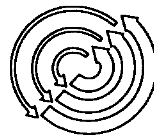

CRSO

Center for Research on Social Organization

The Working Paper Series

The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor

IN SEARCH OF THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION: THE PARTICULARITIES OF GERMAN HISTORY

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Sept. 1987 CRSO #350/CSST #4

"In Search of the Bourgeois Revolution:

The Particularities of German History".

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The Peculiarities of the Germans?

The aim of this essay is to identify a central assumption of historical writing about Germany and to consider some of its implications for our wider understanding of European and comparative history. That assumption concerns the alleged absence or failure of bourgeois revolution in German history and its consequences for Germany's future political development. It appears in the detailed literature on 1848 and the 1860s; in the general textbooks; and in much of the literature on later periods too. Above all, it appears as a strategic idea in most of the attempts to build deep historical explanations for the rise of Nazism and the weakness of German liberalism.

But the implications go far beyond German history itself to embrace equally forthright conceptions of other national histories, particularly those of Britain and France. To the extent that all national historiographies rest on more or less elaborate systems of distinction, establishing the "peculiarities" of one country against the "otherness" of the rest, the idea of Germany's absent bourgeois revolution also possesses this hidden or latent comparative dimension. In addition, works of general political theory tend to share the same view of the German past, especially when proceeding from a comparative historical perspective, whether Marxist or non-Marxist: those of Barrington Moore, Dahrendorf, and Poulantzas

are all good examples.[1] In other words, the idea that Germany had no bourgeois revolution forms the basis for a general interpretation of German history, which proposes its marked peculiarity when compared with the other states of Western Europe.

How does this interpretation run? It begins with certain crucial deficiencies of the German bourgeoisie's political behavior, which are used to explain the weakness of German liberalism in the century between 1848 and 1945. The German bourgeoisie is regarded as a weak and underdeveloped bourgeoisie, which failed as a class to act in its own best interests. But what exactly is meant by this assertion? Abstracting cautiously from an extremely large literature, it seems to imply the following: that the German bourgeoisie (by contrast, that is, with its counterparts elsewhere in the West) was seriously lacking in "maturity" and political self-confidence, "incapable of developing an independent class consciousness" of its own.[2] During the nineteenth century it failed to constitute itself as a self-conscious class-subject, acting politically in its own collective interests, in direct confrontation with the established domination of a landowning aristocracy. On the contrary (so the argument runs), so far from realizing its essential interests in class struggle with the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie in Germany preferred to compromise with the old order, first in the 1848 Revolution, and then during the unification struggle of the 1860s. It allowed itself to become

subordinated to the "pre-industrial ruling elite", failed to win basic reforms in the state, and permitted its own assimilation to the existing aristocratic and authoritarian value-system.

Under the Second Empire (1871-1918), after the unification of Germany, this process was continued. The so-called "feudalization" of the bourgeoisie became heavily institutionalized. This was assisted by manipulative techniques of government (e.g. "social imperialism", "secondary integration", anti-socialism), which diverted the bourgeoisie from thoughts of further reform, and at which Bismarck was the supreme master. The socializing institutions of the Imperial state (school, church, army, university) also helped reconcile the bourgeoisie to a subordinate place in German society. Satisfied with the fruits of the new capitalist prosperity, enticed by the glitter of imperialism, and spurred by the carefully manipulated fear of socialism, the German bourgeoisie settled for second best. There failed to develop that "emancipatory will" or "sense of citizenship" that in Britain or France was thought to have sustained a process of democratization. Denied a "natural" outlet in liberal politics, it is often argued, bourgeois energies were directed elsewhere--into business and commercial enterprise in one view, or philosophy and cultural contemplation in another. Either way, German public life lacked the vitalizing liberalism of a bourgeoisie triumphant in its own hegemonic capability. Progress towards parliamentary government was disastrously interrupted.

The liberal-democratic tradition was stillborn, easing the polarization of left and right, and prefiguring the possibility of fascism.[3]

As a view of German society under the Kaiserreich, this has several interesting features. Before going further, I want to draw attention to three of these:

(1) Industrialization and Democracy

First, this view reflects a set of larger assumptions about the bases of political development under industrial capitalism. Most German historians seem to accept that there should be some sort of logical fit between "the process of industrial growth" on the one hand, and "political modernization" on the other; and by "political modernization" in this context is meant the consolidation of liberal-democratic institutions.[4] Within that framework of assumptions the key question of German history becomes to establish why such a desirable and ultimately necessary complementarity of economic and political forms failed to develop. Here is Ernst Fraenkel: the crucial question for German historians is that of "why . . . Germany has found it so difficult to understand the parliamentary form of government, to come to terms with it, and apply it successfully".[5] Dahrendorf, in his influential and wide-ranging reflections on "society and democracy in Germany", puts the question in much the same way:[6]

> Why is it that so few in Germany embraced the principle of liberal democracy? There were enemies of liberalism everywhere and still are today (sic). There may even be or have been other countries where liberal democracy has found as little recognition as it did in Germany.

> . . .But in this study we want to find out what it is in German society that may account for Germany's persistent failure to give a home to democracy in its liberal sense.

In this view, the real crux of Germany's "mistaken development" by comparison with the healthier trajectories of the "West" was the failure to create a "pluralist democracy", and the vital continuity in German history is one of "authoritarian and anti-democratic structures in state and society".[7] This postponed the inevitable march of progress--i.e. the ultimate necessity of the "bourgeois revolution" which would finally "open the road to modernity", in Dahrendorf's revealing phrase.[8]

