Max Weber's Liberalism

Fritz Ringer

THERE are a variety of possible approaches to Weber's political thought. One can emphasize his class-conscious attack upon the new East Elbian agrarian capitalists, or his commitment to a politics of responsibility, in which the probable consequences of political proposals are explicitly assessed and announced. Wolfgang Mommsen has focused upon Weber's nationalism, almost to the exclusion of other aspects of his work. Jürgen Habermas has suggested that Weber tended to reduce ultimate value choices to essentially gratuitous, purely personal decisions. The emphasis in the present essay, however, is upon Weber's liberal pluralism, which anticipated a principled value pluralism, and which was a profound and persistent theme in his political commentaries.[1]

Reading Weber, in fact, one is inclined to ascribe to him a distinctive intellectual personality. He had a pronounced penchant for heterodoxy and a passion for intellectual diversity. His character was reflected, to begin with, in his choice of friends. He was close to a few senior colleagues, among them the political scientist Georg Jellinek. He respected the economist Lujo Brentano, although they certainly had their disagreements as well. Among valued political allies were Friedrich Naumann and the jurists Gustav Radbruch and Gerhard Anschütz. All of these were "modernists" in my terminology; they voted with the liberal Left or, more rarely, with the Social Democrats. But Weber also developed close relationships with many junior faculty and students. These he encouraged and supported with great constancy, almost regardless of their views. As a matter of fact, he typically disagreed with them in important respects, but liked them precisely because they took heterodox positions on principle, or because they were in need of support against orthodox senior colleagues. A good many of them were Jews, but he also appreciated the Russian and Polish students who valued him as a teacher.[2]

1. See Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890–1920* (Chicago, 1984); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston, 1985). The present essay summarizes parts of a forthcoming book on Weber. In what follows, *MWG* refers to *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*.

2. Max Weber, *Briefe 1906–1908* (*MWG* II/5); *1909–1910* (*MWG* II/6); *1911–1912* (*MWG* II/7), the indeces for this and what follows.

Central European History, vol. 35, no. 3, 379–395

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

His voluminous correspondence testifies to his enduring support, despite occasionally heated debates, with the sociologist Robert Michels. Michels was a Social Democrat, who did not have his children baptized. In Prussia, a law had been passed to ensure that members of the Social Democratic Party could not become university instructors (*Privatdozenten*), even though that rank did not entail the status of a civil servant. When Michels tried to find a place at a non-Prussian university, moreover, he was turned away even in the absence of such a law. He therefore immigrated to Italy, where he joined the faculty at the University of Turin. In 1908, an annual conference of German university teachers (*Hochschullehrertag*) discussed the "freedom of learning and teaching," primarily in order to exclude specified religious affiliations for certain positions. In response, Weber reported on Michels's experience to a liberal newspaper, and confessed himself unable "to behave as if we possessed anything like 'freedom of teaching'" that someone could threaten to take away.

> In the interest of good taste and of truth, (there should be no further talk) of the "freedom of learning and teaching" in Germany. For the fact is that . . . the freedom of learning exists only within the limits of political and confessional acceptability — not outside it.

In a more extended commentary, he further insisted that faculty should not use the classroom to convey their "worldviews" or to stipulate the ultimate norms of social policy. They should confine themselves to empirical and logical analysis, while announcing their personal commitments only in the public arena, where they were subject to criticism. Many German academics linked academic freedom to the abstract "purity" of learning and to the "apolitical" posture. Weber was not satisfied with that; he demanded the principled toleration of diversity, along with a distinction between classroom teaching and public debate.[3]

In 1908, the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg had to recommend a candidate for the second senior position in philosophy to the Ministry in Karlsruhe, since Kuno Fischer had retired in 1906. Max Weber very much wanted to bring Georg Simmel to Heidelberg; but the posture of Wilhelm Windelband, the remaining senior philosopher, was deliberately ambiguous. Moreover, a negative reaction to Simmel reached Karlsruhe from Berlin, where Simmel taught in a junior position. We now know that the Berlin Professor Dietrich Schäfer wrote a letter to Karlsruhe to testify that, though he did not know whether Simmel was baptized, he was an "Israelite through and

3. Weber, "Die sogenannte 'Lehrfreiheit' an den deutschen Universitäten," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 53, no. 262 (20 September 1908), p. 1; Weber, "Die Lehrfreiheit der Universitäten," *Hochschul-Nachrichten* 19, no. 4 (Jan. 1909): 89–91.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

through." Schäfer emphasized the contrast between "our German-Christian *Bildung*" and Simmel's "worldview," which was characterized by "acid and negating" criticism. Windelband too had written of Simmel's "destructive" (*einreissend*) criticism, and these terms were part of a hateful code intended to contrast "Jewish" with "Aryan" modes of thought. Weber did not know about Schäfer's letter; but he was certain that some sort of intervention from Berlin had ruined Simmel's chances, and he found out enough about Windelband's position to feel deeply disgusted.[4]

