[1] Alex Burkhardt (ab682@st-andrews.ac.uk) is a doctoral student in Modern History at the University of St. Andrews. His research interests centre on the radicalisation of German nationalism after the First World War and the growing extremism of the German Bürgertum during the Weimar Republic. His thesis focuses on Hof-an-der-Saale in Upper Franconia and asks why its middle class residents went from voting 'Democrat' in 1919 to voting 'Nazi' just five years later.