

Christian Twardowski: Weiblichkeit unter der Gewalt des bayerischen Sowjets. Verstöße gegen die Sittlichkeit als Mittel der Stigmatisierung der Linksextremen im Bayern des Frühjahrs 1919 [Femininity under the Rule of the Bavarian Soviets. Violations Against Morality as a Means of Stigmatising the Extreme Left in Bavaria in the Spring of 1919], Hamburg, Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2011. 546 pp. – ISBN 9783830056751.

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As Christian Twardowski points out in the book under review, on 11 April 1919, a political poster asked the population of Munich, if ‘according to the communist ideal, they will really tolerate it that every women will belong to any man and that in the shortest time all women will become whores? (p.469)’ (April 11, 1919) [*Duldet Ihr wirklich, daß nach Kommunistenideal alle Frauen jedem Manne gehören und in kürzester Frist restlos zu Huren werden?*]. Four days later, another leaflet, which was dropped from the air onto the city’s streets, posed a similar question: ‘Are you going to wait (...) until your daughters and wives will become fair game for the desires of Jewish men and lechers’ (p.1) [*Wollt Ihr warten (.) bis eure Töchter und Frauen Freiwild werden für die Gelüste jüdischer Herren und Wüstlinge?*]. These posters were produced by pro-government forces in response to the Bavarian Councils’ Republic, a short-lived utopian attempt to introduce communist rule to Bavaria. It was led by Munich’s revolutionary councils – bottom up institutions created during the upheaval of November 1918 to give a voice to the soldiers and workers who had largely been excluded from Imperial Germany’s top-down process of political decision-making.

As is well known, almost as soon as it began on 7 April 1919, the experiment failed: the Bavarian Councils’ Republic never extended its rule beyond Munich and its slim chances of survival were fundamentally weakened by its lack of internal cohesion, an absence of political support, and the hostility of its opponents – including the vast majority of Bavarians. Nevertheless, the Councils’ Republic posed a significant challenge to Germany’s post-war political order. The challenge was magnified by the broader pan-European climate of fear that occurred as the old continent was shaken by the rise of Bolshevism and the collapse of state and imperial authority across vast swathes of Central and Eastern Europe. Only weeks earlier, Béla Kun had proclaimed a Communist Republic in Budapest. As a result, a utopian vision of a new Central European Communist Republic became fractionally realistic.

The threat posed by the Bavarian Councils’ Republic was made worse when it gained two crucial micro-victories. On 13 April, its supporters defeated an attempt to oust them from within that was organized by the Social Democratic government of Bavaria, which had fled to Bamberg. Three days later, pro-Councils’ Republic forces defeated soldiers loyal to the Social Democrats to the north of Munich at Dachau. But these successes also marked the start of their downfall. They ensured that the Bavarian government gave a green light to the ‘bloodhound’ Gustav Noske and the Weimar government to crush the Councils’ experiment. Even though the situation in Munich meant that the rule of the Councils was already unravelling of its own accord, the forces of the young Republic ruthlessly did so. Between 29 April and 6 May, the violence committed by pro-state and anti-councils forces left over 1000 people dead. The legacies of this unrepentant display of state power would be felt in

Bavarian and German politics for decades. They included the transformation of the once liberal and socialist leaning city of Munich into the capital of Weimar's anti-Republican right.

Given that it was a fundamental juncture in twentieth century German history, Munich's revolution and its aftermath has long been the subject of historical attention. In *Weiblichkeit unter der Gewalt des bayerischen Sowjets*, Christian Twardowski adds a further level of analysis. His book's purpose is to explore the role of the language of sexual morality in the anti-Councils movement. Its main point is that the leaflets that warned of the dangers of the communalization of women may have fallen from the skies, but the language and ideas that they contained had their own genealogy and history. To explore it, this book is divided into two parts. The first 150 pages provide an introduction that includes an explanation of the author's theoretical approach, the problematic nature of the available sources, and 11 numerically organised sections outlining the long history of ideas concerning the socialisation of women. They include discussions on the subject in Plato and among Münster's Anabaptists, as well as in the political discourses of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Alexandra Kollontai. This background information serves as a long first course, before the second half of the book analyses the anti-councils propaganda during the spring of 1919. It does so through four 'explanatory approaches' [*Erklärungsansätze*].

