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Jean-Numa Ducange, *The French Revolution and Social Democracy. The Transmission of History and its Political Uses in Germany and Austria, 1889-1934*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019. 356pp. \$185.00 (cl). ISBN 978-9004384798.

Review by Jonathan Kwan, University of Nottingham.

Jean-Numa Ducange's book, originally published in French in 2012, appears now in an English translation as part of Brill's series 'Historical Materialism'. It is a solid, focused study about the changing conceptions of the French Revolution in the German-speaking Socialist milieu. There is much on Socialist historians and intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as they grappled with the legacy of 'the Great Revolution' and the protean intellectual project of extending Marxian historical analysis. At the same time, the Socialist parties were undertaking a vast range of concrete activities in representative politics and working class communities, though Ducange does not cover these processes in depth. At key moments, for example during World War I and its immediate aftermath, Ducange could have widened his horizon and provided more detail about the Socialist parties and their intellectuals in their specific contexts. This period, as Ducange argues, constituted a change both in discourse and in practice as the Socialist parties founded new Republics then formed fundamental pillars of the establishment. They also clearly distanced themselves from radical Communists and revolutionary events in Russia. Yet, apart from some general background, Ducange's discussion remains largely within the confines of the Socialist intellectual milieu. The book, for instance, does not directly address such larger questions as the place of Socialism in the respective polities, the relationship between ideology and practice or the intellectual exchange between French language and German language academia, among many other possibilities. Overall, Ducange defines his topic narrowly and stays within those boundaries.

In a new preface written for the English language edition, Ducange writes of a 'Kautskyan moment' (p. vii). Indeed the 'Pope of Marxism', Karl Kautsky, is a spectre that haunts and traverses the book. Born in 1854 Kautsky's adult life almost exactly mirrors the time period of the book (he died in 1938). His short study, *The Class Contradictions of 1789*, appeared in the centenary year of 1889 and set the template amongst German-speaking Socialists for interpreting the Revolution. Based on secondary reading, Kautsky's book concentrated on popular action and social groupings, especially the peasants. Around the same time, almost as a popular supplement, a materialist, narrative history appeared from the pen of Wilhelm Blos. Both books stressed the bourgeois nature of the Revolution along with the glimpsed possibilities for a better future. Their work—as well as the occasional articles in the party press and workers' calendars (ably covered by Ducange)—was part of the general construction of a

Socialist world-view. Left wing intellectuals were exploring, forming, elaborating and extending a wealth of Marxist ideas, particularly in history. Since Marx had never written explicitly about the Revolution (though he had intended to), it presented an opportunity for his followers to research and discuss a major historical event without the weight of detailed exposition and analysis from the fountainhead. Indeed, the works by Kautsky and Blos formed part of the evolution towards conceptions underlying the historical materialism of history. This was just one of the many currents to this enormous and fruitful intellectual project.

The first serious challenge to Kautsky's interpretation came around 1900 with the publication of Jean Jaurès's monumental Socialist history of the Revolution. Jaurès, a French political leader and intellectual, took an explicitly Marxist and Socialist viewpoint but also incorporated contingency and personalities, amidst a wealth of detailed archival and synthetic work. Eduard Bernstein, the Socialist theoretician of the 'Revisionists' (who recognized significant progress under bourgeois institutions and eschewed violence and revolution), attempted to introduce Jaurès's work to German readers but there was limited impact. Jaurès's work was not translated into German (it still, I believe, remains untranslated) and Kautsky's interpretation continued its dominance within German-speaking Socialist circles. Indeed, around this time, Kautsky's book was translated into French by the hard-line Marxist grouping, the Guesdists.

The discussion surrounding revolutions in general intensified in the wake of the 1905 Russian Revolution. Kautsky and Rosa Luxembourg were among many Socialists affected by the 1905 revolutions, though Bernstein was not overly enthusiastic. Despite the debates, there was no fundamental reassessment of the French Revolution or of revolutions in general. Two important themes were, however, gradually emerging around this time. First, Socialist history was slowly taking on the trappings of academic scholarship. For example, Heinrich Cunow, who would later take over as editor of the influential journal *Die Neue Zeit* from Kautsky, published a book on the press and parties in Revolutionary France. While still adopting a materialist view of history, Cunow discussed and used primary sources and the recent historiography, including Jaurès. Second, Socialist educational institutes, such as the Berlin Workers School (founded in 1906) and the Central Party School (where Cunow taught), were founded and expanded, providing both a home for Socialist intellectuals and a means of disseminating Socialist viewpoints.