The young economist Franz Eulenburg published a solid and courageous report on the difficulties faced by poorly paid instructors, who made up a rapidly increasing portion of the teaching faculty at German universities. This attracted Weber's attention and caused him repeatedly to recommend Eulenburg for an associate professorship. Since Eulenburg was Jewish, Weber once again ran into the anti-Semitism of German universities. In a letter to Brentano, he complained of always "having to see the least intelligent 'Aryan' preferred to the ablest Jew." This reaction lends credibility to the story told by Paul Honigsheim that Weber once fantasized about teaching a seminar made up entirely of "Russians, Poles, and Jews."[5] Wolfgang Mommsen and Wolfgang Schwentker have collected essays that analyze Weber's relationships not only with Robert Michels and Friedrich Naumann, but also with such pronounced "outsiders" as Ernst Toller, Ernst Bloch, and Georg Lukacs.[6]

I dwell on these particulars to point up Weber's cultural individualism, which echoes Wilhelm von Humboldt, and which is recaptured in John Stuart Mill's ideal of an open intellectual community. In such a community, radical differences in beliefs and in ways of life are preconditions of intellectual progress. As we will see, Weber admired autonomous individuals who act upon deliberated principles. He insisted that intellectuals must be capable of swimming against the tide of established opinion, and he despised those "pliable" natures who can "adjust" to almost anything in their environment that will help them succeed — or at least survive.

Another ingredient in Weber's liberal orientation, his commitment to "the rights of man" (*Menschenrechte*), is reflected in his comments on the Russian Revolution of 1905, which reflect his passionate interest in Russian constitutional or "Semstwo" liberalism. Though the Semstwos themselves were selectively and indirectly representative bodies of the estate type, the draft

4. Weber, *Briefe 1906–1908*, 467–73, 482–83, 492–96.

5. Weber, *Briefe 1906–1908*, 568–71, 585–86, and esp. 644; *Briefe 1911–1912*, 542; Paul Honigsheim, "Max Weber in Heidelberg," in *Max Weber zum Gedächtnis, ed.* R. König & J. Winckelmann (Cologne, 1963), 167–241, esp. 172.

6. W. Mommsen & W. Schwentker, eds. *Max Weber und seine Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen, 1985), esp. the articles by Mommsen, Aldenhoff, Theiner, Dahlmann, and Karadi. On Lukacs, see also Weber, *Briefe 1911–1912*, 625.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

constitution that attracted Weber's attention envisaged a bicameral legislature (Duma) with a directly elected lower and an indirectly elected upper house. The intention was to transform the Tsarist regime into a constitutional monarchy. The Russian liberals expressed none of the disdain for parliamentary institutions that had become fashionable in Germany; but the central planks of their agenda were the "four-part" (general, equal, direct, and secret) suffrage, and constitutionally anchored "human rights." The Semstwo liberals took it to be their duty to introduce fully equal suffrage, even though they knew that this was extremely risky, given the cultural backwardness of the Russian peasants. As a social group, the Russian liberals were middle-class intellectuals, not capitalist "bourgeois," and they were seconded by the more radical "third element" of officials attached to the Semstwos. Weber thought them comparable in their principled individualism to the members of the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848.[7]

The main point of Weber's commentary was that the fight for individual freedom in Russia faced very heavy odds, since the extended historical developments that allowed liberal principles to emerge in Western Europe had not had time to do their work in Russia. The problem of cultural differences among nationality groups had not been resolved, and the separation of church and state had not been achieved. More important, the Russian peasants were probably interested only in a radical land redistribution, which in itself posed formidable political and technical problems. The belated advent of capitalism, moreover, created class conflicts that might well foster revolutionary violence and bureaucratic centralization, rather than middle-class liberalism and gradualist reform. The Leninists explicitly rejected the thesis that the development of capitalism — and of its contradictions — had to be complete before the proletarian revolution could take place. Weber even detected an affinity between the bureaucratic centralism of the anarcho-syndicalists and that of the Tsarist regime.

> The political "individualism" of the West European "rights of man"... insofar as it is "ideally" conditioned, was created partly by former religious convictions ... and (partly by) the optimistic faith in a natural harmony of interests among free individuals that has now been destroyed forever by capitalism. Thus these developmental stages cannot be made up in Russia even for purely "ideal" reasons.

The old middle-class individualism, having been abandoned by the propertied and educated strata, was unlikely to convert the lower middle class, not to mention the revolutionary masses.[8]

7. Georg Jellinek, *Die Erklärung der Menschen- und Bürgerrechte: Ein Beitrag zur modernen Verfasungsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1904), 1–64; Weber, "Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Russland," *MWG* I/10, 86–163 for what follows.