(2) Pre-Industrial Traditions

Secondly, German historians give the greatest explanatory weight to "pre-industrial continuities", which under different circumstances a successful bourgeois revolution would have swept away--what Hans-Ulrich Wehler calls the successful "defence of traditional ruling positions by pre-industrial ruling elites against the onslaught of new forces".[9] Thus the weakness of German liberalism under the Second Empire is explained not by what happens inside the Imperial period itself, but by the traditional hangovers of a previous era--i.e. not by the structures and conditions of an industrial-capitalist society (or by the specific political experiences of the period 1871-1918), but by "pre-industrial" survivals thought to be out of step with the "normal" logic of industrialization. Moreover, lurking within this argument is the further belief that by some universal criteria of "modernity" the unwillingness of the German bourgeoisie to struggle for additional

parliamentary and other reforms was an irrational denial of its own best interests, certainly in the longer run. Thus the anti-trade union attitudes of the big employers in heavy industry is usually attributed to a "backward" and abnormally reactionary mentality, which hampered the emergence of "modern" forms of industrial conciliation. This was one consequence of the bourgeoisie's defective consciousness, subordination, and deference to the aristocracy, exemplified by the internalization of traditional authoritarian values. A paternalist conception of industrial authority prevented the big employers from developing an enlightened view of their own self-interest by acknowledging the "just" demands of the working class for "social and political equality of status". Consequently, in Wehler's view, the "power-elites" again re-emphasized their ideological backwardness, because they were "neither willing nor able to introduce in good time the transition to modern social and political relationships".[10]

(3) Origins of Fascism

Thirdly, this type of argumentation also involves a particular view of fascism, which defines the latter very much by its long-term origins. Here the weakness of liberal-democratic traditions also signifies Germany's greater vulnerability to fascist or authoritarian politics. Thus the failure to "modernize" the political system under the Kaiserreich and to build a strong enough democratic consensus in the Weimar Republic are both traced to the critical "defeats" of the bourgeoisie in 1848-71, with the resulting survival of "pre-industrial traditions".[11] In effect,

the problem of Nazism is redefined as a more general problem of political backwardness, what Dahrendorf calls the "structural syndrome" of German authoritarianism.[12] Hans-Jürgen Puhle has put this particularly conveniently (if long-windedly), explaining fascism in terms of a society[13]

> in which the consequences of delayed state-formation and delayed industrialization combined closely together with the effects of the absence of bourgeois revolution and the absence of parliamentarization to form the decisive brakes on political democratization and social emancipation.

The explanation for Nazism is derived from a specific contrast with the deep histories of the "Western democracies", in which Germany's alleged absence of bourgeois revolution plays a key role. In other words, the argument contains a powerful notion of German exceptionalism.

The Problem of Bourgeois Revolution

Thus the assumption that Germany did not have a bourgeois revolution in the nineteenth century has structured our general understanding of the German past. It affects both the questions we ask and where we look for the answers. Fixed on the apparent subordination of the bourgeoisie under the *Kaiserreich* and the seeming archaism of the Imperial state, most historians address the following question: why was the German bourgeoisie not more liberal in the style of its French or British counterparts? Moreover, this is also thought to deliver an explanation for fascism, so that the conjunctural specificity of Nazism--why it happened when it did--is almost wholly collapsed into a description

of its deeper nineteenth century origins. The peculiarity of German history is situated in a linear continuity of "pre-industrial traditions", which blocked the development of "modern political institutions". Arguably this leads to a view of the German past which is intellectually very undemanding. For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it produces a closed system of interpretation, each of whose elements presumes the others: because Germany produced Nazism, it was an illiberal society excessively vulnerable to authoritarianism; because it failed to generate a viable liberalism, it was an imperfectly "modern" society; because the bourgeoisie is the agent of "modernization", Germany must have lacked a self-confident and class-conscious bourgeoisie; because the German bourgeoisie occupied a subordinate place in an aristocratically dominated society, Germany lacked a bourgeois revolution.

If we turn to the concept of bourgeois revolution itself, moreover, it soon becomes clear that this rests on a series of normally unexplicated assumptions that are extremely questionable. My aim in examining these assumptions is not to convict individual historians of "error" and thereby dismiss their contributions. Nor am I suggesting that the ideas concerned may always be found as consciously adopted formulations. What follows is deliberately an exercise in abstraction, exploring the logic of certain influential interpretations to establish the limits of their explanatory purchase. I am interested in how the idea of "failed bourgeois revolution" functions in the discourse of German historians, with a

view to opening up some new perspectives. Again: I am not interested in scoring points for their own sake, or with impugning the scholarship and intellectual credentials of previous historians. I am interested in defining a problem which might then be discussed, nothing more.[14] In this sense there are several areas of difficulty:

(a) Talk of Germany's "failed bourgeois revolution" seems to imply that all "modern industrial societies" worthy of the name must at some stage pass through a bourgeois revolution of the (attributed) British or French type. (This is especially marked in the case of Dahrendorf). Where such an experience fails to occur, as in Germany, we have an instance of "mis-development". As the model of successful bourgeois revolution is never discussed except by implication, however, we have to infer exactly what that entails. In passing, we may also note an irony of intellectual history: whereas the original coinage of "bourgeois revolution" was impeccably liberal, deriving from the early-nineteenth century conjunction of political economy and representative government (the term itself comes from Guizot), the present usage in the French and English-speaking worlds has become largely Marxist; non-Marxist historians have retreated from that earlier conception of progress (now stigmatized as "whig"), in which the emergence of liberal institutions was precisely generated by the rise of a new social group, namely, the driving energy of a new entrepreneurial and non-noble propertied class, whose interests and behavior required the sweeping away of feudal and absolutist restrictions on economic

freedom and <u>therefore</u> a set of liberal political innovations; instead, a large body of developmental theory from the post-1945 social sciences, economically and sociologically founded, but with no integral conception of revolutionary political transformation of the same pivotal kind, has crowded in to fill the intellectual space.[15] In Germany, by contrast, the older vocabulary of "bourgeois revolution" continues to coexist uneasily with the more recent framework of "modernization theory", which on the whole the post-sixties generation of West German historians has enthusiastically embraced. Given the present Marxist associations of the bourgeois revolution theory and the anti-Marxist orientation of modernization theory, this produces a disjointed eclecticism that can sometimes confuse.

(b) In the light of the above, the meaning of bourgeois revolution has to be reconstructed from the general output of the historians concerned. On this basis the following definition seems to emerge: the "bourgeois revolution" represents a set of changes forced through by the bourgeoisie <u>itself</u>, acting collectively in its own class interests, in direct confrontation with a "pre-industrial" or feudal ruling class. This entails a stress on motivations and the social identity of participants, implying that the bourgeoisie itself would be at the head of the revolutionary movement in an authentic bourgeois revolution, leading the insurgent masses and seizing the helm of the state. Aside from the empirical objections (which should be clear enough from the literatures on the English and French Revolutions), this raises

serious theoretical problems. For one, it presumes that the bourgeoisie can be conceptualized in the first place as a corporate political actor, with a collective class interest traceable through particular events and ideas in a directly expressive way, speaking through the acts of individual politicians. Though Marxist in origin, this is not perhaps a conception many Marxists would now defend.[16] On the other hand, it seems to be present in much German historiography "in a practical state". At the very least, it is not inconsistent with how German historians currently talk about the nineteenth century.

