

German Economic History

Author(s): Gerald D. Feldman

Source: *Central European History*, Jun., 1986, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Jun., 1986), pp. 174-185

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of Central European History Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4546067>

#### REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/4546067?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4546067?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



and Cambridge University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Central European History*

JSTOR

# German Economic History

GERALD D. FELDMAN

IT is not without irony that I feel compelled to begin my remarks by saying that I do not think that the American contribution to the field of German economic history should be measured in quantitative terms. According to figures compiled by Professor Konrad Jarausch, the percentage of articles on economic history in the *Journal of Central European Affairs* between 1941 and 1963 was 3.8 percent, and it rose to a mighty 3.9 percent of all articles from 1968 to 1983 in *Central European History*. That is, economic history accounted for 30 of the 639 articles published by those two journals.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of articles on German economic history in the *Journal of Economic History* has declined significantly over the years. Where 10, or 6.6 percent, of the 152 articles published on German history dealt with economic problems in the period 1926–1968, only 2.7 percent, that is, 3 out of 110, such articles appeared between 1969 and 1983. According to my tabulations, a total of 26 articles in the *Journal of Economic History* between 1943 and 1984 dealt with problems of Central European history. The *Business History Review* had 15 articles dealing with Germany between 1949 and 1962. As for *Explorations in Economic History*, it had 10 articles dealing with Germany between 1949 and 1962. The figure for 1963 to 1984 is zero, if one excludes 4 articles dealing with Central Europe. Just for comparative purposes, I might note that the *Economic History Review*, the leading British journal in the field, had 22 articles dealing with Germany between 1927 and 1984, of which 4 were written by American historians.

Given the occasion, perhaps I should now say, “Ah, but what historians!” The subject is best discussed in this manner over cocktails, however, and I think that a more sober approach is necessary. First of all, many of the most outstanding American contributions to German economic history have not been made by historians at all. Thorstein

1. Konrad H. Jarausch, “German Social History—American Style,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985): 349–59, statistics on 350–51.

Veblen provided one of the earliest and still widely accepted conceptual frameworks for the analysis of German political economy early in this century. H. R. Todsall and George Stocking did pioneering work on German cartels, and Robert Brady's study of the rationalization of German industry and Howard Ellis's work on German monetary theory have remained *the* works on those subjects for over half a century. Alfred Schweitzer's important work on the economic history of the Nazi period, and the studies of Nicholas Balabkins, Horst Mendershausen, and H. C. Wallich on the post-1945 economic reconstruction also illustrate the role of economists in modern German economic history. Joseph Schumpeter also contributed importantly to our field.<sup>2</sup> It would, of course, be nonsense for anyone to say that the works of these persons are not "historical" because they are addressed very often to the contemporary interests of the authors. The same could be said of such "true-blue" historians as Peter Temin and Charles Kindleberger, whose contributions to the history of the depression of the 1930s in Germany are closely related to more general theoretical and policy issues.<sup>3</sup> While I sometimes think that a knowledge of German and a bit more understanding of how the German government and society worked would be helpful, I am prepared to go so far as to argue that even some of the economists who have turned the German inflation into the great playground for their econometric investigations of problems of adaptive and rational expectations have made some contribution to German economic history too.<sup>4</sup>

The basic point is that the field of economic history does not lend itself very easily or well to the national biases and professional exclu-

2. Thorstein Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1966, first published in 1915); H. R. Todsall, "The German Steel Syndicate," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 32 (1917): 259-306; George Stocking and Myron Watkins, *Cartels in Action* (New York, 1947); Robert Brady, *The Rationalization of German Industry: A Study in the Evolution of Economic Planning* (Berkeley, 1933); Howard Ellis, *German Monetary Theory, 1905-1933* (Cambridge, 1937); Alfred Schweitzer, *Big Business in the Third Reich* (Bloomington, 1964); Nicholas Balabkins, *Germany Under Direct Controls* (New Brunswick, 1964); Horst Mendershausen, *Two Postwar Recoveries of the German Economy* (Amsterdam, 1955); Henry C. Wallich, *Mainsprings of the German Revival* (New Haven, 1955); Joseph Schumpeter, *Business Cycles*, 2 vols. (New York and London, 1939).

3. Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939* (London, 1973); Peter Temin, "The Beginning of the Depression in Germany," *Economic History Review* 24 (1971): 240-48.

4. The literature is discussed in Steven B. Webb, "Money Demand and Expectations in the German Hyperinflation: A Survey of the Models," Nathan Schmutzler and Edward Marcus, eds., *Inflation Through the Ages: Economic, Social, Psychological and Historical Aspects* (New York, 1983), 435-49.

siveness that generally characterize our guild. Alexander Gerschenkron, Fritz Redlich, David Landes, and William Parker, to name four historians who have made significant contributions to German economic history and, more importantly, who have exerted major influences on the field both here and in Germany, are not German historians at all.<sup>5</sup> While Hans Rosenberg and Richard Tilly, to take two other powerful influences on the theory and practice of German economic history today, have concentrated most of their attention on Germany, they have been inspired to a very high degree by broader issues of economic theory and informed by a comparative perspective. Obviously there have been and are American economic historians whose work is almost exclusively concerned with Germany, but I would like to argue here that the most important contributions of Americans to German economic history have been in the realms of method and theory and in our almost systematic attack on certain inherited traditions in the German practice of economic history.

Unsurprisingly, the first major critics were the emigrés. While acknowledging whatever efforts German scholars had made to be receptive to the influences of Marx and Weber, Fritz Redlich and Hans Rosenberg were convinced that the dominance of the German historical school, and especially the influence of Gustav Schmoller, had reached the point of diminishing returns and that German economic history had succumbed to the worst traits of the historicist tradition. Thus, in 1958, Redlich argued:

The large role which historians play in modern German economic history explains that there are relatively few ties with the social sciences. Incidentally, it also explains the limited interest in historical statistics. German books and papers in our field are usually straight narratives, implying that the underlying questions are: What happened and when? Genuine problems that the recent

5. Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Berkeley, 1943) and *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, 2d ed. (New York, 1965). Fritz Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and His Work Force: A Study in European Economic and Social History*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1964–65); *Anfänge und Entwicklung der Firmengeschichte und Unternehmerbiographie: Das deutsche Geschäftsleben in der Geschichtsschreibung* (Baden-Baden, 1959); *Der Unternehmer: Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichtliche Studien* (Göttingen, 1964); *Steeped in Two Cultures: A Selection of Essays* (New York, 1971). David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge, 1969); "Japan and Europe: Contrasts in Industrialization," in William Lockwood, ed., *The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan* (Princeton, 1965), 93–182. William N. Parker, *Europe, America and the Wider World: Essays on the Economic History of Western Capitalism*, 1, *Europe and the World Economy* (Cambridge, 1984).

developments in the social sciences . . . pose for the economic and social historian are hardly seen, and I have found, in otherwise satisfactory papers, attempts at conceptualization that were just primitive. . . . On the whole, however, German economic and social history is not sufficiently inspired and fertilized by the social sciences, and Ranke's venerable methods are in danger of being made a fetish. . . .<sup>6</sup>

A year before, Hans Rosenberg wrote a devastating review of Heinrich Bechtel's economic history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany arguing that

. . . the author gives a thin narrative account of major economic events and innovations, which he tries to link to the course of general German history. There is much vague talk about *Geist* and *Stil* but little information about savings, investments, capital formation, or the fluctuations in prices, interest rates, costs, profits, output, employment, and consumption. The salient problems posed by the interrelations of these variables are not pointed up, let alone clarified. Unfortunately, the author does not seriously come to grips with the central theme of German economic history since the late 1830s—the revolutionary changeover to self-reinforcing economic growth per capita, the transformation of an “underdeveloped country” into a mighty industrial economy.<sup>7</sup>

A decade later, Rosenberg was much kinder to the then-dean of the West German economic historians, Friedrich Lütge, praising two of Lütge's more recent articles for being “much less timeworn in their lines of approach” than his earlier work and for making “a feeble yet promising departure from cherished historiographical traditions.”<sup>8</sup>

