

LAUDATIO FOR KONRAD JARAUSCH by *Elizabeth Heineman* (University of Iowa)

Crossing the Atlantic Divide with the Carrboro School: An Appreciation of Konrad Jarausch

It's an honor to be asked to speak at this celebration of Konrad Jarausch's 65th birthday. I first met Professor Jarausch in the spring of 1986, when I visited several campuses in an effort to choose a PhD program. Professor Jarausch, needless to say, was a big part of my decision to attend the University of North Carolina. In my second year at Chapel Hill, I joined a group house that included three Germanists and a historian of Britain. It was there that we dubbed the team of students working with Professors Jarausch and Gerhard Weinberg the "Carrboro School," after the former mill village right next door to Chapel Hill whose lower rents were popular with grad students. I imagine we must just have slogged through a stack of articles on the Bielefeld School. We were in any case convinced that UNC was a very exciting place to do German history.

Deciding what to talk about today was no easy task. What, exactly, could I NOT discuss? Professor Jarausch's breadth is one of his trademarks: he has been an important voice in nearly every discussion regarding modern German history in the last several decades. He has published on an enormous range of topics, each time making a major intervention. In taking on high politics – the career of Chancellor Bethmann-Holweg – he joined the Fischer controversy concerning German guilt in the First World War. Turning to nineteenth century German liberalism, Professor Jarausch looked towards large political movements to put his stamp on discussions about Germany's Sonderweg. Shifting his focus to the history of social groups, he examined students and professionals to confront the failures of German liberalism in the early twentieth century. Critically eyeing the either-or frameworks of totalitarian versus apologetic analyses of the GDR, Professor Jarausch offered an interpretation that integrated political and social history: the notion of a "welfare dictatorship." His latest book, covering sixty years since the end of World War II,

takes seriously the matter of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but is equally concerned to understand the ways postwar Germans built with the future, and not just the past, in mind. And we surely haven't heard the last. Professor Jarausch was last spotted at the GSA speaking on transnationalism in German history.

As important as Professor Jarausch's topical breadth is his methodological flexibility. He has written a biography of a "great man," and he has written social histories of groups whose members remain mainly anonymous. He pioneered the use of quantitative methods in history, and he offered a plea to cool inflated passions against deconstruction in historical writing. In all cases, he has remained committed to the empirical record. Indeed, his methodological catholicism has shown us just how much this record has to offer us, if only we remain open to new ways to investigate it. Professor Jarausch has often been at the forefront of discussions of new topics, methodologies, or theoretical frameworks – and then, a few years later, has been the one to write up a summary evaluation of the development. In this regard, his enormous corpus of articles has been as important as his books, certainly for those of us involved in graduate training. One can find an article by Professor Jarausch on just about any important development in German historiography of the last three decades.

How did this affect us as students? Of course, we learned by example. We learned the limitations of identifying ourselves as "fill-in-the-blank" historians – as social historians, as cultural historians, as military historians. Instead, we absorbed a sort of fearlessness about drawing from all strands of historical writing, including schools that positioned themselves as mutually exclusive. Mainly, we understood we were simply to read everything. And we absorbed a sort of fearlessness about being the first to try something – we were to know what was current, but not be limited to what was stylish.

But in preparing this talk, I didn't want to assume my experience was typical. Thanks to Hannelore Jarausch, who painstakingly created a list of Professor Jarausch's PhD students from departmental records not organized according to advisor, I polled them for their thoughts on Professor Jarausch's influence on them. And here's what I found out.

Many recalled what one delicately called "Professor Jarausch's version of the Socratic method." Some of you in the audience will know what I'm talking about. But for the rest, it usually started with Professor Jarausch posing what might be called an open-ended question. Perhaps one like this:

"Why is Konrad Jarausch important?"

Such a question usually provoked a wild scurry to figure out which of the many correct answers was the one he had in mind:

"Because he pioneered the application of quantitative methods to history?" No, that wasn't it.

"Because he challenged the use of the totalitarianism framework for understanding the GDR?" Sure, but that wasn't the answer to bring this discussion forward.

"Because he exposed exaggerated fears based on caricatures of deconstruction & brought common sense to the discussion of its use in history?" Well, yes, but what else?

"Because he insisted on placing debates on liberalism in their social context?"

With the class clearly not getting it, Professor Jarausch would finally be forced to fill in the answer himself: "Because he was the first director of the Friends of the German Historical Institute!"

A number of former students reported, with a hint of apology towards their students, having absorbed the technique so well that they now use it in their own classrooms.

On a more serious note, many described their awe upon witnessing what they described quite simply as intellectual brilliance. One student recalled Professor Jarausch's "extraordinary capacity for putting other people's thoughts in order. I would go to his office, find him jetlagged and buried under a stack of mail, lay out what I thought was a brilliant strategy for approaching my next chapter, and he would, off the top of his head, suggest a far more sensible approach."

And former students admiringly recalled his conscientiousness, commenting on his quick turnaround of draft dissertation chapters – including when he was in Potsdam. "Another lesson I took from my time working with Konrad," wrote one, "was that it was important to always make time for students. . . true, he might come to your defense and eat lunch (as he did for my prospectus gathering), but he was there -- with probing questions and a wry wit."

Former students commented on his practicality, his knack for "combining lofty intellectual pursuits with a hard-nosed, practical understanding of the academe. While he always encouraged us to find our own scholarly voices, he also wanted his graduate students to get jobs." And this, perhaps, went hand in hand with Professor Jarausch's pedagogical sensibility. One graduate described his "deft 'Leinenpolitik,' i.e. knowing, sensing, divining not just when grad students need some direction, but also when to get out of the way and let them get on with it."

Undergirding this scholarly and pedagogical profile was, we recognized, a complex personal relationship to Germany and to German history. To read Professor Jarausch's work is to engage a tremendous seriousness about just how big the issues at stake are. For him, however, seriousness does not automatically mean pessimism: it is as important to understand the good as it is the bad.

Most centrally, we see in his work a persistent concern with the public sphere, with liberalism, and with what he most recently has called "civilization": the development of a commitment to civil society. And we see a sober confrontation with the consequences of the failure of

the public sphere, of liberalism, of civilization. This is not a removed scholarly concern, for in Professor Jarausch's work we face the abandonment of liberal principles by people like us – by professionals and students. Nor is his work simply a sober reflection on the past. Rather, Professor Jarausch reminds us of continuing perfidious consequences of racial nationalism in sometimes violent xenophobia today. Yet he is unabashedly admiring of East Germans' grass-roots movement to end dictatorship in 1989.

Furthermore, even in tales of tragedy Professor Jarausch is concerned with the potential for a different outcome, indeed the fact that the end of the story has yet to be written. This is why we must recognize the attractions, and not just the failures, of nineteenth-century liberalism. This is why we must recognize the intelligence, the sense of responsibility, and the open-mindedness of Bethmann Holweg, and not just the imperial hubris and institutional rigidity that led to catastrophe of World War I. And this is why we must not permit the task of looking backward after the Nazi era to obscure the long distance traveled since 1945 – in East, West, and reunified Germany. Even as he spurns facile parallels, such as the notion that we can democratize Iraq “just like” we democratized Germany, Professor Jarausch still holds out hope for learning from the positive, not just the negative, lessons of history. Indeed, he makes it just as urgent to do so, a sentiment nicely summed up in *Civilizing Germans*: “It is important not only to analyze what went wrong in the past but also to point out how things were put right after the Nazi catastrophe, since recovering from dictatorship and atoning for massive crimes is an issue facing other nations beyond Germany.” This is a big charge – and one that I hope his students are worthy to carry out.