(c) Thirdly, talk of the German bourgeoisie's political failings strongly implies that the "rising" bourgeoisie (if, that is, it is to be regarded as a <u>fully-formed</u> <u>class-conscious</u> bourgeoisie) should be naturally or necessarily <u>liberal</u> in its political inclinations. There is often a great deal of conceptual slippage from "bourgeois" to "liberal" in the writings of German historians, confusing the two terms' legitimate applications, with a tendential (and tendentious) reduction of politics to class. As Laclau has observed in another context, this involves the common assumption that <u>specific</u> ideologies have a specific <u>class-belonging</u>, in the sense that they are historically the "natural property" of a particular class or social group.[17] This is so pervasive a habit that it barely needs detailed demonstration, but some salient examples would be the following: <u>anti-semitism</u> as the natural property of small producers threatened by industrialization or "modernization"; <u>socialism</u> as the natural property of a class-

conscious proletariat; <u>liberalism</u> as the natural property of a rising bourgeoisie; and finally, <u>authoritarianism</u> (as in Imperial Germany) as the natural property of a "feudalized" and subordinate bourgeoisie, which has failed to constitute itself as a self-conscious class-subject through a successful bourgeois revolution. Many others could be added. These days, when "economism" and "reductionism" of different kinds have become the cardinal sin of materialist analysis, it seems hardly necessary to expatiate on the drawbacks of this approach. But the habitual conflation of "bourgeoisie" (an economic or sociological category, to which a varied repertoire of outlooks and cultural traits may be historically attached) and "liberalism" (a specific ideology and type of politics), where the one becomes a logical accompaniment or consequence of the other, is clearly worth noting (and doing something about).[18]

(d) In most discussions of 1848 in Germany events seem to be measured against a straightforward polarity of alternatives: liberal victory through the triumphant voluntarism of an anti-monarchist revolution, or the armed counter-revolution of resurgent aristocratic authoritarianism and the restoration of the pre-March monarchy. In this way, the test of success for both the bourgeois revolution and an authentic liberalism becomes a particular abstract model of the revolutionary process. (Parenthetically, we might say that this model is informed more by later conceptions of revolutionary change and party organization than by any sensible understanding of what happened in the 1640s and 1789). In this

sense the bourgeois revolution appears as a contest, which the bourgeoisie must either win or lose, with state power as the coveted prize. This strict polarity of alternatives is not very helpful for unscrambling the complexity of events, the shifting configuration of political forces, or the full range of possible outcomes.

(e) Finally, there is the most dubious assumption of all, namely, that the model of "bourgeois revolution" attributed to the British and French cases (i.e., of a forcibly acquired liberal democracy seized by a triumphant bourgeoisie, acting politically as a class, in conscious struggle with a feudal aristocracy) actually occurred. This assumption is the most basic and questionable of all. For the thesis of Germany's absent bourgeois revolution, in so far as we can reconstruct the concept's specific content, presupposes a reading of the English and French Revolutions that has long been discredited in the national literatures concerned. Of course, the simplified reduction of other national histories into ideal-typical models for the purposes of comparison has a long, not to say respectable provenance. But there is a certain poignancy in the reliance of mostly non-Marxist (and frequently anti-Marxist) historians on an old shibboleth of vulgar Marxism, which recent historical work has cast into disrepute. In an oddly similar controversy concerning the "absence" of a proper bourgeois revolution in Britain, Edward Thompson dealt this kind of thinking a devastating blow:[19]

> I am objecting to a model which concentrates attention upon one dramatic episode--the Revolution--to

> which all that goes before and after must be related; and which insists upon an ideal type of this Revolution against which all others must be judged. Minds which thirst for a tidy platonism very soon become impatient with actual history. The French Revolution was a fundamental moment in the history of the West, and in its rapid passage through a gamut of experiences it afforded incomparable insights and prefigurements of subsequent conflicts. But because it was a gigantic experience it was not necessarily a typical one. So far from an advanced, egalitarian, left-Jacobin phase being an intrinsic part of any fulfilled bourgeois revolution, recent research into the role of the Parisian crowd, the actual social composition of the sections and the institutions of the Terror and of the revolutionary armies, as well as into the national emergency of war dictatorship, calls into question how far it is meaningful to characterize the Jacobinism of Year II as an authentic "bourgeois" experience at all. And certainly the _industrial_ bourgeoisie cannot be credited with being either the "vanguard" of Jacobinism or the major social force upholding this profoundly ambiguous political movement.

In other words, the social determinations of revolutionary crises (whether in France in 1789, Germany in 1848 or elsewhere) remain extremely complex, and the specific contribution of the bourgeoisie and its different fractions far from clear. At all events, what we can say is that British and French historians have largely abandoned the schematic notion of bourgeois revolution (as in [b] above) _German_ historians still appear to assume.

Thus the very concept of bourgeois revolution as German historians seem to understand it is itself problematic. At the same time, identifying "bourgeois revolution" with a necessary measure of parliamentary democracy also dictates a particular view of the Imperial state--namely, as a system of "pre-industrial domination" which assigned the bourgeoisie as such to a junior place. Because a retrospective measure of mature liberal democracy

is applied, the Imperial state is inevitably found "backward"; and because "democratization" is diagnosed as an immanent purpose of the historical process in Western Europe, a "discrepancy" is not surprisingly discovered between an advanced economy and a retrograde polity. In the argument's familiar terms, "political modernization" had failed to keep pace with "industrialization". Two consequences follow from this position, certainly in the practice of its exponents' historiography. On the one hand, it follows that the Kaiserreich was condemned to political instability till its political institutions became adequately "modernized": without the latter its governments would stay trapped in a logic of "manipulation" and "secondary integration", which could only end in disaster (and did). On the other hand, the idea that German history before 1945 provides an example of "mis-development" has to imply some notion of what a "correct" development would have been--i.e., a normative understanding of how "modern" societies should develop. In this case, liberal democracy becomes the manifest destiny of the bourgeoisie, which in the German example is somehow alienated.