8. Ibid., 164–267, esp. p. 164.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the last six pages of his essay on the revolution of 1905, Weber brought his themes together in an extraordinary sequence of tension-ridden paragraphs. Once again, he insisted upon the "unique" historical conditions that gave rise to modern "freedom": the expansion of Europe, the distinctive economic and social structure of the "early capitalist" epoch in Western Europe, the rise of modern science and learning, and especially certain religious ideas and values that interacted with specific "political constellations" and "material preconditions" to form the "cultural values" of modern man. Current developments, unfortunately, were pointing away from "democracy" and individualism, not only in Russia, but elsewhere as well. Weber was thinking mainly of bureaucratization: "Everywhere, the steel housing (*Gehäuse*) for the new bondage stands ready." The slowing down of technical and economic "progress" and the victory of "rent" over "profit," along with the exhaustion of the remaining "free soil and free markets," might well make the masses "pliable" enough to enter that cage. Certainly if everything depended only upon the "interest constellations" created by material conditions, then all the signs would point toward "unfreedom."

> It is ridiculous to ascribe to high capitalism . . . an elective affinity with "democracy" or "freedom." The question can only be: under its domination, how are these things "possible" at all?

This, for Weber, was the burning question of his time.[9]

The pessimistic tone of Weber's analysis must not be interpreted as resignation. While acknowledging that Semstwo liberalism faced overwhelming obstacles in the short run, he thought, it might ultimately play the role of an inspiring memory, much as the liberalism of the Frankfurt Parliament did in German history. Indeed, Weber expected liberalism to retain its power as an "ideal," and this for quite specific reasons: the current estrangement between the intellectuals of the propertied and educated middle class and their courageous "proletaroid" cousins would ultimately be overcome. The influence of "populist romanticism" was bound to be undermined by the further development of capitalism. It might be replaced by Marxism; but the "immense and fundamental agrarian problem" certainly could not be mastered by the "intellectual means" embodied in Marxism. On the contrary, it could be "solved" only by "the organs of self-government." This, indeed, might eventually bring the two wings of the intelligentsia back together again.

> Thus it seems a life-and-death question that liberalism continue to find its vocation in fighting against bureaucratic as well Jacobin (revolutionary) centralism, and to try to infuse the masses with the old individualistic principle

9. *Ibid.*, 269–71; my italics.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> of the inalienable rights of man, which has become as "trivial" to us West Europeans as rye bread is to those who have enough to eat.

Liberals must act while there is time, during the life span of the "next generations." The "much-maligned 'anarchy' of production and the equally maligned 'subjectivism'" may in fact offer a "last chance" to "construct 'free' cultures from the ground up," in America as in Russia.[10]

Weber's commitment to the "freedom" of the autonomous "personality" is clear also from his interventions at meetings of the Social Policy Association during the decade before the First World War. In a 1905 session on working relationships in large-scale industry, for example, he explicitly identified his "value perspective" as a "characterological" one; he wanted to know what "becomes of the human beings" that are placed in specific "conditions of existence." He called attention to the language used in the disciplinary rules stipulated for workers in large German factories. These spelled out punishments for various kinds of transgressions in what Weber termed "police jargon." They reflected a "philistine urge to dominate" that "distorted the character of our working population." Seconding Lujo Brentano, Weber then protested the one-sidedness of German labor law, which elaborately protected strikebreakers, while allowing employers to threaten workers with dismissal if they joined unions. For labor, however, unions were "valuable in themselves," whether or not they achieved much in their conflict with management. For they alone fostered and sustained the "comradely honor" and "idealism" of the working class. The Social Democratic Party, though less desirable than the trade unions, was indispensable as a shield in the "petty war against the Prussian state and its police."[11]

In another session of the 1905 meeting, Weber opposed Gustav Schmoller's suggestion that government representatives should be added to the boards of large combines and cartels. Weber suspected that such positions would not attract "altruists," as Schmoller imagined. Instead, they would serve as "benefices" for the clients of the dominant parties. Weber further believed that an alliance between heavy industry and the Prussian civil service would simply reinforce the stultifying effects of bureaucratization. Indeed, he asked whether the industrialists were not actually interested in the survival of the Social Democratic Party (as a threat to the middle class), just as the Social Democrats were interested in the repression that strengthened their following among the workers.[12]

10. Ibid., 268–69, 272–73.

11. Weber, "Die Arbeitsverhältnisse in den privaten Riesenbetrieben," *MWG* I/8, 251, 254–57, 259.

12. Ibid., 269–71.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In 1909, the Social Policy Association discussed the public enterprises of municipalities. In his comment, Weber charged Adolf Wagner and other senior members of the association with an excess of enthusiasm for bureaucracy. Indeed, he referred to a presumably younger group of members as "we who think differently." He could not agree that private entrepreneurs should be replaced, wherever possible, with public or municipal officials. He fully acknowledged the "technical superiority of the bureaucratic mechanism" and the high moral standards of the German civil service. He also pointed out, however, that France, the United States, and even Britain did very well without reliable officials, especially in foreign affairs. But "many of us," as Weber insisted, take the power of the nation to be our "ultimate value."[13]

Weber thus reinvoked the nationalist standpoint he had taken in his academic Inaugural Lecture of 1905. Yet his formulations seem to highlight another, equally salient concern. He called up a dark vision of the ancient Egyptian bureaucracy, which might be reincarnated in a technically perfected form.

