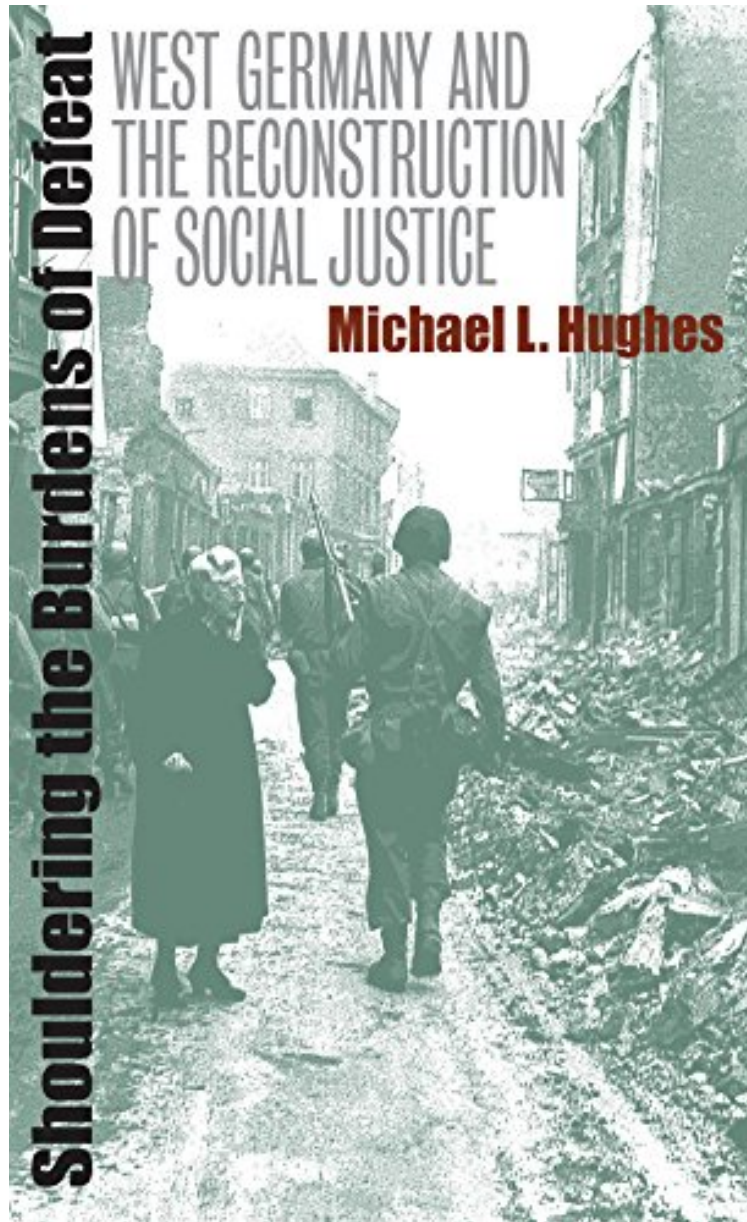


Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice

Michael L. Hughes

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Michael L. Hughes : Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Germany's communitarian impulse for wealth equalization post WWII By Joseph Psozka Hughes, M. L. (1999) provides a finely detailed analysis of the Lastenausgleich law, and ascribes its easy passage to a continuation of the communitarian ideas fostered by Nazi ideology. Even those who had profited from WWII or come through it unscathed believed that the war had been a community wide effort and required recompense for all its participants. So, the ideas and laws creating this dramatic equalization of post war wealth found countrywide support even from the elites who were largely unscathed. In part this was because the events of WWI where those who paid the reparations were largely owners of credit paper created an environment where largely everyone believed that those with wealth and property also needed to pay to equalize the burden. As a result the laws were passed over the opposition of the ruling American, British, and French governments who were largely against this redistribution as too radical, and were content to create monetary reforms that did little to redress war damages and losses. On top of the Load levelling payments, other features of the law made pensions and disability payments computed in new money rather than the largely worthless old currency. Hughes does little to analyze the wealth equalization that this law produced, and the economic stimulus provided. He mentions the Marshall plan and does describe how economic growth made the Lastenausgleich payments from tax funds easier than everyone had projected. The economic miracle that followed may well have been undergirded by this generous redistribution of wealth: a lesson for those interested in current income and wealth inequality. Redistribution, not the Marshall Plan, may have been the most significant stimulus to Germany's rapid post war growth.

World War II and its aftermath brought devastating material losses to millions of West Germans. Military action destroyed homes, businesses, and personal possessions; East European governments expelled 15 million ethnic Germans from their ancestral homes; and currency reform virtually wiped out many Germans' hard-earned savings. These "war damaged" individuals, well over one-third of the West German population, vehemently demanded compensation at the expense of those who had not suffered losses, to be financed through capital levies on surviving private property. Michael Hughes offers the first comprehensive study of West Germany's efforts to redistribute the costs of war and defeat among its citizenry. The debate over a Lastenausgleich (a balancing out of burdens) generated thousands of documents in which West Germans articulated deeply held beliefs about social justice, economic rationality, and political legitimacy. Hughes uses these sources to trace important changes in German society since 1918, illuminating the process by which West Germans, who had rejected liberal democracy in favor of Nazi dictatorship in the 1930s, came to accept the social-market economy and parliamentary democracy of the 1950s.

An informative and impressive book--carefully structured, clearly written, sensitive to the mentalities and interests of its protagonists. Peter Hayes, Northwestern University Hughes describes the competing Lastenausgleich movements and their leaders well and at great length. . . . There is enough detail of the various options and turns in the history of the Lastenausgleich to satisfy any student of policy and law making.--American Historical |An interesting and thoughtful account of how West Germany dealt with the financial consequences of the past that raises important questions about the contrasts of Bonn with the Weimar Republic.--Harold James, Princeton University|Hughes employs a wide range of sources, including contemporary public opinion surveys, private papers from many politicians and financiers and lobbying and parliamentary party collections.--Canadian Journal of History|Impeccably researched.--H-German|An informative and impressive book--carefully structured, clearly written, sensitive to the mentalities and interests of its protagonists, and grounded in a fine command of extensive source material. It makes a significant and original contribution to the literature on the early history of the German Federal Republic and on the process by which that regime won widespread popular support during the 1950s.--Peter Hayes, Northwestern University|[A] highly original study of postwar West German political, social, and economic reconstruction.--Journal of Economic History|From the Inside Flap|A comprehensive study of West Germany's efforts to redistribute the costs of World War II among its citizens.