Some Consequences

What follows from these observations? In the most general terms we clearly need to rethink the problem of bourgeois revolution if the term is to keep its value, and this has implications far outside the German discussion. In my view, any sensible discussion will have to proceed from the following points:

(1) <u>The Complexity of Revolutions</u>

Revolutions are complex configurations of events and participating forces, for which any single formula remains procrustean. If we ask the question, "what is the revolution *about*?", we can expect contradictory answers, depending on the particular group of participants, the part of the country, and the phase of the process. In particular, the relationship of the great seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century revolutions to the longer-run processes of social change that preceded them remains anything but clear. We can certainly put them in a general context of social change, involving expanding capitalist production in town and country, the dislocation of customary social relations, the re-ordering of state/society relations, and so on. We can also reasonably suggest that from the process of change there gradually crystallized a new social force--a bourgeoisie-in-the-making, shall we say--in whose cultural presence, social place, and general comportment the new changes were condensed, and which began to assert its leadership in society and even (though not necessarily) its right to control the state. But at the same time, it seems mistaken "to subordinate all other forms of social antagonism to the conflict between a generically defined 'bourgeoisie' and the ancien regime". In fact, the 1848 revolutions (to return to our immediate example) may best be seen as a "polarization of large and small producers, articulated by a radicalized intelligentsia of ex-university students and young professionals".[20] If this

was so, the specific political content of the revolutionary processes was highly contingent and can't be reduced to any pat formula of ascribed bourgeois consciousness. By now, it seems incontestably the case that the revolutionary impetus came as much from those who were seeking to oppose or hold up the agenda of social change as from those seeking to impose it. Indeed, the capitalist bourgeoisie proper usually acted as a conservative force in the revolutionary process itself, with constitutional goals that were strictly limited.

(2) Levels of Explanation

This forces us to separate very carefully the content of the popular revolutionary struggles from the actual changes which in the end they helped to confirm (or at least failed to obstruct). This leads to further distinctions--between the social and occupational backgrounds of the revolutionaries and the social relations of domination and exploitation that constrained their actions; between intention and effect; and between how the revolution was "made" and how its experience was eventually assimilated. Abstractly, this means distinguishing between two levels of determination or significance in the revolutionary conjuncture: between the revolution as a specific crisis of the state, involving widespread popular mobilization and a reconstitution of political relationships; and, on the other hand, the deeper processes of structural change, involving the increasing predominance of the capitalist mode of production, the potential obsolescence of many existing institutions and

practices, and the uneven transformation of social relations. How these two levels--change at the level of the state, change in the social formation--became articulated together in the revolutionary conjuncture of a 1789 or an 1848 is a matter for detailed historical investigation, and can't be legislated in theory, whether Marxist or any other.

(3) Bourgeoisie--Liberalism--Democracy

Next, we have to break once and for all the obstinate linkage of liberalism as a political movement and the necessary class interest of the whole bourgeoisie. At a theoretical level, this identification is overly determinist and class-reductionist. But several particular comments may also be made.

First, as a political tradition nineteenth-century liberalism was always rooted in larger social coalitions, which extended downwards from the industrial, commercial, and professional bourgeoisie into the petty bourgeoisie, artisanate, peasantry, and working class. At the same time, as an ideology of progress liberalism envisaged a type of society in which the bourgeoisie as a class could be dominant. Moreover, although liberalism could never be the "party of the bourgeoisie" in any simple or directly expressive way, the bourgeoisie proper could obviously do much to influence the character of the liberal movement, both regionally and nationally. It "led", not necessarily by numerical dominance on the liberal executives or in the organs of liberal opinion (though this could easily be true), but by a particular structure of interests, prejudices,

and aspirations, which set tasks for liberal leaderships and limits to their possible options. In this case the web of relationships between dominant groups and a wider popular constituency--i.e., the mediation of liberal hegemony--becomes crucial. Here we may simply note that the degree of subaltern groups' real integration (and hence the liberal coalition's degree of unity and cohesion) varied enormously, from country to country and region to region. As Stedman Jones has suggested, the more developed the social formation, the stronger the economic power of the bourgeoisie proper, and the greater the social and political distance from the mass of the small traders and producers; "conversely, the less developed the bourgeoisie, the smaller the gulf between 'bourgeois' and 'petty bourgeois', and the greater the preponderance and cohesion of the popular movement".[21] Once the new industrial working class was added to the picture, the degree and forms of variation became all the greater.

Secondly, the nineteenth-century liberal coalitions were characterized not only by "vertical" but also by "horizontal" integration. They were never exclusively an urban formation, but always had links to the countryside, not only via appeals to the rural masses (peasants, artisans, small traders), but through close relations to the landed interest. Whether we call the latter an "agrarian bourgeoisie" or retain it as a separate category (to speak of a "feudal aristocracy" becomes increasingly inappropriate, surely, after the post-Napoleonic settlement, even

east of the Elbe), it was always part of the liberal universe, through intermarriage and other forms of social intercourse, through commercial interpenetration, or through corporate political alliance. Though German historians tend to see the industrial-agrarian alliance of the late nineteenth century as some sort of peculiarity, it should probably be seen as a variation on a much broader theme. Similar processes of interpenetration (though naturally in different forms and over different periods) can be found in Britain, Italy, and France as well.[22]

Thirdly, we should never forget that the term "bourgeoisie" is strictly speaking a sociological category, which tells us nothing necessarily about the political behavior of particular bourgeoisies or their individual members. A great deal could be said, for instance, about the bourgeoisie's regional diversity and internal differentiation, and the variable form of its relations with other groups. Given such indeterminacy, it makes little sense to generalize predictively and collectively about the bourgeoisie's political behavior, whether in revolutionary or other situations.

