

THE RESTORATION OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT IN POSTWAR GERMANY: An Essential Biographical and Historical Reference Work

M.d.B. Volksvertretung im Wiederaufbau 1946–1961. Bundestagskandidaten und Mitglieder der westzonalen Vorparlamente. Eine biographische Dokumentation.

Herausgegeben von Martin Schumacher. Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 2000. 104 and 574 p. illus. ISBN 3 7700 5224 2. DM 55.00

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Scholarship flourishes when the minute, sometimes unglamorous work of gathering facts, verifying dates and names, times and places underpins its intellectual goals. Modern information technology with its prodigious capacity to create and manipulate massive files of information now makes much of this kind of piecemeal work less laborious and potentially more rewarding. It creates new modalities of analysis and combination. The justification for these remarks can be easily demonstrated by an examination of the German work: *Bundestag MPs: Reconstruction of Popular Parliamentary Representation 1946–1961. A Biographical Compilation of Candidates for the Bundestag, and Members of the Non-Parliamentary Deliberative and Consultative Bodies in the Western Zones of Post-war Germany*. This free translation of the title of a work of encyclopaedic scope, edited by Martin Schumacher, will indicate what the volume embraces. The details supplied in the subtitle are particularly noteworthy because the membership of the various advisory and provisional bodies created in the confused and tense days of the immediate postwar era in West Germany and Berlin cannot be easily established. Without access to major research collections strong in German official publications, this task has been until now very difficult to carry out reliably. These bodies had the job of preparing the ground for the creation of elected assemblies and the drafting of what became the provisional constitution, called the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of West Germany. The Basic Law came into operation on 23 May 1949.

Like its 1994 companion biographical volume dealing with the fate of Reichstag members from the Weimar era under National Socialism,¹ this volume also has a long and indispensable introduction (pp. 11–82 in double columns) by the Editor. Richly footnoted with a myriad of bibliographical references, his introduction is invaluable to researchers into the personalities and course of developments at this crucial stage of Germany's recovery from the disasters of Hitler's rule. So extensive is the bibliographical apparatus throughout the compilation (works by and about the various persons listed) that the compendium might merit being called a bio-bibliographical handbook. The term 'bio-bibliographical' is nowadays out of fashion, but the utility of such compilations for political and parliamentary research,

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¹ For a review of the biographical dictionary of the Weimar Republic's Reichstag, see pp. 179–83 in 'Biographical Dictionaries of Parliamentarians: Considerations and Examples', by R.L. Cope in the Australian Senate's series *Papers on Parliament*, no. 33, May 1999.

particularly with the Schumacher volume as a guide, fosters the wish to resurrect it for similar scholarly undertakings in Australia.

Martin Schumacher explains in his lengthy introduction that even with the enormous amount of detail in the present work, it cannot be considered as achieving more than 'preliminary work' towards a complete parliamentary handbook of the Bundestag's membership as well as of Bundestag election candidates. He details what needs still to be done, and this causes us to reflect on the parallel situation in Australia.² Putting aside differences of interpretation of what is meant by 'parliamentary handbook', we might agree that an assessment of the quality (reliability and coverage) of the various Australian parliamentary handbooks listing the membership of the parliaments would be a useful exercise to carry out. It might well prove more enlightening (or sobering) than many students might suspect. This is not the place to attempt this assessment, but it is appropriate to mention that in the Parliament of NSW the numerous inaccuracies, especially in dates, uncovered in the *NSW Parliamentary Record* by the compilers of the indispensable five-volume *Consolidated Index of the Minutes of the Proceedings [of the NSW Legislative Council] and Parliamentary Papers, 1856–1954* (issued 1955 to 1978) came as a surprise at the time. Those deficiencies are said to have been subsequently rectified. As for lists of candidates in parliamentary elections, the compilation of consolidated lists, perhaps delimited by decades, is a desideratum, which one would hope the respective parliamentary libraries might fill for their respective jurisdictions. Most of them have the necessary computers, technical competence and the printed sources with the information to carry out such a worthwhile project.

In this alphabetical record of Bundestag members and aspiring members from 1949 to 1961, the biographical entries cover some 480 pages in double columns. They summarise the salient facts: date of birth and death, religion when known, profession and place of death or residence, name of electorate or state contested or represented, whether elected directly or from a list of candidates for a party, details of time spent as a federal MP (that is, M.d.B.) or state MP (that is, M.d.L.), as well as membership in various other bodies and assemblies. This intermingling of successful and unsuccessful contestants for parliamentary office makes interesting sociological and genealogical reading. Also of interest is what one might surmise from the fact that many unsuccessful candidates sought election from the second vote that is given to party lists. The position of each candidate on a party list is indicated in the following way: Walter Kaufmann: LL Rheinland-Pfalz (8/14) DG

² Martin Schumacher has carried out basic bibliographical work on identifying and listing German parliamentary handbooks from prior to 1803 up to contemporary times. This work is valuable for his remarks on the study of parliamentary handbooks; he also points to the importance of the printed catalogues of the parliamentary libraries in Germany as guides to 'lost historical collections' (p. 14). This remark will not be lost on researchers in Australia with knowledge of what the state parliamentary libraries here once represented. The details of the Schumacher bibliography and finding list are as follows:

Deutsche Parlamentshandbücher. Bibliographie und Standortnachweis. (Heft 8, Bibliographien zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der Politischen Parteien). Bearbeitet von Martin Schumacher. Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 1986. 180pp.

