

**Lutz Raphael, *Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte Westeuropas nach dem Boom*, Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019.**

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One of the most successful and widely discussed collaborative research projects in German academia in the past ten years was *Nach dem Boom. Forschungen zur Entwicklung west-europäischer Industriegesellschaften im letzten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts* [After the Boom: Studies on the Development of European Industrial Societies in the Last Third of the Twentieth Century]. This project, jointly headed by Professors Anselm Doering Manteuffel of Tübingen University and Lutz Raphael of the University of Trier, looked at the development of Western European industrial countries after the years of economic growth following the Second World War. It argued that the 1970s were a turning point in the twentieth century when the economic crises following the oil crash hit Western Europe hard. Members of the project spoke of a “structural

breaking point” (*Strukturbruch*) in 1973/74 with the transition from a Keynesian consensus to a neoliberal understanding of society. This time period is thus seen as the immediate prehistory of the present day, to quote the title of an edited volume the group published in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Lutz Raphael’s *Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl* is a synthesis of the discussions within this larger research project. While the book has been very successful and widely read in German academia, it has also made an impact among the public and in politics. Raphael discussed it, for example, with the current German SPD Minister of Labor, Hubertus Heil in 2019. A few weeks ago, the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) issued a paperback version of the book –a sign of the book’s impact on the broader public debate.

*Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl* is a comparative history of deindustrialization in Western Europe. The subtitle reads: “A history of the society of Western Europe after the boom” [*Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte Westeuropas nach dem Boom*]. The term *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* hints at the methodological approach of the *Bielefeld School* renowned for a sociological approach to history, which combines political, social, economic, cultural, and intellectual history. Ulrich Wehler’s five volume *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* [History of the German Society] between 1700-1990 is

<sup>1</sup> Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Lutz Raphael, and Thomas Schlemmer (eds.), *Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart: Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom, Nach dem Boom*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.

probably its most famous example. Following the *Bielefeld School*, Raphael aims at writing a *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* from below, focusing on the working classes (he uses the French term *classes populaires*) in the three biggest economies of Western Europe: France, Germany, and Great Britain.

Raphael argues that between 1970 and 2000, industrial workers became invisible. According to his analysis, traditional working-class parties turned away from industrial workers because they had lost their jobs. These parties then turned towards the middle classes instead. The unions no longer represented these industrial workers not only because the latter were now unemployed, but also because the unions lost momentum as well. Industrial workers also became geographically invisible as they lived outside of the new centers of the world of finance and the service economy. Only in the past few years, he argues, has the fate of industrial workers regained the attention of researchers, politicians, and the media. Examples include the publication of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* or the discussion of working-class voting patterns in the context of the Brexit vote or the rise of Alternative for Germany and the Front National. These debates concerning the current threats and crises democracy faces are the subtext of Raphael's study, although they are rarely spelled out explicitly.

Like most studies on deindustrialization, Raphael writes a book about decline and decay in the context of the massive loss of manufacturing jobs over the course of three decades. Before this period, as the book shows, unskilled or semi-skilled workers made a decent living with industrial jobs and even became homeowners. This was no longer possible in the service industry. As employers increasingly demanded that workers possess professional qualifications, many unskilled workers had difficulties finding a job. They had to switch jobs more frequently and experienced periods of unemployment. This was notably true for younger men and migrant workers. Strikes accompanied this process, but not as many as one could have expected, as Raphael claims. There had been strikes, but the numbers declined in all three countries since the mid-1980s, with the British miners' strike in 1984/5 as an important turning point.

The book is divided into two parts, moving from the macro- to the micro-level. In the first part, "The bird's-eye view" Raphael describes how governments shaped the political economies of the three countries through legislation. In doing so, he shows that deindustrialization was not an unavoidable development, but an active political decision. Besides the role of national governments in this process, this part highlights the role of the unions, political parties, and the strike movements that accompanied deindustrialization. Raphael also underlines the changes in production through new technologies, requiring new and additional skills from the workers. The second, shorter part of the book is titled "Close ups" and focuses on the micro-level, tracing biographies of workers throughout the period of study. Here, Raphael addresses changing attitudes towards the workplace as well as the living situations of industrial workers, thus mentioning contemporary issues such as the gentrification of former workers' neighborhoods and youth riots. For his study, Raphael uses sociological research of the period of study as well as more traditional historical sources. In particular, he makes use of the "socio-economic panel," a data set stored by the *Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung* [German Institute for Economic Research] in Berlin. This data set, collected from over 12,000 households in West

Germany since 1984, enabled Raphael to trace individual working-class biographies over a long-time span – but only in West Germany. It provides information on employment, income, living situation, education, health, and political attitudes. The latter information, however, does not appear in Raphael’s book, even though it might have been beneficial to support or question his point about the current crises of democracy.