It was not only German emigrés to the United States who argued that the time had come for an invasion of American social sciences and Anglo-American approaches to economic history as well as for a remigration of Marx and Weber. Richard Tilly, who settled down at the University of Münster in the late sixties and thereby transformed our profession's great family firm of Tilly, Tilly & Tilly into a multinational enterprise, was no less forceful. In a major review article of 1969, he bluntly charged that “from around the 1870s . . . interest in

6. Fritz Redlich, “Recent Developments in German Economic History,” *Journal of Economic History* 17 (1958): 516–30, quote on 530.

7. *American Historical Review* 63 (1957): 121–22. Now reprinted in Hans Rosenberg, *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen: Studien zur neueren deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1978), 288.

8. *American Historical Review* 72 (1967): 1005–1006. Reprinted in Rosenberg, *Machteliten*, 287.

. . . [the] ties to mainstream economics began to recede; emphasis on institutional and legal studies, collection of sources, and sheer antiquarianism grew ever more important. Since then, German economic historians, increasingly producing economic history without the economics, have been playing Hamlet without the Prince.”<sup>9</sup> He was concerned about the persistent linking of social and economic history in Germany and the priority given to social history. Tilly criticized both West and East German economic historians for favoring political over economic explanations of German industrialization and for failing to integrate the Anglo-American literature on growth and development into their investigations. Above all, Tilly insisted upon a reversal of the tendency of the historical school to emphasize “the limitations, rather than the possibilities of economic analysis, suggesting that answers to important economic problems were extraeconomic in nature.”<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to determine the extent to which the study of economic history in Germany has benefited from the so-called Hirschmann Effect, that is, American imports showing Germans what to produce. The roles played by English historiographical imports certainly were no less and possibly were more important than those arriving from America, and the indigenous capacities represented by Knut Borchardt, Karl Erich Born, Wolfram Fischer, Hans Pohl, and Wolfgang Zorn and two generations of their students deserve recognition. Nevertheless, it is fair to argue that the impact of American scholarship was very significant. The influence of Fritz Redlich on German entrepreneurial history is widely acknowledged, and Alfred Chandler’s impact on the study of German business history is no less profound in Germany than it is here.<sup>11</sup> The so-called Bielefeld School has systematically sought to carry forward the methodology advocated in Hans Rosenberg’s *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* in its attempt to

9. Richard Tilly, “*Soll und Haben*: Recent German Economic History and the Problem of Economic Development,” *Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969): 298–319, quote on 298.

10. *Ibid.*, 318.

11. Walther Hermann, “Fritz Redlich,” *Tradition: Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte* 24 (1979): 1–9. For examples of Alfred Chandler’s influence, see Jürgen Kocka, “The Rise of the Modern Industrial Enterprise in Germany,” in Alfred Chandler and Herman Daems, *Managerial Hierarchies: Comparative Perspectives on the Rise of the Modern Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 77–116, and Norbert Horn and Jürgen Kocka, *Recht und Entwicklung der Grossunternehmen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Wirtschafts-, sozial- und rechtshistorische Untersuchungen zur Industrialisierung in Deutschland, Frankreich, England und den USA* (Göttingen, 1979).

link sociopolitical development to the trend periods in economic history postulated by Kondratieff and other theorists. While one may quarrel with the concept of the Great Depression and with the Bielefelders' concept of "organized capitalism," the attempt to link cyclical economic development and sociopolitical trends has had a profound effect on German historiography in Germany and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

