

Marjorie Lamberti. *State, Society and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany.* New York: Oxford, 1989.

Marjorie Lamberti's study of elementary school policy in Prussia between the time of German unification and World War I addresses the concerns of both historians of education and historians of modern Germany. She begins with historiographic debates around the "peculiarity" of German political development, in order to criticize interpretations that argue that the schools were simply one aspect of the state's political crusade against socialistic and democratic tendencies, another one of the many manifestations of Germany's peculiarly undemocratic character. Lamberti wants to broaden the discussion of schooling history to include the many parties that shaped it, and in so doing she illuminates the particular Prussian political situation and adds a degree of subtlety to our understanding of how educational institutions change and persist.

Lamberti is particularly interested in bringing religious factors into the discussion of school history—both the role of parental religious attitudes and the institutional role of church personnel in the formulation and implementation of educational policy. She argues that the overemphasis on political and material factors in existing accounts understates the role of religious sentiment and identity. In fact, the whole study is centred on the question of why the "anachronism" of confessionally organized schools persisted in

one of the most "modern" educational systems of the late nineteenth century.

Although her research centres on policy questions, Lamberti attempts to avoid the overemphasis on state actions that often characterizes educational (and other) policy studies. She is interested in exploring the dynamics of interaction between state officials, local authorities, Church officials, teachers, and parents. She examines both the passage of legislation and its implementation. Her study is a rich and well-researched one, informative even where it does not convince entirely.

Lamberti's answer to the puzzle of persistence of confessional schools emphasizes the cultural strength of confessional identity in Germany and a kind of tacit political and ideological alliance between Catholic and Protestant clerics determined to preserve the schools' confessional character. This alliance is understandable only in the context of the *Kulturkampf* and its political residues. Briefly, during the 1870s, Prussian state authorities had attempted through a series of anti-Catholic measures to secure the parliamentary support of nationalist liberals holding anti-clerical views. The *Kulturkampf* seemed to liberals to be a step toward a secular school system and a more enlightened and nationally oriented citizenry.

Many liberals gave priority to nationalist and anti-clerical rather than libertarian principles in the struggle and came to see state monopoly over schooling as the only "solution" to clerical domination. The main tactic they evolved during the *Kulturkampf* era was the creation of interconfes-

sional schools, supervised by secular officials and funded by communities regardless of confession. But the *Kulturkampf* was not administered evenhandedly. Lamberti's research into the local implementation of the *Kulturkampf* laws showed that it was enforced almost exclusively against Catholic clergy in the schools. Although many local school officials would have liked to see reforms spread to Protestant supervisors as well, state authorities largely backed away from this degree of anti-clerical zeal, which did little to forward their political aims.

The effects of the *Kulturkampf* were far-reaching. The mass dismissal of Catholic school inspectors left the Catholic clergy permanently suspicious of the state and in opposition to any state effort to tamper with the confessional character of the schools. Moreover, as liberal school officials pushed for the development of secular interconfessional schools in the era following the *Kulturkampf*, they discovered the limits of their abilities to loosen the hold of clerics over the schools. When later attempts were made to promote interconfessional schools even where Protestant populations would be affected, another source of opposition was heard from—namely, Protestant Conservatives who in fact mounted a more effective opposition to secularization because they were a party long friendly to the state. Conservatives formed a tacit alliance where it was least expected—namely with the Catholic Centre Party outsiders—in defence of the clerical control both parties wanted. Beyond this, in Lamberti's view, the whole effort to

alter the religious character of the schools was doomed to fail anyway as a misguided elitist effort that was neither practical nor supported by Catholic or Protestant parents who were attached to their confessional identities and schools.

Lamberti's analysis of the political disputes over school administration in the post-*Kulturkampf* era centres on three factors: first, the changing place of the Catholic Centre Party in parliamentary strategy; second, the particular dynamics of confessional school struggles in the Eastern Polish-Catholic provinces of Prussia; and third, the fiscal implications of policy reforms that would reduce clerical control. In all of these discussions, Lamberti attempts to demonstrate how the persistence of confessional schools was politically overdetermined.

In a time when Liberal influence and electoral strength was waning and socialist strength was on the rise, earlier arguments in favour of popular enlightenment and the diminution of religious influence lost their appeal. Moreover, as the state sought parliamentary majorities that did not depend on the weakening Liberals, a Conservative-Centre core seemed all the more appealing. But such a strategy required the abandonment of *Kulturkampf* tactics.

In the case of the Polish-majority provinces, despite a series of aggressive measures to convert the schools to tools of "germanization," the opposition of clerics and parents that culminated in a series of embarrassing school strikes in the first decade of the twentieth century showed the dangers

of anti-confessional measures even where there was some larger political gain to be expected.

Finally, the fiscal implications of school reform were unacceptable. In brief, a switch to interconfessional schools would have resulted in many regions in increases of the tax burden upon Protestants and landowners. This precluded alternative arrangements for schools in the absence of substantial increases in state school subsidies. This was a price too high to pay in an era when efforts to reform tax policy were stymied by Conservative opposition.

In the end, Lamberti's analysis supports many aspects of the familiar argument about German political development. Certainly the failure of attempts to secularize Prussian schools cannot be understood without reference to the increasingly desperate search for a pro-government majority in the face of the rising socialist threat, and to the resistance to fiscal reform that alternative school administration would entail. Both of these aspects of the story point back to previously argued connections between politics and economic development that Lamberti set out to correct. Even if the schools were not *simply* vehicles of ruling strategy (and there is plenty of evidence that they were not), this study illustrates the many aspects of those strategies that shaped them at every level. Nevertheless, we get in Lamberti's research a far more nuanced view of how political, social, and cultural conflicts manifested themselves in the school system, and of the degree to which state policies were enacted or frustrated.

The effort here to rehabilitate religious explanation also falls somewhat short of the author's claims, even though the research into Catholic and Protestant religious politics is invaluable. The nature of the revision that Lamberti argues is apparent in rhetorical characterization of clerics and their political allies. Catholic clergy and Christian Conservatives are generally described as moderate and practical because they recognize the confessional character of Germany, whereas Liberals and Progressives are seen as too often motivated by political considerations—as if it were possible in this era of (in Lamberti's own analysis) religiously driven politics neatly to separate out religious from political motivations. Moreover, despite the evidence presented here concerning the ways in which religious identities were used, altered, adapted, and politicized during this era, there is no explicit recognition in the analysis of the historical malleability of this "confessional character" of Germany, which is instead accepted as a given rather than an historical construction. Still, it is a mark of the richness of the research presented here that readers can find bases for somewhat alternative interpretations. Lamberti's book is an important contribution to our understanding of the history of educational policy and a fine example of how to embed that history in broad political and cultural developments.

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