

# MEMORIAL

## Allan Mitchell, 1933–2016

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Allan Mitchell, the renowned historian of Franco-German relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, passed away on 30 October 2016, after an operation from which he sadly did not recover.

Allan was among those historians whose contributions to scholarship may have been underestimated during his lifetime, and it is only when we look back on his writings and academic accomplishments that we can see how significant a contribution he has made to modern European History. True, he once called himself an “outsider” to the profession, but this may apply only to his position in the community of scholars in the United States where he held full professorships at two prestigious institutions, Smith College and the University of California at San Diego, but no research and visiting fellowships elsewhere. Instead he was very much sought after in Europe. Thus he became a fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research at Bielefeld University in 1986–1987 and at the Historical Commission in Berlin from 1989 to 1991. Two years later, he acted as Associate Director of Studies at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris and was given another fellowship at the *Centro Studi Ligure* in Bogliasco, Italy, in 1996–1997. It must be added that he received summer research grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Fulbright Commission, but also from the German Academic Exchange Service, the Thyssen Foundation, the French government, and the German Marshall Fund.

Since, apart from numerous articles and reviews, he published more than a dozen monographs and edited or co-edited three anthologies, his scholarly output is impressive enough to warrant a more detailed assessment of his work. What follows is a retrospective appreciation, designed to transcend Allan’s all too self-conscious self-definition mentioned above

and to put him back into the mainstream of American historical writing on modern Europe.

Allan's Scottish-born parents were first generation immigrants who settled in Kentucky. His father was a craftsman with a commuting job, and so his mother took their son every Friday to the Ashland railroad station to meet Mitchell senior. Eventually, the family became sufficiently prosperous to send their son to Davidson College from where he graduated with a B.A. in 1954. Subsequently he studied for an M.A. at Duke University and received another M.A. at Middlebury College in 1958. A Phi Beta Kappa student and highly motivated, he was accepted by Harvard University where William Langer, the diplomatic historian, and H. Stuart Hughes took him under their wings. Hughes had made a name for himself in 1952 with a major study on Oswald Spengler, followed in 1958 by his seminal book on *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930*. Inspired by Hughes's kind of intellectual history, Allan began to work on Kurt Eisner, the left-wing radical who, after the abdication of King Ludwig III of Bavaria in November 1918, had been elected minister president of the Bavarian "Free State" by the regional Workers' and Soldiers' Council. Faced with the chaos of the Revolution, Eisner tried to restore some sort of order until he was assassinated by Count Arco auf Valley, a right-wing extremist on the fringes of the anti-Semitic Thule Society. This biographical focus enabled Allan to finish his doctoral dissertation in three years, but he then expanded the manuscript into a broader study of the revolutionary upheavals in Bavaria and the origins of the short-lived Bolshevik republic that Eugen Leviné and others established in Munich until they were defeated by the Free Corps, paramilitary units that the Republican government in Berlin had raised to stop the Leninist revolutionaries.

Allan's *Revolution in Bavaria* had little time for the Bolsheviks in Munich. However, he saw in the positions that Eisner took up a possibility "to attain some stable compromise between the council and parliamentary systems." What Allan raised here was the notion of a third way that was also being promoted by some younger West German scholars in the 1960s and that challenged the notion current in West Germany after World War II, i.e., that there were only two ways out of the crisis: Bolshevism or a bourgeois republic forged by Friedrich Ebert and the Social Democrats with the support of the traditional Imperial elites. The latter proposal appeared doomed from the start because of its compromise structure. The critics of this interpretation asserted that, like Eisner, Ebert should and could have pursued a third way by relying on those elements of the Council movement that rejected revolution, but wanted more far-reaching democratic reforms. In other words, they highlighted the chance

to form a broader, more genuinely democratic base for the new Weimar Republic, capable of stemming the pressure of the rapidly growing anti-Republican Right.