> Awful as the thought may seem that the world will some day be made up of nothing but professors . . . even more dreadful is the thought that [it] will be inhabited only by those little cogwheels, those human beings . . . glued to a little post and striving for a little bigger one — a condition you will find . . . [in] today's civil service, and above all among its heirs, our students.
>
> [It is] as if we . . . [were] human beings who need "order" and nothing but order, who become nervous and cowardly when that order is weakened for a moment . . . That the world should know nothing but such men of order — that is the [current] development . . . in any case, and thus the central question is . . . what we have to set against this machinery, in order to preserve a remainder of humanity from this parcellization of the soul, from this total domination of bureaucratic ideals.[14]

This vision of the human cost of bureaucratization is surely more passionate than anything Weber wrote about the primacy of the national cause.

When the First World War finally came, Weber fully shared the general enthusiasm for it. On the other hand, he soon joined a small minority of German university faculty who sought to restrain the annexationist hysteria that gripped most of their colleagues, and he bitterly opposed the recourse to unlimited submarine warfare. Moreover, a new phase in his political commentary began in 1917, in which he outlined domestic reforms that were to be completed before the end of the war. In the spring and fall of 1917, he published two brief articles on the democratization of the Prussian electoral system. In addition, between April and June of 1917, he wrote a series of essays for the

13. Weber, "Die wirtschaftlichen Unternehmungen der Gemeinden," *MWG* I/8, 360–61, 363–66.

14. Ibid., 362–63.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* that ultimately became a treatise on "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order." In a preface to "Parliament and Government," Weber announced that his arguments would not be confined to the realm of science, but would encompass value judgments, as would his attacks upon the reactionary speculations of the "academically educated." "We . . . who have stayed at home," he wrote, have no business distinguishing truly "German" political forms from "Western" alternatives, as if Germany had no politically liberal traditions. We certainly should not tell our men at the front that they will have "bled in vain" unless extensive new territories are annexed. Instead, we must transform our political institutions, so that after the war, the returning soldiers will be able to participate fully in shaping the nation's political future. To that end, we must be willing to deal with "sober civic" issues of political technique that may not satisfy the cultural pretensions of our "literati."[15]

The starting point of Weber's critique of the Wilhelmian sociopolitical system was an attack on the "Bismarck legend" that had been created by politically immature publicists. According to the current "literati's fashion," Bismarck's liberal collaborators and rivals in the construction of the German Empire were people without talent or vision, and unrepresentative of the "German spirit." In the face of this orthodoxy, Weber conceded the limitations inherent in the laissez-faire economics of the old liberal leaders; but he fully identified with their determination to create a liberal political framework that could endure beyond the era of Bismarck's personal dominance. The fact that they failed in this project was due, not to their lack of leadership qualities, but to Bismarck's inability to tolerate men of independent views among his political competitors. To defeat them, he engaged in the worst sort of "demagogic" tactics, not only to wrest concessions he thought he needed, but also to impose illiberal solutions that destroyed his principled opposition. In an analogous way, he refused to accept the trade unions' right to represent the legitimate interests of the workers, while unsuccessfully wooing the working class with social insurance payments from a state in which they played no role. The police and judicial harassment institutionalized by the anti-Socialist law virtually forced the Social Democratic Party into the fruitless posture of unconditional opposition, while the dramatized threat of revolution kept the middle class pliant from sheer cowardice. A state that based its military system on honor and comradeship deprived the proletariat of comradely honor, the only possible source of working-class idealism. Thus Bismarck's heritage left (1) a huge deficit in the political education of the nation, (2) a powerless parliament unable to attract political talents

15. Weber, "Das preussische Wahlrecht," *MWG* I/15, 224–35; "Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland," *MWG* I/15, 432–633; "Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland," *MWG* I/15, 432–633, esp. 432–36.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

comparable with its early leaders, and (3) the unchecked rule of the government bureaucracy.[16]