The major concern of most economic historians, however, has been the industrialization of Germany, and here American scholarship has contributed mightily to the reduction and qualification of the perceived role of the State in industrialization as well as to the promotion of a non-antiquarian study of regional development that stresses the significance of economic determinants and that is often comparative in nature. Even Landes, who has so strongly emphasized the governmental promotion of technical education and a technological mind-set in Germany, has sharply criticized the stress on the direct role of the state in industrialization found in the works of some German historians but also in those of the English economic historian, W. O. Henderson.<sup>13</sup> Gerschenkron's stress on the importance of banks and financial institutions in German industrialization has provided a serious theme of research.<sup>14</sup> The path-breaking studies of the textile industry and the regional comparisons in the work of Herbert Kisch, whose early death was a profound loss to the field, provided ammunition against the exaggerated emphasis on the role of the state and other non-economic influences in early industrialization. This work has been carried on in the imaginative and important studies of Landes's student, Frank Tipton, who has done major analyses of regional economic development in Germany and has stressed the lack of parallelism between the processes of German economic growth and German unification.<sup>15</sup> Indeed,

12. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne & Berlin, 1964), and *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen, 1973). On "organized capitalism," see the essays in H. A. Winkler, ed., *Organisierter Kapitalismus: Voraussetzungen und Anfänge* (Göttingen, 1974).

13. Landes in Lockwood, *Japan and Europe*, 103–4.

14. Richard Tilly, *Financial Institutions and the Industrialization of the Rhineland* (Madison, 1966), and "Germany 1815–1870" in Rondo Cameron, ed., *Banking in the Early Stages of Industrialization* (New York, 1967), 151–82.

15. Herbert Kisch, "The textile Industries in Silesia and the Rhineland: A Comparative Study in Industrialization," *Journal of Economic History* 19 (1959): 541–64. Kisch's *Die hausindustriellen Textilgewerbe am Niederrhein vor der Industriellen Revolution: Von der ursprünglichen zur kapitalistischen Akkumulation* (Göttingen, 1981) has been published posthumously in German. See the critical but generous and interesting appreciation by Jürgen Kuczynski, "Herbert Kisch als Wirtschaftshistoriker" in *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1984/2): 187–89. Frank B. Tipton, Jr.,



if the stress which Charles and Richard Tilly have placed on the study of “protoindustrialization, demographic change and industrialism as life experience”<sup>16</sup> in their program for the future study of European economic history is to be realized, then the interest in regional studies and comparisons is likely to continue at the expense of the study of national units and of the role played by non-economic institutions. This is not to say, however, that comparatively informed studies within a “national” framework, such as Steve Hochstadt’s important work on preindustrial migration, will not play an important role in fulfilling the Tilly program. His work, like that of Lutz Berkner, David Sabean, Allan Sharlin, whose tragic death is a great loss to historical demography, and John Knodel and Michael Haines, who have done important work on the later period, demonstrate the significant contributions which Americans have made and are making to the study of German historical demography.<sup>17</sup>

It must be recognized, of course, that the marriage of economics and history is not conducive to harmony and bliss. We are, for example, more appreciative of Alexander Gerschenkron and Hans Rosenberg today than they at times were of one another. Thus, Rosenberg’s review of Gerschenkron’s *Bread and Democracy in Germany*, while duly appreciative of Gerschenkron’s command of the literature on German protectionism and certain of the peculiarities of the German situation,

---

*Regional Variations in the Economic Development of Germany during the Nineteenth Century* (Middletown, Conn., 1976), and “The National Consensus in German Economic History,” *Central European History* 7 (1974): 195–224.

16. Charles Tilly and Richard Tilly, “Agenda for European Economic History in the 1970’s,” *Journal of Economic History* 31 (1971): 184–98, quote on 186.

17. Steve Hochstadt, “Migration in Preindustrial Germany,” *Central European History* 16 (1983): 195–224. See also, Lutz K. Berkner, “Inheritance, Land Tenure and Peasant Family Structure: A German Regional Comparison,” in Jack Goody, Joan Thirkel, and E. P. Thompson, eds., *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200–1800* (Cambridge, 1976), 71–95, and “Peasant Household Organization and Demographic Change in Lower Saxony, 1689–1766,” in Ronald Demos Lee, ed., *Population Patterns in the Past* (New York, 1977), 53–69; David Sabean, “Household Formation and Geographical Mobility: A Family Register Study for a Württemberg Village, 1760–1900,” *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1970): 275–94; Allan Sharlin, “Natural Decrease in Early Modern Cities: A Reconsideration,” *Past and Present* 79 (1978): 126–38; John E. Knodel, *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871–1939* (Princeton, 1974); Michael Haines, “Population and Economic Change in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe: Prussian Upper Silesia, 1840–1913,” *Journal of Economic History* 36 (1976): 334–58. Sharlin’s important studies of the demography of Würzburg, begun before his death, are being completed by Jan de Vries. It should be mentioned that Knodel has produced many articles dealing with the demography of the pre-1871 period.



