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Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich. By Shelley Baranowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 254 pp. \$65.00).

For the time being research on the Third Reich mainly means research into the mechanisms of genocide. This is certainly an imperative task for histori-

ans. However, focussing on the terror in particular, and on the apparently “bad” aspects of the regime in general, has doubtful consequences. Fading out, minimizing or denying the “good” aspects, i.e., achievements, the glamour and the efficiency of the Nazi politics makes it a mystery that the attitude of the majority of the Germans towards National Socialism changed from scepticism to approval after 1933—a mystery in line with the dogma of the incomparability of that era: an unfathomable alien world inhabited by unfathomable alien people. This de-contextualization tends to put all efforts towards comparison and *verstehen* under taboo and offers a comforting containment for the evil—an intellectual imposition and a pedagogical dead-end street alike. Apart from a minute minority the holocaust is found an atrocity anyway. This is why neo-Nazis (and Islamists, too) fade out, minimize or deny the genocide: Auschwitz shatters the intellectual and moral integrity of their belief. This belief relates, however vaguely, to other arguments. We should take them seriously. In other words: we need more knowledge about the ambiguity and seductive splendour of terrible regimes.

Among the fields that had a lasting, positive impression on the contemporaries, at home and abroad, the Nazi leisure politics ranked high. The most prominent achievement in this respect was the introduction of mass tourism, organized by *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF, literally “Strength through Joy”). The leisure branch of the “German Labour Front” (DAF) was moulded along the Fascist *Dopolavoro* (“After Work”) but soon left the Italian model behind. KdF comprised numerous activities, ranging from sports to theatre, but only two were more than a substitute for the smashed organisations of the labour movement: firstly, the department “Beauty of Work” which was engaged in the aesthetic and “hygienic” improvement of the workplaces, and secondly the tourist department, called *Reisen, Wandern, Urlaub* (“Travelling, Hiking, Holidays”). The latter finally was widely seen as virtually identical with KdF.

Shelley Baranowski, historian from Akron, concentrates on the semi-state run tourism, although the other KdF branches are also discussed. Entrenched in the debates on mass consumption, the foundation, the organizational structure and the objectives of KdF are presented. The DAF which had replaced the Unions, stood firmly under control of the party leadership and was anything but popular. In order to “win the heart of the workers” the regime had to add carrots to the sticks. Offering cheap travel facilities was part and parcel of the somewhat Fordist concept of *Sozialismus der Tat* (“Socialism of deed”): Socialism¹, it read, was an ideology of class struggle that did not live up to its promised land of plenty, but split the nation instead, whereas the true, national Socialism improves the “standard of living” of the masses and unites the nation in the *Volksgemeinschaft* (“people’s community” or “racial community”, as Baranowski translates in respect to the exclusion of genetic “inferiors”²).

KdF travel was to enhance the worker’s status symbolically by democratizing a prestigious goods. Unlike other “people’s” products, such as the *Volkswagen*, the “breaking of the bourgeois travel privilege” was more than a mere propaganda tale. Millions of Germans for the first time in their lives enjoyed “real”, i.e., bourgeois-like vacation in form of the unrivalled cheap package tours. KdF was by far the world’s biggest tour operator—including a fleet of cruisers which

docked in Italy, Libya or Madeira. The pictures of "German workers" tanning on deck of luxury liners went through the world; in truth they mostly showed middle class people or big wigs. Nonetheless, as the author resumes, KdF "gave flesh and blood to the imagined racial community by reaching across the class lines."

Already by the 70/80s KdF was becoming a topic of research. On the one hand, in the context of studies into the Nazi social politics: however, the debate on the ambiguous relation between "working class and people's community" (Tim Mason) petered out when the research concentrated (again) on the war years. On the other hand, KdF became a topic in the context of the "historical tourism research", including a political history of tourist consumption: however, this field remained more or less a German peculiarity. In her introduction, the author mentions these approaches. Thus, it sounds rather daring when the publishers announce her study as "the first major book on the Nazi leisure and tourism agency" (as the consumption historian Wolfgang König notices smugly: *Sehepunkte* 6/2006, No. 7/8). This phrase found its way into *History Today*—historians, too, drink from Lethe, the river of oblivion. What the study does is to resume the topic and to import it into the American, or English-speaking, research. And it does it in a brilliant manner.

The result is a stringent, extremely well written overview. Quantitative data could be used less sparsingly to my taste, and experts will be familiar with one part or the other, but new findings, especially for the war years, are also presented. In addition, the interpretation sets a different course in some respects. The author follows the—contested—concept of a distinction between "mass consumption" in the interwar period and the "consumption culture" after the war. Doubtless deserving is the emphasis that is laid on the role of the racist concept of "biosphere" (*Lebensraum*); hitherto the research tended to look all too much at the social aspects of Nazi social politics. Admittedly, both views meet in the conclusion that KdF was a means for the final aim of "great politics" (as Hitler called the planned war on occasion of the founding of KdF). Stressing the geopolitical and racist objectives of the regime means to distinguish carefully the different forces, motifs and milieus in the ruling classes, the camps and fractions in the party, the rank and file and the inner circle, and also to take the regime's incrementalism into account. Here, the book opens a wide field for further research. An excellent overview, it captivates with a good eye for the telling detail and for structures alike, resulting in a sound judgement.

Berlin and Hannover

Hasso Spode

ENDNOTES

1. The Nazis spoke of "Marxism" instead, comprising all Leftist ideologies and parties, regardless the struggle between Communists and Social Democrats in the Weimar Republic.
2. This rightly points at the core of the thinking and politics of the regime's inner circle. It should be mentioned, however, that the meaning of *Volksgemeinschaft* was basically a social one: since around 1900 it was a notion among reformers of different camps, in

Germany and abroad, who sought to overcome the class society. Its adoption by the Nazi movement was in line with a widespread discontent with the civil-war-like conditions in the Republic. The slogan of a "racial community", I suppose, would have been not very popular.