

Dr. Wilhelm Schultz aus Darmstadt: Inspirator von Karl Marx und Weggefährtin von Georg Buechner. Walter Grab. Frankfurt am Main: Gutenberg Buechergilde, 1987, 550 pages, DM 62.

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The Italian Benedetto Croce once observed that "all history is contemporary history." Croce meant that historians always look on the past from a vantage point in the present. Every historian carries the problems and challenges of his or her time into his or her researches. Past events possess no intrinsic meaning. The past is mute. The burden of history is to make the past speak. Croce judged historians by their success in awakening what was living in the past. To Croce this meant that history writing afforded the opportunity to reveal the concept of liberty realizing itself in human affairs.

Croce's position ran counter to the dominant historicist conception of history that reigned throughout the nineteenth century. Historians such as Leopold von Ranke, Henrich von Treitschke, Heinrich von Sybel, Johann Gustav Droysen, and their followers carried historicism into ascendancy. Early in the century Ranke had called on historians to forego judging the past and give themselves over exclusively to describing the past "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" (as it really happened). In practice nineteenth century historicists served as the apologists for the reigning social and political order. The historicists masked their conservative intent behind a call for scientific objectivity. No one ever accused Sybel, Treitschke, and Droysen of being shallow optimists. Rather, their strength was their claim of realism. Certainly, this was not the best of possible worlds. Nevertheless, it was the only possible world given the "facts." The historicist's message was clear. It was impossible to judge the past. Historians can only try to describe it. What has happened cannot be changed and what is happening lies beyond our control.

History writing has changed a good deal in the twentieth century. Historicism has fallen into disgrace. Today social historians and clio-metricians work to open new perspectives. Croce's conception of history, however, has rarely found favor among professional historians. Most of today's social historians aspire to scientific objectivity. The few who would put the study of history to some practical end are considered tainted with subjective or ideological bias. The net result is that all too often the new history resembles the old. Monographs multiply like mushrooms. The lesson never changes. We are powerless in the face of history.

The Israeli historian Walter Grab has done a great deal to combat this conception of history. His work is subtle and convincing. In his latest book *Dr. Wilhelm Schultz aus Darmstadt* he succeeds in demonstrating that there was a vibrant democratic opposition in the midst of the reaction that swept across Germany after the Napoleonic Wars. The existence of this indigneous democratic movement is not a matter of mere

"academic" interest. Throughout the nineteenth century and the first four decades of the twentieth century German historians have portrayed the idea of democracy as something that was imported from the west. Traditionally, politicians who were eager to further first autocratic and, then, fascist ends argued that there was something innately "un-German" about their democratic opponents. Walter Grab has done more than any other historian to show the falseness of this position. In this book he uses the career of Wilhelm Schultz to show that there was a democratic alternative to Germany's authoritarian past.

Wilhelm Schultz was born in 1797 and died in 1860. Schultz was one of the few individuals who lived through the three waves of revolution that followed Napoleon's defeat and culminated in the events of 1848. Schultz was unique. Most revolutionaries fell to the wayside. Some made compromises; others went into permanent exile. Schultz labored on as a publicist and democrat. Twice imprisoned and twice forced to flee to Switzerland, Schultz remained committed to the cause of Germany's unity and the principle of the solidarity of all oppressed peoples.

In 1843, Schultz published his *Die Bewegung der Produktion (The Movement of Production)*. In this work Schultz outlined his theory of materialism and the relationship of political economy and society. Two years later Marx drew on Schultz's ideas in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In 1848, Schultz was called to the Paul's Church for the Frankfurt Assembly. The Prussian Army ended the hope for democratic reform. Many fled. Schultz continued to fight for the cause of democracy.

Grab's book is important for three reasons. First, the story of the German democratic tradition has been neglected for too long. Schultz played a central role in the movement. Second, Grab succeeds in demonstrating that Schultz was not alone in his aspirations. Schultz was a close friend of the poets Georg Herwegh, Ferdinand Freiligrath, Gottfried Keller, and Georg Buechner. Grab makes it clear that there was a community of democratically minded individuals at work in the first half of the nineteenth century. Finally, Schultz's book *Die Bewegung der Produktion* offers a valuable aid in constructing the intellectual history of the development of historical materialism.

This is a solid piece of work. Walter Grab has made a convincing case for recognizing the importance of Wilhelm Schultz for German democracy. At precisely the moment that historicism was triumphing in the German universities, Schultz was leading the fight for national unity and democracy. The university historians and their disciples charged the democrats with being unpatriotic and utopian. Wilhelm Schultz confounds this image. He was a German patriot and he was not a dreamer.

The history of the democratic movement in nineteenth century Germany has a special significance in the present. Germans born after 1945 must find a usable past. There is perhaps no more important work that a German historian can do than to demonstrate a democratic alternative to the reactionary and fascist course that recent German history took. Germans can find support for their work in building a democratic state in the study of their past. Walter Grab deserves credit for his pioneering studies and reminding us that the task of the critical historian is to discover in the past those moments which offer us an opportunity to make a better present.