Leading into WWI, then, Kautsky's intellectual influence remained dominant, despite challenges from Jaurès and Bernstein. The Socialist Party machine was disseminating its views through the party press, educational institutes, and its growing base of cadres. There were some isolated works from Austria—for instance Emma Adler's popular work on French revolutionary women—but there was no distinct profile emerging from Austria. Throughout these developments, Ducange proves an informative, neutral commentator. There is, however, little sense of the sheer effort from the Socialists in surviving their outlawed status under Bismarck and then asserting their viewpoint in the face of considerable official and societal resistance. It would have been instructive, for instance, to have a deeper investigation of the more conventional accounts of the French Revolution written in the Wilhelmine period. The conservative-minded, moderate liberal Heinrich von Sybel, who occupied a towering position within the historical profession and wrote copiously on the French Revolution, is mentioned but not really addressed. Did the Socialist intellectuals engage with Sybel and the wider currents in German academia or were they as hermetically sealed in their milieu as Ducange presents? Similarly, outside of academia, how did the changing position of the Socialists impact

on their ideology (including their historical views)? On the eve of WWI, the German Socialists were famously the largest party in the *Reichstag*. Did this political ascent interact with and impact on their intellectual project? Were there any significant links between politicians and intellectuals? And beyond the educational institutes, newspapers, journals, books, and calendars, how widespread and influential were discussions about the French Revolution amongst the wider ranks of the Socialist party? It would have been instructive if Ducange had addressed some of these larger questions, even if evidence and firm conclusions proved problematic.

Surprisingly the events of WWI are not covered in any depth (the Socialists generally supported the war effort) and Ducange's account moves swiftly to the effects of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Kautsky, increasingly a reduced figure within the movement, came out against Bolshevik violence and dictatorship. From the end of WWI, the Socialists were either the governing party, both in Germany (1918-21, 1923, 1928-30) and in Austria (1918-20), or a major support for the new Republics. In this position they distanced themselves from radicalism, terror and dictatorship. The governing Socialists were complicit, for example, in the assassinations of the radical left leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Ducange mentions the assassinations in passing (p. 240).

In the immediate post-WWI world, there was less interest in the French Revolution. Ducange writes that while academic work continued, 'the French Revolution had largely lost its central role in party education' (p. 265). The process of integration into the new states and becoming part of the establishment also meant a loosening of strict Marxist analysis and newer readings, despite considerable continuity with the pre-1914 traditions. There was, for example, an increased willingness to write about individuals (eg. Hermann Wendel on Danton and various discussions about Robespierre). There was also the case of Hedwig Hintze, a left-wing historian close to the Socialists (though never officially a member of the party), who published on the French state and federalism in the revolutionary period. She was one of the first female academic historians in Germany and an expert on the historiography of the Revolution, including Jaurès. Ducange discusses her work and ideas but perhaps could have elaborated on her academic milieu, still dominated by right-wing historians, and her place in the spectrum of ideas in Weimar Germany. Hintze reviewed for the *Historische Zeitschrift* (founded by Sybel in 1859) but there is little sense of the journal's prevailing ideology, ethos or environment. (The renowned Friedrich Meinecke was its editor during Hintze's involvement). While there is mention of right-wing historical accounts of the French Revolution, there is no deep investigation of these interpretations or of any exposition of possible dialogue between the Right and Left. Ducange ends the narrative in 1934 with Germany in the throes of depression and the Nazis on the rise. Hintze, a Jew, was trapped in Holland during the war and committed suicide rather than face deportation.

Ducange's conclusion summarizes the overall argument of the book. The 'vulgate' for a Socialist interpretation of the French Revolution was set by Kautsky and Blos in the centenary year of 1889. It focused on social and economic aspects (and deemphasized individuals) in accordance with Marxian analysis. While Jaurès provided an intellectual challenge to strict historical materialism, his approach was not influential in Germany or Austria. Only following the great break of 1917-1918 did the ideological straitjacket loosen. At the same time, there seemed to be less popular interest in the French Revolution. Throughout the later decades there was a corresponding movement towards increased professionalization in historical

studies, including among Socialists and left-wing intellectuals. Ducange is a clear and lucid guide through this narrative arc but stays tightly confined to the Socialist milieu. At particular moments (especially in 1917-20) a wider survey of the intellectual and political world would have illuminated and enriched the narrative. In any case, Ducange pursues his narrow focus with diligence and professionalism.

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