According to Weber, the modern world is characterized in any case by the steady advance of bureaucracy. Just as economic modernization is equivalent with progress toward capitalism, so the modernization of the state entails the emergence of a bureaucracy based upon specialized training, secure salaries, pensions and promotions, designated spheres of competence, systematic record keeping, and a clearly defined hierarchy of super- and subordination. Municipal government, the modern army, and private capitalist enterprise too, are characterized by bureaucratic organization, and thus by the separation of the official, the officer, and the employee from the means of administration, warfare, and production or distribution. The parallel development of capitalism and bureaucracy is no accident; for modern Western capitalism rests essentially upon rational calculation; it therefore needs a system of public administration and justice whose workings are predictable or calculable, like the operations of a machine.[17]

Modern political parties too are increasingly bureaucratic in structure. They have always been essentially voluntary organizations, dependent upon solicitation to increase their membership. In recent times, however, they have evolved from informal associations of notables to mass organizations administered by a staff of salaried officials. The parties must still compete for votes; but the ordinary voter and party member has played a less and less active role in determining party programs. Notables have continued to be important as patrons or figureheads; but much of their former influence has passed to party secretaries, publicists, and other professionals. Modern political parties have been of two main types: some have primarily pursued the patronage of offices that become available after a victory at the polls. Particularly in the United States, such patronage parties have adjusted their platforms to attract as many votes as possible; party "bosses" have traded in patronage to deliver election results, and the rank and file has actually preferred the resulting corruption to the arrogance of expert officials. But even in the United States, as resources eventually become scarcer, the efficiency of specialized training and discipline will point the way toward bureaucratization. The second type of party has been more characteristic of Germany; it has been committed to a "worldview," and has pursued relatively fixed political ends. The Catholic Center is an example, and so is the Social Democratic Party; yet particularly the latter, the largest and most democratic party in the German political system, also illustrates the increasing convergence between the two types of political parties.[18]

16. Ibid., 437–50; "Wahlrecht und Demokratie," 347–48.
17. Weber, "Parlament und Regierung," 450–54.
18. Ibid., 451–55, 457–61.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Against this background sketch of bureaucratization, Weber developed a penetrating critique of the Wilhelmian political system. The fatal flaw of that system, Weber wrote, lay in the absence of responsible political leadership. Ever since Bismarck's time, the German state was governed by men who behaved like honorable civil servants, trying to stand above the political parties in the Reichstag, rather than taking responsibility in their own behalf for a deliberate political course. Emperor William II's determination to govern in person led to offensive and pointless gestures, rather than to reflected policies; for the monarch was confronted only by an interested courtly clique, and by men who did not recognize their elementary duty to resign when egregious mistakes were made. In short, there were no responsible political leaders, no one to restrain the administrative rule of the bureaucracy, and no genuine intermediary between the government and the Reichstag. In England, by contrast, a monarch retained a measure of political influence precisely by withdrawing from day-to-day political decisions, a working parliament represented the citizens in the face of officialdom, and genuine political leaders guided a state that was able to attract the largely voluntary submission of much of the globe.[19]

Article 9 of the German Constitution of 1871 forbade leading statesmen, who had to be members of the Federal Council, from holding or retaining their seats in the Reichstag. Thoughtlessly adapted from the English separation of Lords and Commons, this disastrous provision prevented political party leaders from taking ministerial positions without severing their parliamentary roots — and thus condemning themselves to impotence. As a result, young aspirants for political leadership were shunted away from the Reichstag, which really became a recruiting ground for civil servants. This seemed a "German" solution of the parliamentary problem to the "literati," who "examine officials and feel themselves to be officials and the fathers of officials," and who sneer at "West European" and specifically "democratic" place hunting. Weber observed, however, that the conventions of the civil service hierarchy do not favor personal independence and the talent for politics, which requires conflict and the ability to recruit allies and followers. "Philistine moralists" harp upon the obvious fact that the "will to power" motivates aspirants to political leadership, while the "egotistic striving for office" moves their followers. Candidates for civil service posts, by contrast, are presumably never conformist "climbers" (*Streber*) — or hungry for salaries. The truth is that we must create a framework in which such all-too-human traits will serve to select political talents. That is why party leaders must have a real chance at power and responsibility. That, too, is why we need a working parliament, in which service on commissions and acquired expertise will be as important as good speeches. We need true political leaders,

19. Ibid., 467–72.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

not mere demagogues. Politically neutral officials can never take their place.[20]