Combining micro- and macro-level analysis is one of the many strengths of this book. However, Raphael does not use oral history nor looks at the history of everyday life as other studies on deindustrialization do.<sup>2</sup> His analysis of the micro-level therefore seems sometimes a little cursory and understudied – this is clearly not where Raphael’s heart lies. One advantage of Raphael’s approach is that he avoids the emotionally charged debate around deindustrialization (around nostalgia, white supremacy, etc.) and describes the processes in a more neutral, unengaged way, as one reviewer remarked.<sup>3</sup> Whether we can leave out emotions in the story of deindustrialization is, however, at least debatable, as emotions (disappointment, despair, nostalgia, or solidarity) play such an important role in the public and private discourses on deindustrialization.<sup>4</sup>

In other aspects of the book, Raphael follows the current historiography on the topic in that he highlights the complexity of experiences of deindustrialization, which are very different according to generation or social class. Deindustrialization did not necessarily mean decline; it could also mean new opportunities. For instance, Raphael shows that there were some people profited from deindustrialization. Workers who did not lose their jobs, for example, could sometimes take advantage of the increased possibilities for participation at the workplace. Raphael pays attention to include the perspective of women and migrant workers, as both were from an early stage particularly hard hit by deindustrialization. As most studies on deindustrialization focus on a single country, region or even factory, Raphael’s three-country perspective is a great overview and synthesis of the development in those three countries –even though well-informed readers might not find many new aspects to a by now relatively well-known story.<sup>5</sup> The comparison of the three countries leads Raphael in the end to at least implicitly establish a ranking of the three countries: Germany dealt with deindustrialization best (that is, most smoothly) and the UK comes in last because it experienced the most brutal transition to a neoliberal society. France occupies the intermediate rank.

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez’s *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), the work of Canadian historian Steven High or the German interview project “Menschen im Bergbau“ (People in the mining industry) at Bergbaumuseum Bochum.

<sup>3</sup> See Gustav Seibt, “Der lange Abschied vom Malocher,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 15, 2019, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/jenseits-von-kohle-und-stahl-lutz-raphael-rezension-buchkritik-1.4482500>.

<sup>4</sup> For the historiographical debate on nostalgia and deindustrialization, see for instance, Tim Strangleman, “‘Smokestack Nostalgia,’ ‘Ruin Porn’ or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and Meaning of Deindustrial Representation,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013): 23–37. doi:10.1017/S0147547913000239 or Chitra Joshi, “On ‘De-Industrialization’ and the Crisis of Male Identities,” *International Review of Social History* 47 (2002): 159–75.

<sup>5</sup> For an insight into the current state of research, see, for example, issue 16.1 (March 2019) of *Labor. Studies in Working-Class History* titled *(De-)Industrial Heritage* edited by Stefan Berger and Steven High or the issue 144,4 (October 2019) of *20&21. Revue d’histoire* titled *La désindustrialisation, une histoire en cours* edited by Marion Fontaine and Xavier Vigna.

I would have liked to learn more about the transnational and global character of deindustrialization in this book, such as the role of the European Union in the process and whether there were international and transnational solidarity movements in support of workers who had lost their jobs. Sometimes the focus on nation states blurred regional specificities or industry/sector-specific developments. The latter would have been helpful to understand competition and conflicts around deindustrialization within one nation state.

But all of this cannot be studied in one single book, and Raphael's contribution is thus an overview (for each country) as well as a first step into the emerging field of the comparative study of deindustrialization. It will certainly serve as work of reference for those engaging in this field. For those who seek an introduction of the history of deindustrialization and the changing working conditions and lives since the 1970s, Raphael's book is warmly recommended.