

requiring ongoing vigilance (175, 182). In Chapter 8, “Apocalyptic *Angst*,” the author draws on his own experience with palpable fears of extinction posed by nuclear power and environmental destruction in the peace movement of the 1980s. This movement presented fear as a healthy response to the threat of extinction, galvanizing many West Germans into protest, and ultimately ushering in new political agents, such as the Green Party.

The final two chapters (“German *Angst*” and the conclusion) open up new vistas, suggesting contemporary fears and potential threats to democracy in unified Germany and the broader global context. We are also reminded of the book’s limitations touched on in Biess’s introduction—most prominently, his sole focus on fears of the “majority society” (20). How might discourses of fear in unified Germany appear from intersectional vantages that include the ongoing racial othering of minorities in German society (particularly Muslims and refugees), or the socio-political impact of feminist and queer movements (in AIDS activism around 1980, for example)? Who is the subject of an “emotional regime,” and how does change between different regimes take place? How should we account for fear’s complex intertwinement with other emotions?

At times of turbulent politics and proliferating uncertainty, such as with the present global resurgence of right-wing populism and white supremacy, as well as the renewed awareness of human fragility in the face of COVID-19 and the climate crisis, fear arguably gains the upper hand. The prescience of Biess’s book’s lucid and thought-provoking exploration of the unpredictable relationship between fear and democracy through the example of the contingencies of West German history should draw close attention from a broad readership.

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The Party’s Over: The End of the Welfare State Boom in Western Europe

**By Alfred C. Mierzejewski. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021.
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The first years of the West German socialdemocratic-liberal coalition and Willy Brandt’s chancellorship (1969–1974) were dominated by a new foreign policy, *Ostpolitik*, which focused on *détente* with the Warsaw Pact states and earned Brandt the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971. In addition, the early 1970s were marked by a policy of liberalizing society, an aspiration expressed in Brandt’s first government declaration in 1969 in the now famous phrase “Mehr Demokratie wagen.” The literature on the history of the Brandt era tends to focus on these achievements, which are strongly anchored in the public consciousness. At the same time, however, the first years of the SPD-FDP coalition were also strongly marked by initiatives aimed at expanding the welfare state. Alfred C. Mierzejewski devotes his source-rich study to the Pension Reform Act of 1972, which in his estimation not only represented “one of the largest social reforms of the era” but can serve as an important example of “the culmination of the boom in welfare state growth that occurred in Western Europe after World War II” (xviii). The intention of this pension reform was not only to improve the material situation of pensioners, but also to restructure the pension insurance system to a large extent. The Social Democrat Walter Arendt, who headed the Ministry of Labor,

saw the great goal of the reform in the decommodification of labor, as Mierzejewski argues in reference to a term introduced into welfare state research by Gøsta Esping-Andersen: “economic considerations” were no longer supposed to play a role in the decision about the time of retirement (166).

The extent to which the Pension Reform Act actually represented a culmination in the process of welfare state building was also shown by the fact that there was no principled political resistance to an expansion of pension insurance: “There was no anti-welfare state party” (216). Social policy was popular, especially at a time when the parties had large milieus of their own and could tailor their policies to the betterment of their own clientele. The CDU/CSU, which had to go into opposition in 1969 after twenty years in government, remembered that its pension reform of 1957, which for the first time dynamically adjusted the level of pensions to wage trends, contributed in no small measure to winning an absolute majority in the Bundestag elections that followed later that year. Consequently, in the legislative process and parliamentary debates, the CDU/CSU looked for ways to outdo the Ministry of Labor and the SPD on pension reform, which was placed on the political agenda immediately after the Brandt cabinet took office. In fact, it succeeded in exerting considerable influence over the law, not least because the socialdemocratic-liberal coalition had lost its majority in the German Bundestag in mid-1972 due to defections to the CDU camp. Above all, the CDU pushed through incentives in the law for retirees to work – which contradicted Brandt’s and Arendt’s goal of a decommodification of work and a clear separation of work and retirement, but was grudgingly accepted by the Social Democratic members of the Bundestag. The FDP, the SPD’s coalition partner, was reluctant to criticize the law: to be sure, during the third reading of the law, FDP deputy Hansheinrich Schmidt gave the classic liberal argument that the growth of the welfare state and the individual’s growing social security contribution could lead to a reduction in the savings rate and a declining willingness to take personal responsibility. Nevertheless, the FDP parliamentary group approved the law, not least because it had succeeded in serving its clientele of the self-employed who could now buy into the pension insurance system at favorable conditions.

The reason for the broad approval of pension reform, however, was not only the common aim to win votes. Rather, all political forces at the beginning of the 1970s assumed that Keynesian demand-management policies would not only succeed in avoiding recessions, but that “the cornucopia of wealth that seemed to be available” (138) would allow continued generosity in pension assessment and the admission of previously uninsured persons. There were some voices, especially from the policy advisory circles in Bonn and from the Bundesbank, warning against too much economic optimism and pointing to imminent demographic shifts that could put the pension insurance system in a precarious position. These voices were not heard. In fact, the year after the pension reform law was passed, a recession set in, causing serious difficulties for the pension insurance system and making further expansion of the welfare state impossible for years to come.

Mierzejewski constructs his account as a “conventional historical narrative” (xviii) and builds his argument on the sources: politicians’ papers, organizational files of the parties and their parliamentary groups, archival records of the ministries involved, along with parliamentary debates and discussions in sociopolitical journals, form the material on which the study is based. In this way, a meticulous report on the preparation, parliamentary deliberation, and adoption of the pension reform law has emerged. It makes good reading. Nevertheless, it creates a kind of tunnel vision: Mierzejewski does not question pension reform in terms of its significance for the reform policy of the socialdemocratic-liberal coalition and its appearance to a wider public. The SPD’s reform aspirations, in particular, did not merge with Ostpolitik on the one hand and an expansion of the welfare state on the other. The goal—at least that was the slogan in the 1969 Bundestag election campaign—was the creation of a “modern Germany.” Statehood as such was to be subjected to modernization. The mastermind of this undertaking was Horst Ehmke, head of the federal chancellor’s office. He appears only in passing in Mierzejewski’s book. Here, one would have liked

to know whether and how the pension reform fits into the idea of a modern and a modernized state, which was also in competition with the GDR. Apart from that, the subtitle of the book seems somewhat exaggerated: The focus of the study is not the end of the welfare state boom in Western Europe, but the—for the time being—last hurrah of the German welfare state. Mierzejewski deals with the determinants of the recession and the end of the *trente glorieuses*, the great postwar boom, from the mid-1970s onward and the consequences for the welfare state only in the epilogue of his study. But anyone looking for a precise study of a crucial stage in the history of the German welfare state will benefit greatly from reading this book.

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