

development. This attempt to force the history of modern German technology into some normative trajectory is distracting and certainly does not provide a helpful structure to build his argument. As Jürgen Kocka reminded audiences in 2018, the *Sonderweg* refers to explanations of fascist dictatorship. However, as Uhl explicitly states in the introduction, the history of Germany technology is not a political history. Apart from discussions of Nazi autarkic policies and the regime's failed nuclear weapons project, the history of the Third Reich receives little attention. While Uhl's attempt to draw the lines of continuity over two hundred years of technological change is commendable, it is not clear how the continuities implied by the *Sonderweg* help scholars analyze more recent histories like that of KUKA. Contingency and context must be at the heart of any historical endeavor, and the scholarship in national systems of innovation and transnational technology transfer is advanced enough to move beyond the *Sonderweg* when constructing interpretative frameworks for the history of German technology.

Despite these theoretical distractions, *Technology in Modern German History* is an excellent and stimulating overview of essential themes in the history of German technology with a helpful bibliography of English-language sources.

doi:10.1017/S0008938923001371

## **Konstruktiv gegen die Revolution. Strategie und Politik der preußischen Regierung 1848 bis 1850/51**

**By Konrad Canis. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2022. Pp. viii + 541. Hardcover €79.00. ISBN: 978-3506708342.**

Barbora Pásztorová

University of West Bohemia

This is not Konrad Canis's first work about the Revolution of 1848. He began his career as a historian looking at this issue in 1965, when he completed his dissertation, entitled *Der preußische Militarismus in der Revolution 1848*. Fifty-seven years later, he returns to the events of the revolutionary year of 1848 in order to modify some of his previous opinions and positions. However, it is not Prussian militarism on which Canis's extensively researched book centers, but rather Prussian political elites.

A recurrent theme in the story which Canis tells is the *Vereinbarungspolitik* and its constructive approach to suppressing revolution. The book explores and demonstrates the full extent of this policy at various levels and for individual processes over the entire course of the revolution and counterrevolution. Its objective was "to overcome the revolution not just by suppressing the uprising, but in particular through a strategy and reformist policy focused on modernization, if to a limited extent, in terms of focusing on a constitutional monarchy and a Prussian-German federal state" (vii). The book is divided into eleven chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on revolutionary events in March 1848 and the *Vormärz* period. The subsequent four chapters analyze the policies of individual Prussian ministries. The second part of the book looks at the Prussian-German narrative line. Since it is impossible to mention all of Canis's arguments here, I have chosen a selection of them that I consider essential.

In Chapter 1, Canis tries to convince the reader that the revolution which broke out in March 1848 in Prussia was not unavoidable and could have been prevented right up until

the last moment. He argues that “if this systemic crisis had been moderated even at the last moment through timely political, social, and ethnic concessions, alongside the provision of material relief from hardship, the uprising of the lower classes may not have occurred” (45). At the same time, however, he admits that it was the outbreak of revolution which forced the old elites to change, opening a path to a compromise between the nobility and the *Großbürgertum*, becoming the core of *Vereinbarungspolitik*. Canis’s assessment of the Prussian king and his actions during the days of the March Revolution is perhaps overly critical. He depicts Frederick William IV as a weak figure, a psychopath who did not keep promises, someone who was pathologically indecisive, volatile, anxious, and unreliable. “All the decisions he made immediately following March 18 were indirect, most proved erroneous, and they did not make him stronger, instead sidelining him, humiliating him, and finally leaving him depressed and defeated, yet also damaging the system” (41). One can make a comparison here with Christopher Clark’s stance: “Frederick William IV . . . acted with more intelligence and flexibility during the crisis than he has often been given credit for. Indeed he performed his new role with surprising aplomb. Remaining in the capital after the troops had left and consenting in principle to the constitutionalization of the monarchy, he locked the liberals into an arduous process of negotiation” (*Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* [2006], 483).

