PREFACE

This issue of the Bulletin presents the 25th Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute, delivered by Mark Mazower this past November. Speaking on “National Socialism and the Search for International Order,” Mazower examined the Nazis’ conception of a new international order against the backdrop of interwar international relations, especially the minority-rights regime administered by the League of Nations. Since minorities had been such a source of international conflict in the interwar years, hardline Nazi thinkers argued that the Third Reich could pacify Europe by eradicating minorities and imposing hegemonic regional rule. Europe was to be stabilized by making each state ethnically homogeneous by expelling or exterminating minority populations. Even though the Nazi vision of a new order was, of course, rejected by the Allies, Mazower argues that its challenge to many of the assumptions of interwar internationalism had an impact on the postwar international order, which dropped minority rights protection, reestablished great power hierarchy, and sidelined international law. Lutz Klinkhammer’s comment raises the question to what extent Nazi ideas about a new international order were translated into political action. The Nazi domination of Europe, he argues, created an institutionalized state of conflict that prevented the implementation of any rational project of a “new order.” Running the gamut between the two poles of collaboration and extermination, Nazi occupation policies were fluid and divergent but ultimately simply destructive.

The next two articles present the research of the most recent winners of the Fritz Stern Dissertation Prize awarded annually by the Friends of the German Historical Institute. Picking up the theme of minority policies, Brendan Karch’s article “Nationalism on the Margins: Silesians between Germany and Poland, 1848-1945” explores how Upper Silesians resisted being assimilated into either the German or Polish nation. Far from being indifferent to nation-building, Upper Silesians nurtured a political culture that embraced ethnic ambiguity and refused to adopt nationhood as the primary axis of identity. The long-term resilience of this political culture allowed Upper Silesians to avoid the ethnic cleansing that took place in other parts of Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. Eric C. Steinhart’s “Creating Killers: The Nazification of the Black Sea Germans and the Holocaust in Southern Ukraine, 1941-1944” sheds light on the motivations of Holocaust perpetrators by examining how residents of Transnistria, a multietnic region on the border between Romania and the Ukraine, were enticed to participate in the Holocaust. Since
the local populations did not carry out any autonomous anti-Semitic pogroms, pre-existing anti-Semitism was not a major factor. Instead, joining the militia and participating in the mass killings of Jews constituted a key way in which local male residents could demonstrate their “Germanness” to the SS, thus positioning themselves to reap the material rewards being offered to those qualifying as Volksdeutsche.

Charles Maier’s article “Lessons from History? German Economic Experiences and the Crisis of the Euro” is based on the lecture he delivered on the occasion of receiving the 2011 Helmut Schmidt Prize in German-American Economic History. In this lecture, Maier elucidated the current crisis by reexamining three sets of episodes from twentieth-century German history: the post-World War I inflation and the deflation of the early 1930s; the protracted conflict over German reparations; and the post-1945 Marshall Plan. Addressing the current crisis, Maier suggests that the Europeans will have to uncouple the short term from the long term by combining a short-term moratorium on debt payments with a long-term resolution of the debt problem. Germany’s role will require generosity and imagination.

In the section on GHI research, Research Fellow Clelia Caruso presents her research project on the role of the telephone in interpersonal communication in Germany and the United States from 1880 to 1990. While research on the telephone often assumes that the device by itself brought about major changes in social relations, Caruso argues that the technological characteristics of the telephone did not predetermine its usage or its interpretation. Instead, over the course of the century after 1880, numerous alternative usages of the telephone were imagined or implemented. The project therefore explores the shifting usage and interpretations of the telephone in order to assess how this new tool of communication both reflected and shaped modern society.

This issue’s conference reports once again reflect the great diversity of the topics examined at the Institute’s conferences and workshops, ranging from medieval history to the history of the Cold War; from the history of migration to the representation of the Holocaust in museums; and from the American Civil War to transatlantic tourism. This spring the German Historical Institute celebrates its 25th anniversary. Please take a look at the special anniversary supplement that is being issued simultaneously with this Bulletin and please join us for some of the public events that will mark this anniversary year. As always, please consult our homepage at www.ghi-dc.org for our calendar of upcoming events.

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