In a characteristic contrast, Weber identified the "parliamentary system" that made England a "democracy" (*Volksstaat*), with the "negative politics" of Germany's "authoritarian state." Since the Reichstag could only grant or refuse budgetary provisions, and accept or reject policies proposed to it, it was bound to confront the government as a hostile force. It could express the dissatisfaction of its constituents, but it was never asked to participate in the formulation of positive political programs. The highest places in the monarchical regime were occupied by successful civil servants or courtiers. Neither the struggles for power nor office patronage ceased under these circumstances. But they took covert and subaltern forms, and they consistently favored policies considered acceptable at court (*hoffähig*). The political parties consequently developed something like a "will to powerlessness," while extra parliamentary forces were encouraged to intervene in the decision-making process. In this "pseudoconstitutional" context, it was taken for granted that Prussian officials must be politically conservative; for that was what the claim to "stand above the parties" really meant. The Social Democratic Party actually collaborated in "negative politics." Its members cultivated their class solidarity and the antipolitical vision of "brotherliness." Its leaders were given no incentive to break out of the "ghetto existence" that was thus perpetuated. "Negative politics" was perfectly consistent, moreover, with blatant concessions to the material interests of government supporters. That is why the representatives of big capital stood united behind a regime that obviously benefited them.[21]

Weber's account of English parliamentary government was highly specific. The statesmen who lead the nation in England must have the confidence of the strongest political party or of a parliamentary majority. The members of the government must answer critical questions put to them by the parliamentary opposition, and they must control the administrative apparatus in the sense desired by the people's representatives. To help them in that task, they must have the right of parliamentary inquiry (*Enqueterecht*); they must be able to compel civil servants to testify before them under oath. They must penetrate the specialized knowledge of the bureaucracy and the secrecy invoked by administrators to protect their prerogatives. The proceedings of a working parliament and of its commissions should usually be public, so that they will contribute to the political education of the citizens. To Weber, it was ludicrous that German philistine literati should look down upon the proceedings of the British parliament from the height of their impotence.[22]

The key question for the German polity, according to Weber, was how to

20. Ibid., 476–77, 481–82, 484, 486–87, esp. 482.
21. Ibid., 473–76, 500–1, 503–5.
22. Ibid., 423, 488–91.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

make the Reichstag fit to exercise power. Article 9 and various procedural rules must be altered to meet this objective. But above all, Germany needs parliamentarians who can make politics their full-time occupation. This is the context in which Weber introduced the distinction between living *from* and living *for* politics. The secretaries, publicists and other officials of political parties and pressure groups earn their living *from* their positions. Among people in nonpolitical occupations, some are more available than others. Thus lawyers can free themselves from their ordinary duties to live *for* politics. Party officials can no longer be dispensed with; but they may make it difficult for independent leaders to reach high office. The notion that political winners must be unscrupulous "demagogues" is of course exaggerated; but some sort of demagogic solicitation of voters is indeed inescapable. In modern mass democracies, the selection of leaders is likely to take on a plebiscitary character. Yet unlike pure Caesarism, plebiscitary leadership is relatively stable and controllable, limited by legally guaranteed civil rights, and by the leader's apprenticeship in the usages of parliamentary work. Besides, the plebiscitary leader whose program fails can be peacefully replaced.[23]

Asking himself why there are democratic opponents of parliamentary government, Weber pointed to the voluntary character of party politics. The popular leader does not simply emerge from a mass constituency. Rather, he seeks power and responsibility to "realize specific political ideas," and he begins by seeking party support for his program. Thus the leader proposes both policy ends and political means, and the voters can only dispose of the proposal by accepting or rejecting it. The safeguard against merely demagogic leaders lies in their prior political work, and in their commitment to the norms of their political system.[24]

Max Weber's 1917 political essays can only be understood as challenges to prevalent orthodoxies he meant to contest. We have to remember that the harmonious mood of August 1914 had been quickly dissipated by what Weber saw as a class war from the right. The campaigns in behalf of radically expansionist policies and of unlimited submarine warfare deeply embittered Weber and a few of his colleagues. The division between an orthodox majority and a "modernist" minority among German academics deepened to the point of undisguised hostility. Weber could not help but feel that the "apolitical" rhetoric of his conservative and "national" opponents, the "ideas of 1914," and the defense of German "culture" against Western "civilization" actually served to rationalize a ruthless campaign to preserve the status quo at home through conquest abroad. No wonder that the beneficiaries of the distorted domestic balance of power should press for the total victory of a distinctively "German" polity.

23. Ibid., 535–37, 539–40.
24. Ibid., 547, 549–51.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

What really angered Weber was the complicity of many German university professors in this disastrous course. He increasingly saw his orthodox colleagues as empty-headed or mendacious.[25]

One of the "soap bubbles" launched by the German wartime literati was the idea of a legislature representing "occupational estates." For Weber, this scheme reflected widespread fears of democracy but was plainly nonsensical. For under modern conditions, the formal occupations of individuals have little to do with their social functions. The main conflicts to be compromised are between employers and workers, and the attempt to circumvent that need would aggravate class antagonisms to the point of "rage." The German literati might associate occupational representation with the vision of a "communal economy," but that just revealed their ignorance of the spirit of modern rational capitalism. Modern individuals, Weber added, live in private spheres that have become highly differentiated. They are divided, moreover, by socially constituted inequalities of wealth and education. All the more urgent is the demand that they be equal *as citizens*, just as they are equal before death on the battlefield. Finally, modern men are typically members of various voluntary associations and interest groups. If an occupational representation were devised, the conflict among these associations and interest groups would certainly continue, whether inside or outside the legislature. Weber declared himself unwilling to take any further interest in political speculations that either served plutocratic interests — or emerged from the daydreams of politically immature literati.[26]

Another vague project that drew Weber's criticism was the plan to privilege advanced education in the assignment of individuals to the Prussian voting classes. Weber saw higher education as a major source of status advantages, as against the economic roots of class positions.