Fourthly, the degree of liberalism achieved during the revolutionary process depends far more on pressures exerted by the popular forces than on the spontaneous inclinations of the bourgeoisie proper, and in practice the latter's various groupings might commit themselves just as easily to authoritarian as to liberal politics. On this basis, the degree of liberal-

democratic progress is possibly an inappropriate measure of the success or authenticity of the bourgeois revolution. Indeed, specifically _democratic_ achievements have rarely been the intended result of violent political upheavals in which the bourgeoisie as such played a leading part. More often they have occurred through protracted histories of political conflict, commonly precipitated by the interventions of non-bourgeois subaltern groups--"plebeians", the _menu peuple_, eventually the working class. Both the British parliamentary and French republican traditions were formed in their different ways from complex and extended conflicts of this type. On these criteria, German society was _more_ rather than _less_ "modern", because it generated a vigorously independent democracy (in the form of the SPD) at a much earlier stage, going far beyond the populist rhetoric of Gladstonian liberalism and the French radicals.[23]

(4) _Satisfying the Bourgeoisie_

If we ask what is specifically "bourgeois" about the bourgeois revolution, we do far better to focus on the consequences of the revolutionary process than on the agency or conscious intentions of the actors.[24] But if we accept this line of argument, what sort of outcome should we be looking for? As a start, we can do far worse than quote Marx himself, summarizing the cumulative effects of the French and English Revolutions:[25]

> the proclamation of the political order for the new European society . . . the victory of bourgeois property over feudal property, or nationality over provincialism, of competition over guild, of the partition of estates over primogeniture, of the owner's mastery of the land over the land's mastery of its owner, or enlightenment

> over superstition, of the family over the family name, of industry over heroic laziness, of civil law over privileges of medieval origin.

In this catalogue of transformations there is no mention, significantly, of a liberal-democratic constitution, though we could probably make a good case in the abstract for seeing liberal political forms as not inconsistent with these other objectives. In fact, Marxists have classically argued that the political groundwork for capitalist economic development (including the attack on absolutist forms of taxation and fiscal management, the destruction of feudal residues and the deregulation of the protected economy, the emancipation of the peasantry and the freeing of the land, the removal of restrictions on enterprise and the mobility of capital and labor, and the creation of the national market) also created the positive basis for liberal forms of government, and that beyond a certain point the ascendancy of liberal ideas became functional for the development of capitalist relations. The liberty to accumulate capital and trade freely was also the liberty to participate in a free political life. The struggle for capitalism and against feudalism was also the struggle for constitutional government. Economic and political freedoms were homologous. Progress was indivisible in that sense.

Moreover, this was not an identity imposed on liberalism by Marxists from the outside; it was inscribed at the center of liberalism's classic doctrinal formulations. But although the drive to establish the overriding legitimacy of bourgeois property rights in the social formation laid the material basis for liberal

political traditions, those same conceptions of property also structured and qualified the notions of government liberals then produced. In Locke, for instance, questions of rights and representation were always predicated on notions of property. "Though in abstract terms, civil society was composed of a mass of free and equal individuals, in concrete terms it was implicitly acknowledged to be composed of the actual quite unequal classes of the propertied and the propertyless".[26] Historically, liberal doctrine both postulated and presumed the universality of bourgeois property relations. In Locke's outlook, "'free born Englishmen' with rights of representation were inevitably propertied men". As Hall remarks:

> . . . by way of this unstated presupposition, the whole class and gender structure of market society, the new relationships of property and capital, the emerging social order of bourgeois society and the structure of sexual divisions were premised at the heart of his doctrine as the silent but salient, absent/present assumption on which its logic was founded.

However, the specific constitutional arrangements compatible with the liberal philosophical outlook and with the realization of bourgeois interests in the above sense could vary enormously; and the latter could also dispense with the stronger liberal formulae of representative government entirely, as this paper has been taking some pains to explain. In that case, it makes more sense to associate bourgeois consciousness with the pursuit of the less political virtues, like competition, merit, secularism, law and order, and so on. In fact, there are good grounds for proceeding extremely cautiously, with a minimalist definition. Stedman Jones

has argued that "the triumph of the bourgeoisie should be seen as the global victory of a particular form of property relations and a particular form of control over the means of production, rather than as the conscious triumph of a class subject which possessed distinct and coherent view of the world". Hence the definition of bourgeois revolution should be confined "to the successful installation of a legal and political framework in which the free development of capitalist property relations is assured".[27]

(5) Revolution as Process, not Event

If we accept this suggestion, several others follow. If we abandon the older idea of bourgeois revolution as a necessary stage of forcibly acquired, spontaneously generated liberality, through which any "modern" society ought to pass, then the details of the revolutionary upheaval itself become far less important. And if we push this argument further in the same direction, then we're likely to stress much longer processes of structural change, in which what is usually regarded as the revolution becomes just a particularly violent and dramatic episode. In this vein, Edward Thompson has referred to the entire period from the fifteenth to the early-nineteenth centuries and the individual moments of political change within it as the "pieces of that great arch which, in fact, in the epochal sense, make up the bourgeois revolution".[28] In The Age of Capital, Eric Hobsbawm takes a similar view, stressing the bourgeoisie's overall cultural predominance rather than its collective political domination of the state, with implicit recourse to Gramsci's concept of hegemony.[29] At the same time,

this means withdrawing from the idea that the bourgeois revolution represents primarily a moment of convulsive, violent political change, and there is something of this in Gramsci's own idea of "passive revolution" too.[30] Now, to the extent that this involves a retreat from the problem of causality--from the problem of relating specific political events like the English or French Revolutions to the longer-run processes of social change--it amounts to a serious weakness.

(6) Revolution From Above

To redefine bourgeois revolution in terms of consequences and lasting effects, and to play down the conscious agency of the bourgeoisie in the revolutionary process, also facilitates the idea of "revolution from above". The unification of Germany, the *Risorgimento* in Italy, and the Meiji Restoration in Japan, all lend themselves to this sort of analysis. Each was a "bourgeois revolution from above" in the specific sense of delivering the legal and political preconditions for a society in which the capitalist mode of production could be dominant. This was achieved by innovative interventions by the existing states, or at least by the radical pragmatism of "modernizing" tendencies within them, but without the social turbulence and insurrectionary initiatives that characterized the previous Franco-British experiences. In neither Germany nor Italy (the Japanese case is more difficult) was the action of the state wholly autonomous, or unrelated to wider processes of social change, naturally, although the latter might easily be imposed from the outside, as in the Napoleonic occupation

of Germany and parts of Italy, or the threatening incursion of Western influences into nineteenth-century Japan. In this sense Bismarck's radical solution to the German question, in circumstances of constitutional confrontation with an impressively resurgent German liberalism, provides the classic instance of revolution from above, substituting military unification and direct political negotiation with the constitutionalist opposition for the confusing scenario of the Franco-British experiences. In certain ways--e.g., the sharpness of the rupture, the definitive character of the legal settlement, the commanding strength of capital in the new national economy--German unification in the 1860s was more closely linked to the realization of specifically bourgeois interests than either the English or the French Revolutions had been, precisely because significant popular interventions never had the chance to occur.