scoffed at Gerschenkron's treatment of rye as a "reactionary" grain and declared that "Dr. Gerschenkron's knowledge of political and social history is distinctly spotty and, on the whole, quite shallow." He went on to warn that "in our time an economist, who is dissatisfied with syllogistic exercises and eager to analyze the complex processes of a moving 'political economy,' is simply anachronistic unless he is also a well-rounded historian and political scientist."<sup>18</sup> Almost a quarter of a century later, Gerschenkron was afforded the opportunity to return both compliments and criticisms in a review of Rosenberg's *Grosse Depression*. Praising Rosenberg's "sharp eye for the revealing significant trifle, and his vivid and lucid style," Gerschenkron proceeded to contest the very existence of the Great Depression, argued that Rosenberg had himself virtually qualified the concept out of existence and that "despairing of economic indicators, he [Rosenberg] says that criteria of depression which are relevant for social historians or historical sociologists need not be those of an economist—which probably is true but, unfortunately, quite detrimental to a thesis originally based on economic criteria." Nevertheless, Gerschenkron welcomed Rosenberg's work for its originality and heuristic value and as a "courageous attempt to build bridges between quantitative economic analysis and political and social history."<sup>19</sup>

Courage does appear to be a requirement. At the very time when one is filled with pride at being in the avant-garde, one suddenly finds oneself a traditionalist and, worse yet, being called a traditionalist. While Rosenberg was praising Lütge's efforts to come to grips with the "new economic history" of the West, he was already warning against the "trap of quantitative scientism,"<sup>20</sup> and Redlich was no less critical of what he termed the "quasi-economic history . . . practiced by some quantitative analysts."<sup>21</sup> If Richard Tilly thought himself a missionary of some "new economic history" in 1969, he found himself numbered among the "more traditional economic historians"<sup>22</sup> by 1976 for the criticism which he and Rainer Fremdling had levelled

18. *American Historical Review* 50 (1944): 117–18, reprinted in Rosenberg, *Machteliten*, 279–80.

19. *Journal of Economic History* 28 (1968): 154–56. Reprinted in Alexander Gerschenkron, *Continuity in History and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass. 1968), 405–8.

20. *American Historical Review* 72 (1967): 1005–1006. Reprinted in Rosenberg, *Machteliten*, 287.

21. "Potentialities and Pitfalls in Economic History," *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, 2d ser., 6 (1968): 93–108, quote on 108. Reprinted in Redlich, *Two Cultures*, 356–74.

22. Hugh M. Neuberger and Houston H. Stokes, "German Banks and German Growth: A Reply," *Journal of Economic History* 31 (1978): 425–27, quote on 427.

against the econometric analysis of the role of German banks in German economic growth by Hugh Neuburger and Houston Stokes.

Economic history seems most susceptible to the American tradition of always turning up with something newer than new, and “normal” historians of Germany, who are certainly as conservative in their methodological predispositions as those working in other fields, must necessarily feel some anxiety at the thought that Robert Fogel and his merry band are flying in our direction. Certainly there is the danger that the new breed of economic historians may be so caught up in their methodologies and techniques as to fail to make their findings relevant and comprehensible to the great unwashed mass of us who should have taken more calculus, not to mention economics. This would be a pity, however, because we need their services. The greatest dangers we now face are not more theory, quantification, and heuristically useful assumptions about the rationality of behavior, but rather the flight into new forms of historicism that make pretensions to being more progressive than they really are. Nothing can be gained from an escape into sentimental description of the conditions of everyday life for the buttressing of congenial positions no longer susceptible to a theoretical elaboration that can stand the test of empirical verification.