In the meantime Allan had discovered not only West Germany where he had spent some months at the University of Freiburg in 1954–1955, but also Paris where he had signed up with the Institut d'études politiques in 1958 and about which he published a retrospective in 2011: *Witnessing Europe: The Personal History of an American Abroad*. In the mid-sixties he abandoned Bavarian history and turned to Franco-German relations in the nineteenth century. With Langer having interested him in international history, he turned to research on Otto von Bismarck. However, the problem for him did not lie “so much in a preoccupation with statecraft as with a too narrow conception of it.” It was not a matter of abandoning biography, nor did he think that “the insistence on the wonders to be wrought by a straight dosage of economic and social history” was the right path to take. Rather Allan was thinking of a combination of both political and economic history, and the testing ground for this approach was to be Franco-German relations in the Bismarckian era.

His first foray into this field came in 1971 in the form of a slim 130-page volume, entitled *Bismarck and the French Nation, 1848–1890*. In many ways, this was still a more traditional analysis of Prusso-German policy towards France, with some linking of politics to financial and commercial developments. What was new about it and probably inspired by the work of Hans-Ulrich Wehler on Bismarckian Germany was the stress on the interdependence of foreign and domestic policy-making. It was only in his next book of 1979 on *The German Influence in France after 1870: The Formation of the French Republic* that he explicitly combined economic history with political history, focusing on both domestic and foreign policy. Though by now a full professor at San Diego, it is nevertheless quite endearing to read how Allan justified the origins of this book: “The relationship between France and Germany, their similarities and their differences is a theme that has fascinated me since my first experience of Europe.” He then added: “Scarcely a decade after the Second World War nothing could have been more natural for a young American student than to perceive the two nations as variations of the same civilization.” While in the 1970s this early Cold War period seemed to lie way back in the past, “the traces” of his earlier experiences of Europe remained, and in this sense the book was “autobiographical.” However, there was also the glaring gap in our knowledge about late nineteenth-century German and French history. While there were many studies that briefly mentioned German influences on France, none had “drawn the subject together,” as Allan now proposed to do.

Popular images of the Franco-German relationship after 1870 still tend to stress the bitter enmity between the two countries following the swift German victory over Napoleon III, the occupation of the Northern *départements*, the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, and the imposition of reparations. It was all about French “revanchism.” To be sure, Allan acknowledged that the newly founded German Empire was superior militarily and politically, and that Bismarck knew how to use this to his advantage. But whatever the irreconcilable rhetoric in public, behind the scenes the French leadership was quietly negotiating with Berlin to mitigate the terms of the peace agreement and to gain concessions, while Bismarck and the Prussian military watched suspiciously whether Paris was secretly trying to change the military balance. So, with the French leadership living in fear of another German invasion, Bismarck wielded the big stick of warfare not merely in the well-known “War in Sight” crisis of 1875, but also on earlier occasions.

However illuminating Allan’s discussion of the political relationship in the 1870s may be, his examination of financial and economic interactions are arguably even more so. Whoever is looking for information on the issue of French reparations payments to Germany or the raising of loans to refloat the French economy will greatly profit from the relevant sub-chapters. This includes the intriguing role of bankers. Among them Gerson von Bleichroeder played a crucial mediating role, after Allan had persuaded his colleague Fritz Stern, then researching his influential book on Bismarck and Bleichroeder, to let him see some of the private correspondence. Overall, this book, with its focus on German influences reaching across the Rhine, is still a rewarding read for anyone looking for information on political and financial-economic links, including telling statistical tables.

No less important, the volume was the first in a trilogy, at the end of which he hoped to provide a comprehensive study of France and the many influences that Germany exerted on its neighbor up to 1914. He realized this plan when in 1984 he published the second volume, entitled *Victors and Vanquished: The German Influence on Army and Church in France after 1870*. With the first volume intended to provide “the context within which the French army and the Catholic Church attempted to reconsolidate their prerogatives” after 1870, this second volume revolves around religious and military problems up to the “traumatic *terminus ad quem* in the Dreyfus Affair.” It is not possible to go into the rich detail of individual chapters, all of them again based on careful research in the French and German archives. After all, the French defeat by the Germans stimulated reforms of practically every aspect of the French armed forces. The training of officers and soldiers was rethought; fortifications, railway supply

systems, and military hardware were modernized, all in order to try to overcome a condition of inferiority vis-à-vis the eastern neighbor that the French leadership thought was unacceptable. The second half of the volume is devoted to the problem of religion and government relationships with the Catholic Church and the Vatican at the time when Bismarck was waging his own *Kulturkampf* against Catholicism in Germany.

