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PROFESSIONALIZATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: GERMANY

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SESSION COMMENTS ON

"PROFESSIONALIZATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: GERMANY"

(Session 4 F, Social Science History Association

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I. Introduction If Prof. Perkin emphasizes professionalization as a process by which post-industrial societies come to be dominated by experts, Prof. Goldstein stresses the tenuousness of the Anglo-American concepts of "profession" and "professionalization" themselves in French research. Prof. Goldstein's point can be made for the German-speaking and Central European world, too, but with less force, perhaps owing to the earlier and more thorough Americanization of social science there. Although German social scientists and historians have come to accept terms such as Professionalisierung ("professionalization,"), we use it in a much less weeping way than Prof. Perkin. If a modern profession is a special kind of occupation distinguished by a high level of expertise (institutionalized through competitive postsecondary education and examination systems) as well as life-long and practically exclusive practice, it follows that professionalization is the dynamic process by which the old liberal professions were transformed and the new ones based on some form of exclusive ("scientific"?) knowledge were created. It would be a long step, however, to allege, in a part of the

world as deeply imbued with bureaucratic values as Central Europe, to equate professionalization with the social domination of experts. Yet if one allows into the "professionalization" process the decision-making and negotiating permanent civil service, which as Jan Goldstein has pointed out raises problems for traditional sociologists of professions, Prof. Perkin's approach becomes more discussable in Central Europe.

II. Anglo-American models and research on professions in Germany.

A. Most of latter being done by scholars trained in USA or influenced by US social science/social historians. (Examples: profession-by-profession studies such as C.H.S. Gispen and Peter Lundgreen on engineers, Jeffrey Johnson on Kaiser's Chemists, Michael Kater and Claudia Huerkamp on physicians, Hannes Siegrist and Kenneth Ledford on attorneys; cross-profession studies such as Konrad Jarausch's The Unfree Professions: German Lawyers, Teachers, and Engineers, 1900-1950 (1990) or my own The German Experience of Professionalization (1991).

B. Virtually all these works informed by critical social-history consciousness have abandoned to some degree the old notion that modern "professions" in the A-S sense could not "really" exist in Central Europe because of the heavy and early bureaucratization and/or the persistence of "feudal" or at least Stand (etat) traditions. Instead, most accept the notion of a process of dialogue between independent professions and

bureaucratic authority (in my own study a triologue involving the professoriate as a frequent intermediary). A question of dispute remains the degree of autonomy of professions vs. the influence of state bureaucracy or (to cite Prof. Perkin again) of private industrial-corporate interests in "constructing" modern professions to suit their needs (as the German sociologists H.A. Hesse has maintained).

C. Clearly social historians of Germany have rejected or modified older Anglo-American theoretical models emphasizing altruistic or even functionalistic taxonomies, but they have also not found that models stressing the drive to power and market dominance (e.g. Sarfatti-Larson) work satisfactorily on the Continent. Once historians entered the field of discourse, also, most notions of fixed and static attributes have had to be jettisoned: In my long-term study of German learned professions, for example, I have found clear patterns of change in the self-understanding and goals of professional organizations over time. Clearly the process of professionalization is far from over. Also clearly, from my discussions with practitioners and organizers in East Central Europe last summer, where it has artificially been stopped or pressed into the service of the previous regimes, one can expect it to resume there.

III. Comparisons with Britain and France Very cautiously!

A. Although current historical research on professions in Britain tends to follow the assumption of radical variance of British and foreign professionalization, the "convergence" of

British and Continental experience since the time 60 years ago when British scholars first began studying professions seriously has awakened a keener interest than ever in comparability, as far as I know. I have had many friendly arguments with my British colleagues about the Anglo-American experience being the tail and the Continental experience being the more universally-applicable one (also in the other world continents) -- one might say the dog -- but this criticism has so far had the effect of a flea-bite.

B. France and Germany have had closer experiences, I can agree with Prof. Goldstein on that. Yet the small amount of comparative work done so far (e.g. Siegrist's on lawyers) and what I know of the history of the French medical profession indicates significant differences. To mention only one -- the central organization of France prior to the rise of modern scientific expertise, compared to the rather federalized nature of German bureaucracy (let alone the alleged -- emphasize alleged --indifference to state authority in Britain and America) led to, it appears to me, a closer and less adversarial relationship between state and professions in France after the Restoration than in Germany.

C. Finally I would like to mention that the kind of empirical research demonstrated in Prof. Abbott's stimulating book, on what professionals actually did, is almost totally missing for Germany. If Prof. Perkin is right in maintaining that "professionalization" is the hallmark of postindustrial society, then critical examinations of the legitimacy of claimed

expertise based on its exercise in everyday practice will almost certainly become de rigueur in all non-totalitarian societies. Professionals, however, are exceptionally irritable about such examinations and, indeed, are not too enthusiastic even about histories of themselves. Nestbeschmutzer (one who dirties his own nest) is still a powerful curse in German, and not too many social historians or social scientists have shown the courage to tackle issues that would earn them widespread ostracism by academics defending the interests of the learned professions -- precisely their university colleagues who make up the third part of the triad referred to earlier. This may explain why so many of the recent authors on professionalization in Germany have been foreigners, encouraged, as I have been, with the sympathetic nudge -- "You can say it, we had better not!"