> Differences of *Bildung* . . . are today one of the very strongest inner barriers in society. Especially in Germany, where almost all privileged positions within and without the civil service are tied not only to specialized knowledge, but also to "general *Bildung*" . . . All our examination diplomas also and primarily certify this important status quality.

But Weber insisted that the graduates of German "doctoral factories" had no more to offer than "specialized knowledge" (*Fachwissen*). In any case, he could not imagine a politically less qualified stratum. The total lack of political measure demonstrated by university professors during the war left no doubt about that. The ever increasing demand for examinations as professional qualifications was nothing more than a quest for prebends: for secure salaries and pensions

25. Ibid., 532.

26. Weber, "Das preussische Wahlrecht," 332–34; Weber, "Wahlrecht und Demokatie," 355–58, 368–72; Weber, "Parlament und Regierung," 456–57.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

appropriate to the status of the diploma holders. Weber was not kind in his comments upon the social pretensions of the highly educated, who habitually looked down upon modern entrepreneurs, labor leaders, politicians, and journalists. It would be absurd to grant them electoral privileges.[27]

In some of the darkest passages of his 1917 essay on "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order," Weber traced the links between (1) the social interests and ideological propensities of most German university faculty, (2) the stubborn resistance to parliamentary democracy, and (3) the inescapable advance of bureaucratization. In what was clearly an attack on the majority of his colleagues, he wrote again of the "academic literati," their "resentment" of anyone not examined and certified by them, and their "fear for the prestige of their own stratum." These attitudes, he thought, were behind their repeated diatribes against "democracy" and "parliamentary dilettantism." Their "instincts" made "the mass" of them "forever blind" to political realities. Their "typical snobbism" caused them to dismiss the "subaltern" problems of political reform in favor of more elevated speculations about "the ideas of 1914," "true socialism," and the like. But a people that is ruled by an uncontrolled bureaucracy, that is not master of its own fate at home, should certainly not try to play the master abroad. Only a politically mature nation has the right to touch the wheel of history.[28]

More than other people, Weber thought, the Germans have displayed a talent for rational administration in every kind of organization. They have applauded the victorious march of bureaucratization as a "form of life," and again the prebends and status claims of the "examination diploma" have been their real objectives.

> The fact of universal bureaucratization is really hidden behind the so-called ideas of 1914, behind what the literati euphemistically term the "socialism of the future," behind the slogan about "organization," the "communal economy," and . . . behind all similar contemporary turns of phrase.

In a peculiarly double-edged rebuke, Weber claimed that "the old Chinese mandarin was not a specialized official, but . . . a literarily and humanistically educated gentleman." The modern official, by contrast, is increasingly in need of specialized training, and thus not really a man of *Bildung*. There are literati who believe that private capitalism could be domesticated through state control. But instead of weakening the "steel housing" of modern industrial work, this would leave the bureaucracy in sole command. A bureaucracy is a human machine; like a purely mechanical one, it is "congealed mind." Together, the

27. Weber, "Das preussische Wahlrecht," 229–31; and esp. Weber, "Wahlrecht und Demokratie," 350–51.

28. Weber, "Parlament und Regierung," 591–95.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

animate and inanimate machines are constructing "the housing for the new bondage," to which "future human beings . . . may have to submit, if a technically good, and that means: rational bureaucratic administration is the ultimate value that will guide the regulation of their affairs."[29]

These formulations have much in common with Weber's outwardly pessimistic reflections on the problems of liberalism in Russia. Again, the image of the "housing for the new bondage" functions as a prophecy of doom that cries out, against the tide of history, for whatever sources of human social vitality may yet be mobilized. The overwhelming threat in the wartime article, however, is simply bureaucracy. And whereas Weber elsewhere concedes that future officials require "general *Bildung*" as well as specialized training, he here contrasts the German civil servant with the humanistically educated "Chinese mandarin." We know that Weber was almost the only German academic of his time to dismiss *Bildung* as a realistic objective of German university education. His exclusive emphasis upon the technical training of the official was meant to contribute to his image of the bureaucracy as a machine, which in turn underscored the need to mobilize residual sources of individualism and of liberty, in politics and elsewhere.[30]

