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History 133A
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Professor Marcuse

Source Exploration:

Workers' Conception of Religion by Paul Göhre

Headnote

Scholars consider Paul Göhre's book *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche: Eine praktische Studie* to be an important document as it serves as part of the knowledge base of 19th century German working class culture. The first publication of this book was in Grunow, a municipality in the Uckermark district in Brandenburg, Germany, in 1891. An excerpt from this book, titled "Workers' Conception of Religion" (specifically located on pages 164-72) is published on the German History in Documents and Images website. The English translation, titled *Three Months in a Workshop: A Practical Study*, was published in New York in 1895 and again in 1972. This book is available in the library at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Biographical Information

Paul Göhre was born in Wurzen, Germany on April 18, 1864. He lived as a dedicated German Protestant, working as both a theologian and politician. Despite humble beginnings, Göhre, on scholarship, was able to attend the prestigious and State School St. Afra in Meissen. He went on to study economics and theology at the universities of Leipzig and Berlin.



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Göhre was a member of a consumer association in Leipzig-Plagwitz. He later wrote and also published several labor biographies. The controversial views published in his works negatively impacted his relationship with the Protestant Church and he broke completely with the church in 1906.

Göhre served voluntarily in the army during the First World War and fought on the eastern front. After the war, in 1919, he was appointed as a State Secretary in Prussia. In 1923, Göhre resigned from office citing health reasons. He died at the age of 66 in Buchholz, Germany on June 6, 1928.

Description of Original Publication

To write this book, Göhre spent three months working in a factory in order to experience and observe working-class life firsthand. The factory he chose was located in Chemnitz, Germany, which was a large industrial city in the Kingdom of Saxony. The six-page excerpt on GHDI reports Göhre's observations of the workers' views on Christianity and religion. Göhre asserts that the workers saw the church as an obstacle to social reform while believing the church to be a champion of the state and capitalism, as well as an enemy of Jews.

This source came to be created due to Göhre's desire to more closely understand the average worker's religious beliefs, especially those workers aligning themselves with the Social Democratic Party. The Social Democratic Party of Germany was the country's oldest party and one of the country's main parties (the others at that time being the Center Party, the National Liberals, and the Conservatives). By posing as a fellow factory worker, Göhre gained the workers' confidence and willingness to honestly share their opinions and beliefs with him. He facilitated relationships with the workers and pulled information out of them during normal, everyday work and social interactions. For example, Göhre took a fellow Chemnitz factory weaver out to a saloon and asked him directly what he thought about Christianity and religion. In frankness, the man responded, "The church is merely a State institution very well devised for stultifying the people; but it ought not to be abolished, only thoroughly reconstructed. It ought to be so managed as to teach and preach natural science" (1).

Göhre reports that most of the factory workers he encountered rejected religion although they were quite moderate in their criticism of it. He describes those workers whom he brands as blasphemous

and who scorn the sacred things of faith. He claims that the younger factory workers equated Christianity with antisemitism and felt there was no room for Christianity among working men. Göhre writes that many of these men feel they have simply outgrown going to church and that they believe that there is no benefit to going to church. An example from the book states, “People went to church and pulled long faces, but their lives weren’t a whit better than other men’s who don’t pretend anything, and who were a good deal more above-board” (2).

Annotated Bibliography

Göhre, Paul. *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche. Eine praktische Studie* pp.164-71. Leipzig: Grunow, 1891.

This book was republished in German in 1895, 1905, 1906, 1913, 1972, 1974, 1978 and 2015.

Göhre, Paul. *Tre månader såsom fabriksarbetare och handtverkslärling; en praktisk studie.* Stockholm, Hiertas Bokförlag, [1891] (Swedish translation)

Göhre, Paul. *Three Months in a Workshop: A Practical Study.* London: S.Sonnenschein; New York, C. Scribner, 1895.

Paul Göhre (1864 – 1924) was a German Protestant pastor and social reformer. In 1890, he went undercover as a factory worker in Chemnitz for three months in order to observe working class life. Through his participation in leisure, cultural and work activities he was able to gain the workers' confidence. T

Göhre, Paul. *Drie maanden fabrieksarbeider: een praktische studie* Amsterdam: Van Looy [etc.], 1895. (Dutch translation)

Гёре ; перевод с немецкого М.Б. Брагин, М., Paul Göhre; М Брагин.

Три мѣсяца фабричным рабочим: очерки культурной и экономической жизни германских рабочих /Tri mĕsiatsa fabrichnym rabochim: ocherki kul'turnoi i ěkonomicheskoi zhizni germanskikh rabochikh. Издание Т-ва И.Д. Сытина, Москва: Izdanĭe T-va I.D. Sytina, 1907. (Russian translation)

Göhre, Paul. *Three Months in a Workshop: A Practical Study.* New York: Arno, 1971. (English translation)

Göhre, Paul. *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche: Eine praktische Studie.* Berlin: Familienarchiv Scheffel, 2005.

Göhre, Paul. “The Social Objects of the National-Social Movement in Germany” pp. 765-773. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 4, No. 6, Chicago, 1899.

Paul Göhre, a German theologian, politician, writer and social activist, wrote this article on the social objects of the national-social movement in Germany in 1899. Göhre asserts that the National Socialists favor all forms of rational improvement along existing lines. These improvements include extension of workingmen’s insurance, legal protection for workingmen, the amelioration of workingmen’s dwellings, and all educational movements. Göhre advocates for the majority of all German Protestant teachers to be counted among the adherents of their mode of thought.

Spohn, Willfried. "Religion and Working-Class Formation in Imperial Germany 1871 – 1914". *Politics & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1991. pp. 109-132.

Willfried Spohn is an Adjunct Professor at Free University of Berlin, Germany. In this paper on religion and working-class formation in Imperial Germany he presents his view that the relationship of religious institutions and the working class of Germany has not been fully or accurately researched. Spohn asserts that this is due to the fact that most national labor histories of Germany have been written by labor-movement intellectuals and these accounts have been influenced by their anticlerical and secular ideologies. Spohn outlines the points that support that the religious components of working-class formation in Imperial Germany, and how they contributed to fundamental political separations. Although Paul Göhre is not directly mentioned in Spohn's article, his work is referenced in his notes. Göhre's book, *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche. Eine praktische Studie*, was one important resource for Spohn's paper.

Reviews

Dawson, William Harbutt. Review. in: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 6 (Jul., 1895), pp. 136-137 (2 pages).

Dawson describes Göhre's work as an "intelligent and instructive" record that contributes to the study of social questions surrounding the working class in Germany during the Imperial period. He points out that due to working undercover at the factory, Göhre was able to meet people from all walks of life, from every "grade and shade" of character. Dawson points out that the strongest part of Göhre's research was that it shows that the workers of this time wanted to be valued for more than just their ability to engage in manual labor. The workers desire social and political equality or as Dawson writes, "not hands alone, but heads." Dawson notes that the English translation was successfully done.

Gizycki, G. von. *Drei Monate Farikarbeiter Und Handwerksbursche: Eine Praktische Studie* by Paul Göhre, Kandidat der Theologie. *International Journal of Ethics*. Vol. 2, No. 3 (Apr., 1892), pp. 393-395

G. Von Gizycki commends Paul Göhre for developing himself as an ethical teacher and leader by going to work among the factory workers. By engaging in manual labor, Gizycki believes it benefits not only the "head but the heart". He finds Göhre's account of his experience in the factory to be reliable and relevant due to the fact that Göhre worked undercover. Gizycki asserts that there is much literature on the subject of the working class in Germany but questions how closely they align to reality.