To make the idea of revolution from above stick, we need to consider the overall European context, spatially and temporally. On the one hand, the German and Italian unifications occupied a distinct temporality when compared with the earlier sequence of the Dutch, British, American, and French Revolutions.[31] Where the latter occurred before the global victory of capitalist relations on a European, let alone world, scale, the nineteenth-century sequence actively presupposed the triumph of capitalism; where the earlier revolutions were driven forward by broad coalitions of large and small property-owners, the later ones lost this popular impetus to an intervening process of social differentiation, which

set the bourgeoisie proper against the mass of pauperized small producers and the infant working class. The growth of an independent popular radicalism, which by the 1860s was already separately organized into nascent socialist parties, constrained the oppositional potential of the German bourgeoisie, whose political imagination had in any case been somewhat chastened by the spectacle of terror, barricades, and popular insurrection West of the Rhine. This tension, between the modernizing aspirations of the progressive bourgeoisie and its fears of popular mobilization, opened the necessary space for a "Bismarckian" solution, which implemented most features of the liberal program (e.g., national economic integration, freedom of trade, standardization of currency, weights and measures, and commercial practice, codification of the law, and so on), while stifling the pressure for a full parliamentary constitution.

But if the violent political histories of the English and French Revolutions cautioned the German bourgeoisie (keeping the masses off the streets was a good exchange for protecting the Hohenzollern neck), the impressive developmental progress of British society had precisely the opposite effect. In the triumph of Britain's industrial prosperity, the German bourgeoisie saw their own future reflected. Of course, the further to the East, the greater the discrepancy between this developmental aspiration and society's real capacity for emulation. But from the early nineteenth century the developmental experience of Western Europe was being systematically appropriated further to the East as an

imitative program well in advance of the indigenous social development that might have spontaneously sustained it. There is a necessary political precocity to the efforts of the more backward societies of Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe to bridge the developmental gap. Revolutionary programs become an anticipation of desirable change, rather than rationalizing the accumulation of existing development. This larger European context--classically encapsulated in the formula of uneven and combined development--is central to the idea of revolution from above.[32]

(7) An Open Agenda

Of course, all this is extremely general. But there's a necessary element of abstraction to this sort of discussion, which should be positively regarded, and doesn't necessarily vitiate or prejudge the outcome of more concrete historical investigations. Having stressed the separation of intention and effect, and the relative unimportance of the detailed events in the revolutionary process for defining the ultimate character of "the" revolution, therefore, we must clearly return to the concrete circumstances of particular revolutions. It's all very well to stress "the global victory of a particular form of property relations" rather than the conscious agency of a collective class subject in defining the rise and eventual triumph of the bourgeoisie, or to distinguish crises of the state (the revolutionary process in the narrower sense) from deeper or longer-run processes of structural change. These necessary separations may salve the troubled theoretical conscience of post-Althusserian Marxism, with its salutary insistence on

getting the questions right. But in the end, the latter have to be reconvened on far more concrete terrain, in the analysis of particular events. Despite the clarification of terms (an entirely necessary procedure), we are not much closer to the problem of revolutionary causality in the most basic sense of all--that of how exactly the underlying processes of capitalist development contributed to the escalation of political contradictions, culminating in the "ruptural unity" of the revolutionary crisis itself. At present, Marxists have been better at asserting this relationship in theory than at showing in it concrete historical analysis.[33]

In the classical Marxist tradition this problem of causality is posed in a very specific way, by according the bourgeois revolution a functional place in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The terms of the argument (involving processes of class formation, non-correspondence of forces and relations of production, and violent change to secure the capitalist mode's predominance in the social formation) are familiar, with their locus classicus in the famous 1859 "Preface":[34]

> At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or--this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms--with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution".

Here the bourgeois revolution becomes a necessary moment of concentrated, violent change, with an outcome logically determined

by the previous processes of development, inscribed in the ever-worsening contradictions of the old social order.

Now, among English-speaking Marxists this way of posing the problem (the logical or functional linkage of bourgeois revolution to processes of transition) became gradually discarded, even suppressed, in the 1950s and 1960s. Maurice Dobb's Studies in the Development of Capitalism (first ed. 1946), for all its attested virtues, omit such a discussion almost entirely.[35] This is perhaps most marked in the later works of Christopher Hill, where the confident pronouncements of The English Revolution (originally published in 1940) and The Good Old Cause (edited with Edmund Dell in 1949) gradually give way to more cautious formulations.[36] The renewal of interest in the "transition" debate in the mid-1970s has been notable for it silence on the subject of bourgeois revolution.[37] Moreover, the "gentry controversy" and the debate about the "general crisis of the seventeenth century" were probably the last points at which the problem of the "English Revolution" was taken seriously by general historical scholarship, and since that time a flood of historical revisionism has left Marxist and other radical historians very defensive on the subject.[38] Work on the French Revolution has experienced a similar process, for while French historians still accept the concept of the Revolution (unlike many of their British colleagues), the commitment to theorizing its characteristics has all but dissolved in the vast production of detailed empirical scholarship.[39] Furthermore, as I suggested at the beginning of this paper, outside the Marxist

tradition it is unclear what the term "bourgeois revolution" could exactly mean, short of an unlikely reversion to the classical early-nineteenth century unities of political economy and constitutionalism, i.e., to the optimistic vision of progress that originally carried the concept into public discourse.