On the French side, the struggle for the country's "soul" and the confrontation between social and political conservatives and Republicanism ultimately reached its climax in the Dreyfus Affair. This part also contains insightful sub-chapters on Jules Ferry's reform of primary and secondary education against the backdrop of what Allan called the "German Model." The same applies to higher education, a field in which Germany had also become a model to the United States. Even if the Republic was stabilized against its irredentist domestic opposition, there was still the dread of Germany, which was expressed in terms of "a desire to catch up" rather than a "compulsion for revenge." It is this French sense of being left behind economically and demographically that enabled him to build the bridge to the third volume of his trilogy.

It appeared in 1989 under the title *The Divided Path: German Influence on Social Reform in France after 1870* after, as he admitted, the complexities of the subject had occupied him "for the better part of two decades" because it revolved around the "social question," then ubiquitous in most of Europe. During the decade preceding this volume's publication many books on this question had appeared that he gratefully incorporated. But as before, Allan went into a large number of archives to produce what in terms of scope and depth is arguably the most impressive volume in the trilogy. Postulating that there were three waves of social reform, he goes back to the pre-1870s with its "puzzles of poverty" and well-known demographic crisis. With the rise of modern medicine and public health concerns, there is again the issue of French perceptions of the German Model, before Allan delves into the administration of social reform at the Parisian center all the way to the level of city governments, including the pressures they came under from the medical lobby.

The discussion of the second wave tackles the role of gender and the history of different groups of women. There are thoughtful sections on single women, working women, and prostitutes, as well as the rudimentary systems of maternal care and family assistance at their disposal, followed by an analysis of the development of the medical profession and public health. Looking beyond Paris, he shows the gaps that were filled all too unevenly between the center and the provinces when it came to the genesis of legislation and the implementation of proposed laws and regulations. Part II concludes with an examination of early labor relations, the

beginnings of the socialist movement, and the role of owners and managers. Part III finally covers the funding of social reform and the conflicts over the collection of taxes and their redistribution into a class-stratified society. With the Bismarckian social reforms always standing as the backdrop and matrix of comparison, Allan deals with the tensions between solidarity and mutualism, followed by a very good chapter on the spread of tuberculosis—the disease of the poor—and how to combat it. Finally, he moves to the underlying ideological conflicts, the question of modern housing and the priorities to be given to women and their children.

In light of his essentially institutional approach and focus on influences exerted by Germany, this book does not take the “cultural turn” into daily-life history and popular culture that came along in the 1980s. In this respect Allan stayed quite firmly in the camp of the West German Bielefeld School of socio-economic history. Indeed, it was Wehler and Jürgen Kocka at Bielefeld University who integrated Allan into a major and well-funded research project that brought together a large number of historians and social scientists in a series of workshops and discussion groups for intensive debates at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research. Away from West Germany’s metropolitan centers, this was a sort of paradise where participants spent their time thinking, arguing, and writing, accommodated in comfortable studios. The central theme that the Bielefeld enterprise addressed was the European bourgeoisie before World War I in an attempt to complement the many studies of the working class that had been produced ever since the rise in the 1950s of labor historians such as Edward P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. The labors of the Bielefeld meeting were eventually published in German in three volumes, covering virtually every aspect of the history of the European bourgeoisie. In 1993 Allan, who had been among the international contingent of invitees, edited jointly with Kocka a translation of selected articles in one volume, entitled *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Beyond European-wide articles on the politics and socio-economic position of the middle classes, this English version contains insightful contributions on the bourgeoisie in Britain, France, and Germany, with a concluding section on the embourgeoisement of the Jewish minority, the “Italian *Borghesia*,” the Hungarian middle classes, and finally, a “cultural turn” examination of “German *Bürgerlichkeit* after 1800: Culture as Symbolic Practice” by an anthropologist.