(1957): that is, he was placed no. 8 on the list (LL: Landesliste) of 14 names for the State of Rheinland-Pfalz as a member of the Deutsche Gemeinschaft (DG) in the general election of 1957, but did not get elected (p. 198).

References are supplied to other family members who were active at some stage in politics, or whose relationship to noteworthy personalities may not be immediately obvious (for example, Franz Böhm is the son-in-law of the famous writer/historian Ricarda Huch). In the case of elected members, a résumé of the member's public career is given. With regard, for example, to Konrad Adenauer, whose political career spanned some five decades, concise details are given of his membership of legislatures in Prussia, and local and city government, his persecution under the Nazis, the vagaries of his career under the American military government, his portfolios in the Bundestag and his role as leader of the Christian Democratic Union. Information is presented in rather small print, relying on a scheme of abbreviations and a standardised form of entry. The use of abbreviations and acronyms is a strong feature of the work and made the reviewer wish the publisher had thought of printing the pages with them (83–97) on coloured paper to facilitate quick retrieval.

The details of Adenauer's political and public career are followed by a listing of sources (publications, archival materials in party and other hands), which covers almost a full page in double columns in fairly small typeface. Naturally, the German literature on this figure alone is huge; this listing would be an excellent guide to what to study first. One finds similar rich information on the other major parliamentary figures of the period (for example, Gerstenmaier, Brentano, Brandt, Carlo Schmid, Helmut Schmidt, Franz J. Strauss, Kurt Schumacher are a few). The work eminently fulfils the role of a detailed ready reference source on German federal politicians for the era 1949 to 1961.

Schumacher makes a number of observations in his introduction on the creation of a German political culture after the ravages of 1933 to 1945. He defends the listing of unsuccessful parliamentary candidates as follows:

Investigations of present-day election results also concern themselves almost exclusively with those representatives who were elected and neglect the unsuccessful candidates, who, however, are part of the political culture (78, column 1).

A number of indexes supplement the main listing of names. These indexes cover pp. 482–573 (some in three columns per page; most are in double columns). Lists of names in various groupings are given, sometimes in extremely detailed form. Included are names of women elected to the Bundestag, names of representatives from Berlin, lists of principal candidates in the party lists under states, lists of successful and unsuccessful candidates for electorates (also under states, with percentages of votes gained) as well as a listing of the birthplaces of successful parliamentary candidates. All this material, somewhat overwhelming in totality, provides researchers with data they would not find gathered together in one

publication and indexed under this wide range of approaches to the subject. Here we see the new modalities for research being realised. The only thing the reviewer found wanting was a listing of parliamentary officials. It may be that such lists already exist, but that is not known to this writer.

Whilst the biographical listing of successful and unsuccessful parliamentary candidates is of prime interest and permanent reference value, many readers will find the masterly introduction of even greater value. It is virtually an examination of the many strands of history that make up the texture of nascent parliamentary democracy in Germany. Schumacher outlines attempts by persons with a tainted past from the Nazi years to gain parliamentary membership. His remarks on Theodor Heuss, the greatly respected first President of the Federal Republic, contain surprises about equivocal episodes in his career in the 1930s (p. 66 and footnote 14). Attempts by the East Germans to 'unmask' former Nazis in the Bundestag are also described, including actual misinformation. A few cases of covert East German agents being elected MPs in West Germany are also mentioned.

In seeking to re-establish a political and parliamentary elite in West Germany after 1945, the chief difficulty was to find reliable men and women with experience in administration and parliamentary government. Political exiles from the Nazi era began to return to Germany and some were anxious to be re-elected to parliament. The former Chancellor Josef Wirth was one of these (p. 75); he and others failed to find support from their former parties and could not gain a seat in the Bundestag. The dramatic circumstances surrounding the election of the first Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, who gained office on 15 September 1949 by one vote, are described in some detail (pp. 48–52). Also worth mentioning is the section devoted to the Federal Assembly (Bundesversammlung) which has the task of electing the Federal President (p. 34 ff.). This body has been spoken of as a possible model for Australians to study if the need arises for us to elect a President. The editor mentions a fact that is little remarked on: although this body consists in equal parts of the members of the Bundestag and members selected from the state legislatures, persons not members of the state parliaments can be chosen by the state bodies to represent them in the Federal Assembly (p. 34, column 1).

There are a number of equally important aspects of this book, which could be mentioned, but perhaps enough has been said to make it clear that the work is a major contribution in its field. It is indispensable to students of contemporary German parliamentary history and to political history as well. It is somewhat monumental in its detail and not always easy to use without some prior familiarity with its scope and organization. The publishers might find the use of different coloured paper to distinguish sections of the work a useful device. The work is strongly recommended for inclusion in research libraries with strengths in German and European history and politics.

This work is one of the now considerable range of scholarly research and reference publications issued under the auspices of the Commission for the History of Parliamentary Government and Political Parties. With headquarters in Bonn, this body has an excellent website and appears unique in both the range of its publications and in the official support and funds it receives from the German Federal Government and that of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia. Australians can only admire and envy what is being done on parliamentary and political party research in Germany. We might also learn from the Commission's experience. Dr Schumacher would be a useful person to consult.³ ▲

³ Fuller details on the nature of the Commission and its work is found in a review of one of its earlier publications in 'The Saga of the German Reichstag and its Library' by R. L. Cope in *Legislative Studies*, v. 13, no1 (Spring 1998). See p.107. The Commission's website is at <www.kgparl.de>.