So, in other words, we are facing very much an open agenda. An older Marxist conception, which stressed the leading agency of the bourgeoisie itself in the revolutionary process, the unitary character of its consciousness as a collective class actor, and the expressive properties of liberalism as a class ideology, is deservedly in eclipse (though the extent to which such ideas were actually held by practising Marxist historians can always be exaggerated). It has fallen before a continuing onslaught of empirical scholarship on the English and French Revolutions, much of it of the highest quality. But while the deficiencies have been recognized, Marxists have been very reluctant to take on the job of constructing an adequate alternative. As mentioned above, the closest we have come is the shift from "intention" to "effect", and to "process" from "event", with some discussion of "revolution from above" as a neglected form. Outside the ranks of the Marxists the inability to propose alternative conceptualizations is just as disappointing.[40] The question arises of whether we should simply cut our losses and abandon the concept of bourgeois revolution altogether, and in these days of Marxist iconoclasm there is no

reason to view such a prospect with dismay (for those of us who remain within the Marxist tradition, that is). But for our immediate purposes, this extreme theoretical indeterminacy makes the apparent acquiescence of German historians in the appropriateness of the old formula all the more striking. In conclusion, therefore, it is to the German case that we must again return.

Provisional Conclusions

In much of this essay I have tried to pose what seems to me the main dilemma of materialist analysis in the late-twentieth century, whether the latter is to be Marxist or some other form of sociology: having pursued the logic of the anti-reductionist, anti-economistic critique to the full, with due respect for the autonomies of ideology, politics, and the state, how should the importance of social determinations be reinstated--or more to the point, how should the latter be measured in the analysis of concrete situations? Having pulled economics and politics, or the social and the political, apart, how do we put them together again? In the terms of this essay, if the bourgeoisie and liberalism are to be uncoupled, if the latter is no longer to be regarded as a "bourgeois ideology" in the traditional (essentialist, expressive, instrumental) sense--if liberalism is to lose its powerful class connotation in that sense--then how is the nature of the relationship to be re-conceived? If liberalism can no longer be conceived as "the political outlook of the

rising bourgeoisie" (as one leading German historian regards it),[41] then how is the bourgeois contribution to liberal movements to be defined? If we have to stop regarding the bourgeoisie as a collective class-subject, and if class as an inter-subjective unity (as opposed to an economic or sociological category) has to be given up--if there can be no bourgeois "class consciousness" in that strong theoretical sense--then how else can the question of bourgeois political agency be defined?

In all of these ways, this essay will certainly have raised far more questions than it has answered, and the answers it has provided will doubtless seem attenuated or schematic. The role of the state in the conception of revolution from above, for instance, remains necessarily under-developed in the above discussion, and I certainly don't mean to introduce the notion of a completely independent institutional agency in this context; but in this particular essay there can be question of specifying the full complexity of nineteenth-century state analysis, as opposed to briefly indicating a question for future discussion.[42] Likewise, though raised in the above discussion, the question of the relationship between long-term processes of capitalist development and the major European revolutions has obviously not been answered, and it may be that intellectual investment in the existence of such a relationship should finally be given up; but my point is that Marxists too must now call the question, and begin the arduous business of appropriating the last twenty years of empirical research for that end. In both cases the question

of theory needs history for an answer, but with a care, a concreteness, and a detail that would burst the bounds of this particular text. At one level, of course, such questions reflect the continuing contemporary theoretical preoccupation with problems of agency and structure. At another they reflect a more specific set of debates in the British (and European) Left concerning the relationship between politics and class.[43]

One area of historical analysis where my general discussion can be immediately re-engaged is that of nineteenth-century Germany and the dominant views of the _Kaiserreich_. In conclusion, therefore, and for the purposes of future discussion, I would like to offer the following theses:

(a) First, we can make a reasonable case for arguing that Germany did, after all, experience a successful bourgeois revolution in the nineteenth century. This didn't take the form of a pitched battle between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, in which the former seized state power from traditional monarchy and replaced it with parliamentary democracy. But then it didn't anywhere else in Europe either, certainly not in Britain in the seventeenth century, and certainly not in France in 1789. _This_ view of the bourgeois revolution, where the insurgent bourgeoisie triumphantly realizes its class interests in a program of heroic liberal democracy, is a myth. But if we associate bourgeois revolution with a larger complex of change--instead of a strictly defined political process of democratic reform--which cumulatively established the conditions of possibility for

industrial capitalism, then there are good reasons for seeing the process of "revolution from above" in the 1860/70s as Germany's distinctive form of the bourgeois revolution, so that we focus more on the material or objective consequences of events than on their motivational origins. We have to accept that bourgeois revolution may vary considerably in its national forms, and certainly can't be identified with either the British or the French examples, not least because the latter themselves remain in hot dispute. In other words, the German pattern of revolution from above (spanning, say, the two periods of 1807-12 and 1862-71) was just as conducive to bourgeois predominance as the different developmental trajectories of Britain, the USA, and France. This leaves open the question of whether "bourgeois revolution" is the appropriate term for the general process.

(b) Secondly, it is quite wrong to see the bourgeoisie under the German Empire as being somehow politically weak or "immature", or as failing by some obscure criteria to realize its collective interests as a class. In any case, it is both theoretically misconceived and empirically impossible to view the bourgeoisie as a single inter-subjective unity in this way, because <u>politically</u> (though not economically or sociologically) there can only be different tendencies <u>within</u> the bourgeoisie, which in different situations may achieve a higher or lower degree of cohesion. But more specifically, this hides the fact that the interests of different bourgeois groupings or fractions may be pursued and secured via other than liberal, let alone

democratic, means. In other words, it is time finally to accept that the Imperial state of 1871-1918 was actually compatible with the adequate realization of legitimate bourgeois interests and aspirations. The Empire was <u>not</u> an irredeemably backward and archaic state indelibly dominated by "pre-industrial", "traditional", or "aristocratic" values and interests, but was powerfully constituted between 1862 and 1879 by (among other things) the need to accommodate overriding bourgeois-capitalist interests.