The problem of reconciling the perceptions of economic and social historians and, more generally, of social, scientifically and humanistically oriented historians long antedates, of course, the present conflict between “Green” historians for whom each everyday life experience is, in the words of one of their more brilliant critics, “immediate to God,”<sup>23</sup> and those for whom theory and Max Weber’s ideal types provide the keys to the Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> Over two decades ago, Donald Rohr sharply criticized Theodore Hamerow for attributing the pauperism and immiseration in pre-1848 Germany to industrialization and convincingly argued that the breakdown of the preindustrial order and the great demographic increase of that period antedated industrialization and could only be relieved by economic modernization.<sup>25</sup> Another American historian, Frederick Marquardt, then sought to

23. Klaus Tenfelde, “Schwierigkeiten mit dem Alltag,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10 (1984): 376–94, quote on 391.

24. Jürgen Kocka, “Zurück zur Erzählung? Pläyoder für historische Argumentation,” in *ibid.*: 395–408.

25. Donald G. Rohr, *The Origins of Social Liberalism in Germany* (Chicago, 1963), 12–77. The work criticized by Rohr was Theodore S. Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815–1871* (Princeton, 1958).

strike a balance between Rohr's well-grounded criticism of Hamerow's explanation of the causes of pauperism and dislocation and the latter's stress upon the experiences of economic misery and dislocation. The mass suffering and upheaval of the period, after all, were no less real for the fact that industrialization would someday relieve them.<sup>26</sup>

At a time when there is a dangerous tendency to flee from theory and to romanticize the life and bemoan the condition of the lower classes for sentimental or ideological reasons, some American historians have demonstrated a welcome disposition to combine their command of economic theory and techniques of analysis with close attention to the actual conditions under which their historical subjects operated. The result is a history that is at once more theoretically sound and more sensitive to the everyday existence of all social classes. This is particularly notable in the field of German agrarian history, where William Hagen is revising the traditional picture of Junker-peasant relations in early modern Prussia and demonstrating that, in Brandenburg at least, the Junkers were neither as powerful nor the peasants as downtrodden and quiescent as previously supposed.<sup>27</sup> A similar revision is going on with respect to the later periods of German agrarian history. It is instructive to learn from J. C. Hunt and Robert Moeller that peasants were more market oriented and rational than we thought and that their support of tariffs was not simply the consequence of Junker manipulation.<sup>28</sup> If the political role of the German agrarian classes remains deplorable, it has now at least become more intelligible thanks to analyses informed by a more sophisticated understanding of economics.

Similarly, there is no point to bemoaning the evil consequences of the German inflation of 1914–1923 until one has understood its possible rationality and the potentially even more evil consequences of

26. Frederick D. Marquardt, "Pauperismus in Germany during the *Vormärz*," *Central European History* 11 (1969): 77–88.

27. William W. Hagen, "How Mighty the Junkers? Peasant Rents and Seigneurial Profits in Sixteenth-Century Brandenburg," *Past and Present* 108 (1985): 80–116, and "The Junkers' Faithless Servants: Peasant Insubordination and the Breakdown of Serfdom in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1763–1811," in Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee, *The German Peasantry: Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (London & Sidney, 1986), 71–101.

28. James C. Hunt, "Peasants, Grain Tariffs and Meat Quotas: Imperial German Protectionism Reexamined," *Central European History* 7 (1974): 311–31; Robert G. Moeller, *Peasants, Politics and Pressure Groups in War and Inflation: A Study of the Rhineland and Westphalia* (Chapel Hill, 1986). See also the introduction to the fine collection of essays he just edited, *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History* (Boston, 1986), 1–23.