In the closing months of 1917, Weber wrote a sequence of five short articles in the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* that were collected in a pamphlet in January 1919 and supplemented by a note on the "Reich President" two months later. The two main points to be made about this small cluster of texts is that it reflected changing tactical choices, but otherwise only slightly modified Weber's wartime perspective. To be sure, the six months from November 1918 to March 1919 saw Weber more actively engaged in current political affairs than ever before. It looked for a time as if he might be elected a representative and a potential leader of the newly formed German Democratic Party. But after professional party officials had undercut that possibility — and after Weber had failed to fight for a mandate — he continued to campaign energetically for the new party, to sit on constitutional commissions, and to travel to the peace conference at Versailles. In substance, Weber favored a constitutional monarchy until the behavior of William II made that impossible. He was dismayed at the revolutionary disorders of November 1918, and appalled at German left-wing pacifists who seconded the Allied claim that Germany was solely responsible for the war. He preached "dignity" in defeat. As the terms of the Versailles settlement began to emerge, his outrage and his pessimism deepened. Yet he soon recovered his equilibrium and his characteristic sense of reality. He came to recommend a program of cooperation between the Social Democrats and the progressive elements within the German middle class. For a while, he even gave lip

29. Ibid., 461–64, esp. 462, 464.
30. Ibid., 465–66.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

service to limited forms of "socialization." Nevertheless, he remained firmly opposed to socialist planning.[31]

The chief purpose of Weber's political articles of late 1918 was to prepare the ground for a democratically elected National Assembly that would reestablish the authority of the German central government and lay the constitutional foundations for a Republic. The legitimacy of the new regime, according to Weber, could only be based upon the "natural law" conception of popular sovereignty. More specifically, Weber's political plan extended the institutions of the old empire, including especially its federal structure, although with significant modifications. Yet he eventually modified his initially federalist emphasis in a unitary direction. Thus he excluded anything like the extensive autonomy of the American states, partly in view of the need for an active social policy. With respect to primary and secondary education, moreover, Weber intended the national legislature to stipulate "norms" for the policies of the several states. The President of the German Republic, Weber believed, should be directly elected by the voters, rather than by the Reichstag. Like the President of the United States, he would thus have an independent political mandate and position, one based upon the plebiscitary principle of popular sovereignty. He was also to be equipped with a suspensive veto, and with the right to dissolve the Reichstag and call for new elections, particularly if no prime minister succeeded in constituting a governing majority from among the political parties. Weber's long-standing interest in the education and selection of talented political leaders ultimately culminated in this call for a plebiscitary presidency. Equally interesting for us is Weber's insistence upon the control of the bureaucracy by means of a parliamentary right of inquiry (*Enqueterecht*), and his call for a set of fundamental human rights (*Grundrechte*) to be anchored in the constitution.[32]

More broadly considered, Weber's essay of November and December 1918 insisted upon the need for political cooperation between the working class and middle-class progressives. Since a Social Democratic majority could not be expected in the forthcoming elections to the National Assembly, Weber argued, the new regime absolutely required the support of the German bourgeoisie, or of genuinely liberal and democratic elements within it. A purely socialist government was impossible in any case, since the Western governments would not accept it, and since Germany needed economic credits that would not be granted unless expropriation was formally excluded. Thus this was no time to listen to radical intellectuals, who lived "from" and not "for" the revolution, or to flirt with the phantasies of "academic literati" about a "communal econo-

31. I am relying upon the editor's introduction to *MWG* I/ 16, 1–37, which is by Wolfgang Mommsen.

32. Weber, "Deutschlands künftige Staatsform," *MWG* I/16, 110–12, 116–22, 125–30, 138–40; Weber's offhand remark that the fundamental right to property might have to be modified was almost certainly tactical only.

https://doi.org/10.1163/15691610260426506 Published online by Cambridge University Press

my" and the like. Above all, the German middle class had to abandon the "spirit of security" it had enjoyed under the protection of an authoritarian regime, the fear of innovation, and the "will to powerlessness." For broad segments of the German population, technically sound administration and material welfare had provided a "housing" (*Gehäuse*) that gradually suppressed all "pride of citizenship, without which even the freest institutions are mere shadows." The republic would put an end to this "security." The middle class would have to fend for itself, as the working class has always done. New political parties would have to be formed, and they could hardly draw upon politicians who had participated in the campaign against Western democracy, in the annexationist propaganda, and in the campaign for unlimited submarine warfare. Indeed, Germany would have to abandon its imperialist dreams, so as peacefully to cultivate its national traditions within the League of Nations. In this and other respects, Weber's 1918 articles were an extension of his wartime position, though with modifications that reflected the new revolutionary situation.[33]

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33. Ibid., 99–109, 112–16, 145–46, esp. 103, 105–09, 116.

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