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François Igersheim, *L'Alsace politique 1870-1914*. Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016. 232 pp. €22.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2868205285.

Review by Christopher Fischer, Indiana State University.

François Igersheim's *L'Alsace-politique* builds on a long career focused on Alsatian history of the pre-World War One period. As the title suggests, Igersheim gives primary attention to the political history of the region. His narrative is built around three sets of issues. First, he tracks the shift from a "politics of notables" to mass party politics. Second, he explores the relationship between leading Alsatian politicians and the German administrators of the region. Third, he shows how local politics in response to German rule evolved from the early period of resistance to a more complex relationship of accommodation mixed with occasional antagonism. While centered on developments in Alsace, one of the strengths of the work is its ability to tie events in the region to political currents in the larger German Empire as well as France. The work is traditional in approach and largely synthetic, with French historians peppered in with more recent Anglo-American and German scholarship. The result is an economical, judicious overview of the Alsatian political developments of Alsace in the German Second Empire.

After an introductory chapter dedicated to sketching the political, demographic, linguistic, and religious contours of the region, Igersheim turns his attention to the decade following the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871. The initial reaction of the local population, Igersheim noted, included acts of violence against the German occupiers, violence that was met with the threat of fairly harsh suppression from the German side (and presaged the German behavior of the early phases of World War One). This initial resistance transformed once the Germans firmly ensconced themselves in power following the Treaty of Frankfurt. While the majority of the chapter lays out the creation of a new legal structure for the *Reichsland*, Igersheim also charts the rise of the twin, related, though often competing responses of the Alsatian population. One strand of response, strongest in the earliest decades of the *Reichsland* (as the combined structure of Alsace and Lorraine was called) but continued in various guises, was the *protestataire* (protestors) movement. This group opposed annexation and looked across the border for a return to France. Slower off the blocks, but gaining steam following the 1877 elections, were representatives of the autonomist strand of Alsatian politics; not seeing a likely reversal of the 1871 defeat, these Alsatians—often drawn from the more Protestant and more heavily German areas of the region—sought to maximize Alsatian linguistic, religious, and political rights within the context of the German Empire.

Part of the ability of the Germans to start winning over elements of the local population lay in its regional leadership. Igersheim here strikes a sympathetic note for Eduard von Moeller, who as head of the regional administration managed to woo, if unevenly, some of the Alsatians despite inference from Otto von Bismarck and the disruptiveness of the *Kulturkampf* with the largely Catholic Alsatian population. The *Kulturkampf* also points to another central development in the region, the development of political Catholicism. Igersheim, as historians such as Christian Baechler before him have long done, not surprisingly places political Catholicism at the center of regional politics. Igersheim here also argues that the enduring strength of this movement was to make itself an early champion of Alsatian rights within the German Empire. While political Catholicism's place would continue well into the interwar period, the political landscape Igersheim so aptly lays out during the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany) would largely shape Alsatian politics through the return of French power in 1918 until the onset of the Second World War.

For Igersheim, the 1890s and first decade of the twentieth century were marked by a series of important political shifts. First, in 1902, the German government relinquished some of its tight control over the region. Both the original and revised 1879 constitutions for the region had granted the German government fairly broad authority to control political appointments, political development, and the press in the region. The lifting of such limitations—in part, driven by the local representative body (*Landesausschuss*) signing off on subsidizing the reconstruction of the castle of Hohkönigsburg for Emperor Wilhelm II—marked, as Igersheim notes, a further invigoration of local politics. One of the outcomes of greater freedoms was the acceleration of local politics from one centered on notable individuals to more organized, professionalized political parties. Thus, although the organizations remained independent of their larger German analogues, the Alsatian Center (Catholic) and Social Democratic (or SPD) parties came to play increasingly vocal roles in regional politics. These parties rarely called for a return to France. Instead, they increasingly, and stridently, demanded greater rights for Alsace within Germany; in short, the *Reichsland* should be elevated to the same status as the other German *Länder* (federal states) such as Bavaria or Saxony.

The desire for greater autonomy found more fertile ground in the closing years of the decade. Here, over the course of several chapters, Igersheim explores how a more sympathetic local governor, Carl von Wedel, and a more open Chancellor embodied in Bethmann-Hollweg, brought about the reform of the Alsatian constitution; that reform, in turn, led to the creation of a new regional legislature. Igersheim's account of the ensuing elections also points to interesting and unusual alliances in Alsace. While the *Union Nationale*, an organization which promoted a more independent Alsace-Lorraine and was led by leading regional Francophiles, tried to push against German rule, German authorities sought to influence more sympathetic Catholic leaders and even—in a move that few national German leaders of the time would have suggested—promoted Socialist candidates in some districts to weaken the *Union Nationale*. Thus, stringently Francophile Catholics, liberals, and even the odd socialists found themselves at odds against the majority of their more autonomist-minded party brethren. Igersheim argues that the previously outsized influence of the “nationalists” diminished after the election as Alsatian politics turned to regular order until the outbreak of the war. The one exception to this rule was the 1913 Zabern Affair, a local imbroglio between a junior Prussian officer and Alsatian army recruits, which gave way to local scandal and protests, and with the use of the military to put down the protests, a national crisis which wracked the government under Chancellor Bethman-Hollweg and received international attention. Here, as Igersheim and others have noted, the Alsatians were unified in

their opposition to the ham-handed (or as contemporary commentators might have noted, jackbooted) reactions of the Prussian-led military.

Igersheim's ultimate conclusions are not surprising. Truly representative government emerged slowly. The constitutional reforms of 1902 and 1910-1911 marked the key political developments in this period. The 1910-1911 reforms in particular, with the granting of expanded voting rights to Alsatian men for elections of representatives to the Second Chamber of the Alsatian *Landtag* (state parliament) as well as the expanded rights of the *Landtag*, marked an important, if incomplete shift of local political life. (The regional executive remained the choice of the *Kaiser*, and Alsace-Lorraine had curtailed rights in the Federal Council [*Bundesrat*]). And, in an argument that many historians have made, German rule created an Alsatian populace whose politics mirrored those of larger Germany but whose integration into Germany remained incomplete. Igersheim's long career also allows him to offer insights into the character strengths, and flaws, of the politicians under consideration (backed by a glossary of all the figures cited in the book). For example, for those who have read the often biting columns of the priest and publisher Emile Wetterlé, it is surprising to learn that he often was a mediocre orator in the *Landtag*. While certainly not overlooking the many flaws in the German administration of the region, Igersheim offers a more nuanced, sympathetic examination of several of the German administrators of the period, especially von Moeller as well as the *Statthalter* (governor) from 1907-1914, Karl von Wedel. Conversely, Igersheim does not overly romanticize the *protestataire* movement or its spiritual heir, the *Union Nationale*, as can sometimes be the case in for the scholarship concerning this period.

Overall, Igersheim's strength is not the originality of his argument but rather the efficiency and clarity of his presentation.

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