Allan’s contacts with the Bielefeld School were important because they resulted in a shift in his research interests. Although he still saw himself as a historian of modern France and Germany, with his trilogy completed he felt it was time to leave behind his interest in German influences on post-1870 France and to take up Franco-German comparative history. He knew from the Bielefeld project that it is not enough to look for simi-

larities and differences in a bilateral comparison. Rather, he needed a *tertium comparationis*, something like a matrix against which to hold the empirical material that he found in the archives. He brilliantly lived up to this challenge in his next book, *The Great Train Race: Railways and the Franco-German Rivalry, 1815–1914*, published in 2000 after years of research in often remote archives. Having agonized quite a lot over how to structure his comparison, he decided to look at the development of the railroad systems in France and Central Europe in three discreet periods. After recounting how the two countries had tackled the introduction and expansion of their railroads institutionally, technologically, geographically, and politico-militarily each within their own national borders, Allan then added, for each of the three periods, a third sub-chapter in which he weighed the similarities and differences that the two nations developed in the hope to draw a balance sheet at the end. From this he assessed which of the two nations had succeeded in gaining a tangible competitive advantage over the other in terms of the institutional, technological, military, and political-legislative solutions that they adopted. His conclusion: As far as its infrastructure was concerned, Imperial Germany had won the strategic train race by 1914. And yet “despite their economic prowess in Central Europe and the commercial integration of their railroads on the Continent, German commanders felt themselves encircled and feared that the balance of military forces in a two-front war would soon tilt against them. Germany thus became the aggressor in the West, not because political circumstances necessitated that action,” but because Germany’s military strategy as reflected in the infamous Schlieffen Plan “posited it.” Allan’s book therefore makes a pioneering contribution to the history not only of the rise of railroads in two modern European societies, but also of the origins of World War I.

It seems that this book, whose Epilogue makes the connection “From Trains to Trenches,” encouraged Allan to advance into the first half of the twentieth century. If France’s strategic inferiority had become a trauma before 1914, the defeat at the hands of Nazi Germany in 1940 was even more shattering. This further shift in his work probably also contributed to a change of heart that explains the subject matter of the books he wrote during the last years of his life. If hitherto he had been fairly balanced in his elective affinities towards France and Germany, the scales now tilted decidedly towards the French side. Accepting that there was something “peculiar” about the development of German society in the twentieth century that produced the Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust, he decided, first of all, to undertake a short stock-taking exercise of his earlier work—in a book he called *A Stranger in Paris*, published in 2006. Here Allan insisted that the Franco-German relationship between 1870 and

1940 was fundamental to an understanding of modern European history. Yet there was no happy ending. In this book, with a cover showing a photograph of Hitler in front of the Eiffel Tower, Allan concluded: “The stranger, who had for so long remained a crucial part of French public life, thus returned to Paris in triumph, as the Third Republic came to its dolorous end.” And having moved so explicitly into World War II, it was only logical that he should write his next gripping book on the German occupation of France in World War II.

This book, published in 2008 under the title of *Nazi Paris*, is in some ways a return to his earlier studies of the German impact on France, but, given the record of the Occupation, it rightly tells a very depressing story. By now close to age 75, Allan went off to the archives again and unearthed large amounts of material not just on the well-known topic of the treatment of the Jewish population and the Resistance in Paris, but also on the daily humiliations and reprisals that ordinary Parisians had to endure at the hands of the Germans. To be sure, there are also accounts of collaboration and abject callousness among the French bureaucracy, the police, businessmen, and intellectuals. But this book has justifiably received much praise not merely because of the many illuminating details it contains, but also because of its uncompromising condemnation of German policies.