The first deals with the contemporary associations between 'unmoral' Bohemian lifestyles and the new political phenomena of Bolshevism. The same themes continue to influence the second, longer 'explanatory approach', which focuses upon the social stigma that grew up around the issue of Bohemianism and sexual morality during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Its best sections deal with the writings of Erich Mühsam, the author of several sexually controversial works that challenged conservative understandings of sexual morality, who later became one of the leading figures in the Councils' Republic. This retracing of literary and theoretical discussions helps us to understand the longer term historical memories that re-emerged in 1919 and associated figures such as Mühsam or Erich Landauer with sexual immorality, regardless of what they actually said or did. In the third 'explanatory approach' Twardowski turns to the relationship between the anti-councils propaganda of 1919 and European anti-Semitism's long tradition of accusing Jews of sexual perversion. Twardowski tackles this theme in five chronological sections that start with anti-Semitic stigma in the middle ages and continue through more recent collective memories that include the analysis of anti-Semitic topoi such as ritual murders and Jewish sodomy. As with the previous 'explanatory approaches', Twardowski sets out to show how these strands of discursive thought powerfully re-emerged in the context of the short lived Bavarian Councils' Republic.

The fourth and final 'explanatory approach' focuses upon accusations of sexual transgression during the First World War. Rightly, Twardowski draws attention to the fundamental role that accusations of sexual transgression played in wartime propaganda. He shows how the discourses of immorality that were used by the anti-Councils' movement overlapped with war propaganda that was produced both for and against Germany. In this sense, the appeal to protect the bourgeois women of Bavaria drew upon and mirrored tropes that called upon German men to protect German women from the threat of rape at the hands of enemy soldiers; just as their representation of the Communists as sexual perverts appropriated discursive patterns present in allied propaganda which portrayed German soldiers as out of control 'Huns' who were willing to rape and murder women and children in France and Belgium.

This book is the published version of the author's 2010 doctoral dissertation, undertaken at the University of Kiel. At over 500 pages in length, it is more than hard going for the reader. However, even if this poorly structured book is unnecessarily long, the text does contain the odd gem of information. Among its most important, it reminds us that the anti-sexual morality crusade helped to solidify the coalition of forces out to destroy the Councils' Republic, even if those forces, such as Bavarian conservatives and Social Democrats, had previously been on opposite sides of political debate. However, there are simply too many better books on the Bavarian Revolution to suggest that this study will have much of an impact.¹ With a current price of €98, it will find few readers outside of the most ardent and dedicated of specialists.

¹ Superior work includes: Eliza Ablovatski: "Cleansing the Red Nest". Counterrevolution and White Terror in Munich and Budapest, 1919, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 2004; Martin Geyer: *Verkehrte Welt. Revolution, Inflation und Moderne. München 1914-1924*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998; Heinrich Hillmayr: *Roter und Weißer Terror in Bayern nach 1918*, München, Nusser, 1974; Christoph Jahr: *Armageddon an der Isar. Medien, Macht und Massenmobilisierung während der Revolution in Bayern 1918/19*. In: Kurt Imhof, Peter Schulz (eds.): *Kommunikation und Revolution*, Zürich, Seismo, 1998, pp. 171-184; Adam R. Seipp: *The Ordeal of Peace. Demobilization and the Urban Experience in Britain and Germany, 1917-1921*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009; Klaus Theweleit: *Male Fantasies*, 2 Vols. trans. C. Turner, S. Conway, and E. Carter, Cambridge, Polity, 1987; Benjamin Ziemann: *War Experiences in Rural Germany 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.