

Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich. By Shelley Baranowski. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xvii + 254 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$65.00. ISBN: 0-521-833-523.

Reviewed by Hans-Liudger Dienel

Shelley Baranowski's *Strength through Joy* (*Kraft durch Freude*, or KdF) is an impressive and convincing interpretation of a suborganization of the German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront), successor to the dissolved unions in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. Baranowski acknowledges that in collective remembrance, KdF remains one of the assets of the Nazi period. At the time, it was the largest leisure and travel agency in the world and is credited with building up tourism in Germany on a mass scale. Shelley Baranowski has written the first English-language general history of "Strength through Joy," which claimed to have established a seamless bond between work and leisure, constructing a "third way" that departed from (Soviet, French, and Weimar) "socialistic collectivism" and (American) market-based consumption. KdF tried to integrate work and leisure, to improve working conditions, and to overcome conflicts between labor and management, thus reinforcing the "beauty of work" (*Schönheit der Arbeit*, SdA). At the same time, KdF helped to strengthen economic growth and to bolster rearmament efforts (p. 39). It was also a racist organization that excluded Jewish and other "non-Aryan" citizens.

KdF claimed to have fundamentally changed the cultures of work and leisure. That was the ideology. Baranowski shows that the reality was different. For one thing, KdF did not have the budget to carry out its ambitious goals. Employers contributed little money for upgrading work conditions. Many improvements in the plants had to be financed by the employees and thus were seldom implemented (p. 116). KdF faced even bigger budgetary problems when it attempted to improve working conditions in the countryside and to beautify rural villages. By 1939, whereas thirty-four thousand plants had participated in measures to improve working conditions, only 708 villages had undergone beautification.

KdF was more successful as a tourist bureau. It was, in fact, the most popular organization of the Nazi era. Its excursions and vacations were half the price of the packages offered by social democratic organizations before 1933. Baranowski describes its successful mix of offerings as “luxurious spartanism.” Additionally, KdF improved the international reputation of the Nazi regime. Its International Bureau for Joy and Work eventually became a rival of the International Labour Office (ILO), which had been founded in Geneva in 1919 to promote international recognition of human and labor rights.

Baranowski carefully traces the development of KdF as it organized German tourism during the country’s six years of peace followed by six years of war. While, at its start, more than 60 percent of the tours were to established spas and recreation resorts, by the outbreak of the war only 5 percent of travelers went to such places (p. 133). Class tensions remained, despite claims to the contrary. Party bigwigs made up a growing share of the vacationers on the most attractive KdF journeys, and they were also more visible on its famous ocean-liner cruises. During the war, KdF was partly transformed into an operation that served the cultural needs of the troops.

According to Baranowski, tourist culture in the two German states that emerged after the war broke with KdF tradition. However, I perceive similarities between KdF and the tourism organized by FDGB (Free German Confederation of Trade Unions), which copied the KdF’s cruises, and others in the socialist German Democratic Republic.

Any discussion of the business side of KdF’s history is largely missing from this book. Although KdF was a “company,” with more than half-a-dozen ocean liners, thousands of employees, and tens of thousands of volunteers, the author gives little space and less statistical analysis to its organization, management, financing, and revenues.

Another weakness of the book is that it does not compare KdF’s tours with other travel arrangements, such as trips taken by individuals. While Baranowski acknowledges that, according to German tourist statistics, KdF never booked more than 11 percent of overnight stays, she does not discuss how KdF’s holiday

packages and tours measured up against the majority of tourist experiences in Germany during those years.

Baranowski's analysis of tourists' attitudes toward the company is largely drawn from complaints she found in KdF files and in the undercover situation reports of the Social Democratic Party in exile, headquartered in Prague, which were largely negative. She has not supplied an annotated bibliography. In dealing with the question of whether to translate idioms, Baranowski attempts an interesting compromise. On the one hand, she applies the English term, such as "strength through joy," rather than the German *Kraft durch Freude*, and she refers to "beauty of work," rather than to *Schönheit der Arbeit*. On the other hand, she uses German abbreviations (KdF, SdA), rather than English ones, in the text.

But these are details. Anyone interested in the history of Nazi Germany, in mass-market tourism, and in an account of a twentieth-century attempt to create a balance between work and life should read Baranowski's thorough and provocative study.

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