Chapters 3–6 analyze the policy of four Prussian ministries – from Ludolf Camphausen and David Hansemann’s rule as moderate liberals from the Rhineland upper middle class, to liberal aristocrat Rudolf von Auerswald and liberal general Ernst von Pfüel, to conservative general and the king’s step-uncle, Friedrich Wilhelm, Count of Brandenburg. Canis explains that it was the government that was the bearer and driver of *Vereinbarungspolitik* from the end of the March Revolution. In this regard, all the governing cabinets, alongside the old elites willing to compromise, attempted to establish a constitutional state within Prussia, with a Prussian-German federal state being the objective at the German-wide level. The path to achieving both, however, was to be a thorny one. Canis examines a number of opponents, both domestically and throughout Germany. At home, the Prussian governments faced resistance from the democrats on the left and from the king’s camarilla on the right, while at the German-wide level, resistance came from the king himself, from the German states, and from external powers, with particular resistance from Austria and Russia. Canis’s argument in regard to the dissolution of the Prussian National Assembly on December 5, 1848, after which a constitution was imposed, is hardly convincing. He responds to the undeniable fact that this led to a breach of *Vereinbarungspolitik* by claiming that it was the deputies who had first breached the *Vereinbarung* by not carrying out their duty of agreeing on a constitution. Canis endeavors to convince the reader that it was not an infringement of the law, because at that time there was no constitutionally guaranteed rule of law, and furthermore the monarch had unlimited rights to dissolve the people’s assemblies according to constitutional practice. He declares that “the constructive actions of the government were evidently, then, the shaping of the law rather than its infringement, and as such this did not represent a coup, but rather just its beginning” (421).

Chapters 7–10 look at the implementation of the second part of the *Vereinbarung* – a Prussian-German federal state. According to Canis, the Prussian government first did not make use of the opportunities to reach agreement with the Federal Diet’s Committee of Seventeen, and subsequently endeavored to find a compromise with the Frankfurt National Assembly and other German states. He rejects Dieter Langewiesche’s position that the *Vereinbarungspolitik* collapsed when Frederick William IV refused to accept the imperial crown. He argues that “the National Assembly previously ignored the course of the agreement by deciding on a constitution and subsequently making an offer which it did not have the authority to do without a will to an agreement. The [Prussian] government rather continued in the course of the agreement, both in Prussia and in Germany” (255).

In conclusion, Canis declares that the Prussian government’s strategy, which aimed to definitively crush the revolution by moving towards state-wide political reform and the

creation of a Prussian-German federal state, failed because Prussia was not strong enough to implement this program by peaceful means. He claims that the path closed by Otto von Bismarck was constructively initiated by the reformist conservative counterrevolutionary government in 1848, which with the transition to a constitutional monarchy in Prussia not only achieved an important intermediate result, but also introduced a promising strategic perspective for the future in terms of achieving a Prussian-German federal state.

Konrad Canis undoubtedly provides the best currently available analysis of Prussian politics in 1848–1851, and this will long remain the case. His arguments are based on extensive research of unpublished government acts and estate documents kept in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, and in the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden, alongside published sources, newspapers, and secondary literature. Like all works of high complexity, this book includes a number of points which might have been stronger. It would certainly have been helpful to readers if Canis had written an introduction to his book giving the current state of research on the topic. The writing is very dense, and although Canis's evidence is compelling, his arguments can sometimes get lost in the writing. These weaknesses, however, do not detract from the value of the book. *Konstruktiv gegen die Revolution* is an important contribution to nineteenth-century Prussian and German history, plugging a previous gap in historical research.

doi:10.1017/S0008938923001449

## The Kaiser, Hitler and the Jewish Department Store: The Reich's Retailer

**By John F. Mueller. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Pp. 239. Hardcover \$115.00. ISBN 978-1350141773.**

S. Jonathan Wiesen

University of Alabama at Birmingham

In the decades leading up to the Holocaust, department stores were targets of antisemitic rage. From the *Kaiserreich* through the Nazi years, right-wing shopkeepers and politicians saw these emporiums – almost all owned by Jewish families – as symbols of rapacious capitalism and unbridled modernity. Or so historians have long assumed. In his elegant and deeply researched book, John F. Mueller complicates this narrative. If department stores were so reviled, he asks, then how do we explain their success during the fifty years preceding National Socialism?

Mueller answers this question by reconstructing the histories of these companies and the families that built and owned them: Schocken, Wronker, Tietz, Knopf, Wertheim, Karstadt. Drawing on an impressive twenty-one archives, Mueller shows that these businesses were not primarily objects of hatred but rather were highly regarded economic and social players in Imperial and Weimar Germany. Except for Karstadt, they had their origins in the Jewish merchant traditions of the 1870s and 1880s. Most families hailed not from Berlin or Munich but from provincial towns. From there, they expanded across the German Empire. Marketing acumen, favorable economic conditions, high demand, and local support led to an explosion of department stores. These new businesses created jobs, enabled expanded