

*Meister und ihre Gesellen. Arbeitskonflikte im Bäckergewerbe Hamburgs 1890–1914.* By Friederike Föcking. 'Münchner Studien zur neueren und neuesten Geschichte', vol. 1. Frankfurt/Main, Berlin, Berne, New York, Paris and Vienna: Peter Lang. 1994. 224 pp. DM 65.

It is now more than two decades since Hartmut Kaelble and Heinrich Volkmann first postulated that the growth of trade union and employer organizations in Wilhelmine Germany led to a rationalization of conflict in the decade before 1914. Although this interpretation has been sharply criticized in recent years, most notably by Friedhelm Boll, rationalization continues to be an important paradigm in the writing of German strike history. As such it forms the starting point of Friederike Föcking's study of industrial conflict in Hamburg's bakeries between 1890 and 1914.

Following a useful discussion of the preconditions for unionization, in which Föcking emphasizes the importance of economic and technological factors in the decline of artisanal ideology, she provides a careful consideration of each of the major disputes in baking. However, the crux of her interpretation rests on her analysis of the period between 1905 and 1911. In both 1905 and 1907 the Bakers' Guild negotiated collective agreements with its journeymen's committee, though union representatives were also co-opted. Superficially this points towards a rationalization of conflict. However, Föcking convincingly argues that these deals were 'armistice agreements' rather than 'peace treaties', because whilst the union strove for full recognition and the institutionalization of collective bargaining, the Guild leadership remained adamantly opposed.

The matter came to a head in 1911, when the Guild hoped to use the renegotiation of the 1907 agreement as a pretext to destroy the union. However, its leadership seriously misjudged the situation. Whilst technological changes had led not only to an increasingly heterogeneous baking industry, but also to a divergence of economic interests, the Guild leadership clung to the fiction that the masters formed a united front. In reality, though, many small masters were unwilling to sacrifice their own economic interests on the altar of the Guild leadership's anti-union policy and therefore negotiated separate work-place agreements with the union. On this basis, Föcking argues that the alternative paradigm to rationalization, 'organized class struggle', likewise does not fit the evidence. Moreover, it was the Bakers' Guild rather than the union, she insists, that found itself in a strategic cul-de-sac before 1914.

This is well-written and persuasively argued book. However, whilst Föcking demonstrates the inapplicability of the two existing paradigms of industrial conflict, a single case study is insufficient to undermine either. Nevertheless, Föcking succeeds in throwing more doubt on rationalization than on 'organized class conflict'. But she is also surely right to question the extent to which it was simply the unions that found themselves in a strategic cul-de-sac before 1914. After all, the failure of Hamburg's Bakers' Guild in 1911 was mirrored in the abortive nationwide lock-out of painters and decorators two years later. This serves to highlight the extent to which historians have all too often neglected the role of both master artisans and guilds in industrial conflict. Indeed, historians have tended to debate the 'pre-industrial' character of the guilds, whilst generally marginalizing, if not overlooking, their function in the labour market, especially in the guise of *de facto* employers' associations.