If *Nazi Paris* is still set in the larger analytical frame that marked Allan’s earlier studies, his attention now turned to individual experiences and biography. In the course of his research on Paris, he had learned about the availability of the journals and personal papers of Ernst Jünger, material that covered the period of his life in Paris during the war. Since so much had been written about Jünger’s earlier life and politics, Allan decided to concentrate on the biographical sources, now held at the *Literaturarchiv* in Marbach. It is not a pretty picture that emerges from *The Devil’s Captain*, considering that Jünger was aware of the murder of hostages, of SS torture, and of the deportation of the Jews from Drancy and other railroad terminals. On a trip to the Caucasus, moreover, Jünger learned about the horrendous atrocities that were being committed by the SS and the Wehrmacht in the East. Back in Paris, all this distressing information seems to have induced insomnia in Jünger at night as well as nervousness during the day when he participated in the display of Nazi power in parades along the Champs-Élysées and witnessed soldiers posing as arrogant bully boys on the boulevards. At the same time, he remained icy-cold in his outward demeanor. He socialized in bars and cafés, as if he were surrounded by a civilian society at peace, and had at least one serious love affair, while his wife and son were left behind in Hannover.

In short, it is difficult to warm to this devil’s captain, and this may also explain why Allan was reluctant to spend more time on Jünger’s actions



towards the end of the Occupation and to make sense of his behavior then. He avers that the officer refused to join the conservative German resistance when one of the men involved in the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler tried to recruit him, though he had responded positively when in 1943 Hans Speidel, a close friend and superior at the Wehrmacht headquarters in Paris, encouraged him to write a memorandum. Entitled "Der Friede," it was apparently to be published after a successful coup. The coup failed; but how is one to interpret Jünger's actions that could have cost him his life if the document had been discovered by the Gestapo? Jünger published "Der Friede" after the war, dedicating it to his only son Ernstel, killed in action in the final months of the war. In short, this mourning father needs further study than Allan provided in his book, also in light of Jünger's extremely negative public image in early postwar Germany. People remembered all too well his political connections to the anti-Republican Stahlhelm veterans association and his contacts with Hitler. Disgruntled but unwilling to admit the errors of his ways, he retreated to Wilflingen near Stuttgart to tend his garden and collections of insects and to write esoteric novels that never became part of the canon of postwar West German literature. In his quest to promote Franco-German reconciliation, Chancellor Helmut Kohl invited Jünger to join him with French president Francois Mitterrand—the two leaders holding hands on the battlefield of World War I where Jünger had once received his baptism of fire.

Pursuing his latest interest in biography, Allan published three more books between 2011 and 2016. The most detailed one, published in 2016 and entitled *The Unrepentant Patriot*, is a biography of the German dramatist Carl Zuckmayer, narrating his success during the Weimar Republic, his flight from the Nazis to Vermont, and his return to Europe after 1945. For Allan this book was a sequel to *The Devil's Captain*, as he had always been mesmerized by Zuckmayer after he had published his drama *The Devil's General*, the story of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of the Abwehr, the Wehrmacht intelligence arm, and his intellectual journey from his service under Hitler to his covert support of the anti-Nazi resistance. The other book, *Fleeing Nazi Germany: Five Historians Migrate to America* (2011), contains vignettes on refugee historians whom Allan met during his long academic career: Felix Gilbert, Klemens von Klemperer, Werner T. Angress, Peter Gay, and Fritz Stern. In between he wrote *Socialism and the Emergence of the Welfare State*, in which he went back to the themes of the last volume of his trilogy in part to tell an American readership about the European traditions of social justice when US-President Obama's efforts to help the underprivileged and uninsured were under siege.

This being a Memorial written for an academic journal, Allan's personal and family life can only be mentioned in passing. But it should not

be forgotten that, after his marriage fell apart, he raised his two daughters as a single parent and, as may be gleaned from the fact that he dedicated several of his books to Catherine and Alexandra, his daughters were very close to him until his final hours. He also kept and nurtured many friendships all over the world. In the first volume of his trilogy, Allan expressed the hope that those three books would “add to a comprehensive understanding of the early years of the Third Republic and also provide a basis for further study of the Franco-German confrontation that has dominated Western Europe ever since.” Although his work deserved greater recognition during his life-time, it is to be hoped that its central importance to modern European history will continue be recognized and cited now that he is no longer with us.

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