some of the alternatives. I hope that I and my colleagues in the international and multidisciplinary project on “Inflation and Reconstruction in Germany and Europe, 1914–1924” have done something to place the discussion of the social and political causes and consequences of the inflation on a firmer economic foundation. Insofar as we have succeeded, it is in no small measure due to the work, not only of our leading German economic historian in the group, Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, but also that of the young American cliometrician, Steven Webb, who knows how to dig really good data out of the archives, use it to explore issues of major interest to both historians and economists, and make himself reasonably intelligible to us all.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the time has come for a similar approach to the depression of the 1930s because there can be no “end run” around Knut Borchardt’s arguments that Weimar could not afford her wages and social costs and that there was no alternative to Brüning’s deflationary policies. Even if one argues, as does Charles Maier, that Borchardt’s analysis is “over-determined” by his economic model, the latter can only be challenged on its own terms.<sup>30</sup> And if some think, as I do, that we need to balance Borchardt’s perceptions with analyses of the investment and organizational behavior of German industry and banking, then we certainly stand to gain from the assistance of more technically sophisticated economic historians. It is fortunate, therefore, that a younger generation of economic historians trained to work as economists as well as historians, like Webb and Lon Peters, both of whom have contributed importantly to revising the traditional picture of the role of cartels in pre-1914 Germany, have demonstrated some

29. On the project, see Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, “Inflation und Wiederaufbau in Deutschland und Europa 1914–1924: Ein Projekt der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin und der Stiftung Volkswagenwerk,” *Jahrbuch der historischen Forschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Berichtsjahr 1983* (Munich, 1984), 40–50. For Webb’s work in this area, see n. 3 and his “The Supply of Money and Reichsbank Financing of Government and Corporate Debt in Germany, 1919–1923,” *Journal of Economic History* 44 (1984): 499–507. See also, Gerald D. Feldman, Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, Gerhard A. Ritter, and Peter-Christian Witt, eds., *The German Inflation: A Preliminary Balance* (Berlin and New York, 1982) and *The Experience of Inflation: International and Comparative Studies* (Berlin and New York, 1984).

30. For Borchardt’s controversial views on the Great Depression in Germany, see the three concluding essays in Knut Borchardt, *Wachstum, Krisen, Handlungsspielräume der Wirtschaftspolitik* (Göttingen, 1982), 165–224. For Maier’s confrontation with them, see his “Die Nicht-Determiniertheit ökonomischer Modelle: Überlegungen zu Knut Borchardts These von der ‘kranken Wirtschaft’ der Weimarer Republik,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 11 (1985): 275–94.

of the techniques that might be used to deal with similar problems for the subsequent period.<sup>31</sup>

Whether politicians can ignore or dispense with their economic advisors remains to be seen, but historians need them even when they bring unwelcome news in ways we do not fully understand. If nothing else, economic historians provide perspectives and evidence that cannot be disregarded, and it is instructive that Robert Fogel and G. R. Elton could write a common conclusion to their recently published debate on history that is of great relevance to our field at this time.

Of all the elements that affect the quality of an historical work, none is more important than the thoroughness of the search for evidence and the care that is taken in the investigation of the provenance, domain, and reliability of the evidence. We take issue with those who argue that details are subordinate to interpretation, not because we celebrate facts for their own sake, but because the quality of an historical interpretation is critically dependent on the quality of the details out of which it is spun. . . .<sup>32</sup>

This is the scholarly framework within which we can and should welcome the testing of explicitly stated and demonstrably relevant theories and methodologies, and I, for one, would be interested to learn what the newest of the new economic historians have to tell us. Whatever the type of economic history, however, let us hope that the curve of American contributions to German economic history rises.

31. For illustrations of the techniques that might be used to deal with some of the problems I have raised, see Steven B. Webb, "Tariffs, Cartels, Technology, and Growth in the German Steel Industry, 1879-1914," *Journal of Economic History* 40 (1980): 309-29, and Lon Peters, "Are Cartels Unstable? The German Steel Works Association Before World War I," in Gary Saxenhouse and Gavin Wright, *Technique, Spirit and Form in the Making of the Modern Economies: Essays in Honor of William N. Parker: Research in Economic History: Supplement 3* (Greenwich, Conn. and London, 1984), 61-85.

32. Robert W. Fogel and G. R. Elton, *Which Road to the Past? Two Views of History* (New Haven and London, 1983), 125.