(c) Following on from this, we need to re-evaluate both the origins and significance of the Second Empire's evident "authoritarianism" (i.e., the limited extent of its parliamentary democratic development). This partly requires a revision of theoretical perspective. German "authoritarianism" was not unavoidably bequeathed by an iron determinism of "pre-industrial continuities", but was specifically overdetermined by the evolving disposition of forces within the German social formation as it entered its predominantly capitalist phase--above all, by the simultaneous existence of significant aristocratic enclaves in the structure of the state and a powerful Social Democratic labor movement in German society, and by important contradictions between different fractions of the bourgeoisie. In other words, in tackling the problem of "Germany's persistent failure to give a home to democracy in its liberal sense" (Dahrendorf), we have to be extremely careful what kind of question we're asking, because in the present discussion two distinct problems are being

confused. On the one hand, there is the question of the conditions under which a bourgeois-capitalist society could reproduce itself, or the legal, political, and ideological conditions of existence for a successful German capitalism. Then, on the other hand, there is the question of how a more liberal political system could have been achieved. These are not the same question. Thus there is no dispute about the practices of the most powerful fraction of German capital before 1914, which by most of the standards we've grown accustomed to since 1945 were extremely reactionary. But whether they were really in conflict with the needs of capitalist reproduction is a very different matter. To put this more positively, it may be that such practices owed more to the special circumstances of the industries concerned--and even to their very "modernity"--than to the influence of any "pre-industrial" mentalities.

(d) More specifically, we might argue that the option of leading fractions of the German bourgeoisie for a politics of accommodation with the landowning class after 1871 was fully compatible with the continued pursuit of bourgeois interests in the sense indicated above. The bourgeoisie (or to be more exact, specific bourgeois fractions) entered the agrarian alliance not from a lack of "political self-confidence", but as the best means of securing certain political goals. The indifference to further "parliamentarization" of the Imperial Constitution came less from any "pre-industrial tradition" of authoritarianism, than from a rational calculation of political interest in a situation where

greater parliamentary reform necessarily worked to the advantage of the Left, and specifically the Social Democrats. Similarly, it make perfect sense for German capitalists to refuse the "just" demands of the working class, providing they could get away with it, that is, when a given level of monopoly organization endowed them with the power to do so.[44] Thus it was not the absence of bourgeois revolution that forced a supine bourgeoisie into a junior partnership with a "pre-industrial power elite", but the particular form of Germany's bourgeois revolution (revolution from above under the aegis of the Prussian state through military unification) that combined with the accelerated character of Germany's capitalist transformation to impose a specific logic of class alliance. The latter entailed no renunciation of bourgeois political ambition. But it did mean that ambitions were articulated in ways considerably different from those in Britain and France. To this extent we should speak not of German peculiarity, but of British, French, and German particularities.

(e) Finally, this also has implications for our understanding of fascism, which can't be discussed in detail here, but can certainly be raised. Once we become sceptical about the argument from "pre-industrial traditions" when applied to the political culture of the Second Empire, the deep-historical view of the origins of Nazism is also cast into doubt. At the very least, this means shifting our attention from the longue duree of Prussian history (the bureaucratic, militarist, and authoritarian traditions which embodied the special position

of the Junkers as a feudal or "pre-industrial" ruling class) towards the internal dynamics of the Imperial period itself (i.e., the specific contradictions of a society experiencing accelerated capitalist transformation). Personally, I would take this further to stress the more immediate circumstances of the Nazis' rise to power--namely, the succeeding conjunctures of the First World War, the post-war crisis of 1917-23, the relative stabilization of the mid-1920s, and the world economic crisis after 1929. At all events, it is surely time to stop blaming the Junkers for all the ills of German history, not (obviously) to exculpate them morally or to demonize the capitalist bourgeoisie in their stead, but to get a better grasp of the full complexities of the German social formation.

In general, this is an argument _against_ notions of German exceptionalism. It suggests that we should think again about the assumed absence of bourgeois revolution in nineteenth-century Germany and accept that the bourgeoisie may come to social predominance by other than liberal routes. Finally, it is meant to query the simple continuity thesis which locates Germany's vulnerability to fascism in "pre-industrial" blockages of "modernization". On the contrary, it may now be far more useful to examine the particular forms of German capitalist development and the structure of politics these determined. In other words, Germany's failure to develop a native liberalism of more vitality may have lain with the conditions of capitalist reproduction themselves, and not with the continuing domination of a "pre-industrial power elite". At least, this is worth discussing.

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Acknowledgements

This essay has been through a variety of incarnations before finding its present form. It began as a paper to a small radical humanities group in Swansea in spring 1974. In 1978 I returned to the ideas in a number of seminars and lectures, before comparing notes with my friend and fellow German historian David Blackbourn, who had been preparing a similar text. At Dieter Groh's prompting, we combined our separate essays into a small book, which appeared in Germany as Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung: die gescheiterte bürgerliche Revolution von 1848 (Frankfurt, 1980). Our book became the center of some controversy in West Germany, where it helped stimulate a wide-ranging discussion of German exceptionalism or the German Sonderweg. Partly to take account of this debate, partly to refine and clarify the argument, partly to extend the discussion into the English language, we published a revised and much expanded edition under the title The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany (Oxford, 1984). The current text is abstracted from my part of the joint volume in the form of a more general argument about the problem of bourgeois revolution, in the hope of stimulating some further discussion beyond the circles of German historians. It is freely offered as an intellectual provocation. It should go without saying that the argument is my own responsibility, and that David Blackbourn doesn't necessarily agree with all of it, although I hope that he does.

In the meantime, versions of this paper have been presented to a variety of audiences, whose reactions have always been valuable. Aside from the History Department at Michigan itself, where I have come to take the high quality of intellectual exchange for granted, a seminar at University of California, Davis, in October 1985 was particularly useful. I am heavily indebted to the ideas and criticisms of friends, among whom David Blackbourn, Jane Caplan, David Crew, Dieter Groh, Keith Nield, Gareth Stedman Jones, and Ron Suny deserve particular mention. I am extremely grateful to Maurice Zeitlin for encouragement in preparing the present text, and to Robert Brenner for an exceptionally careful and penetrating reader's report. Finally, I would like to thank Jürgen Kocka, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and Heinrich August Winkler, whose reviews of *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung* removed any doubts that the argument was worth pursuing.

NOTES

1. Moore 1966, esp. Ch. VII-VIII; Dahrendorf 1968; Poulantzas 1973, esp. pp. 168-84.
2. Sombart 1909, p. 508.
3. Extensive references to the detailed literature on the _Kaiserreich_ would needlessly clutter the argument. The most important influence on recent writings has been Hans-Ulrich Wehler, whose work incorporates the perspective of bourgeois failure/subordination with unfailing consistency. His _magnum opus_, _Bismarck und der Imperialismus_, is not available in English, but his text-book, _Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918_, has now been translated as _The German Empire, 1871-1918_. Two useful essays are also translated: "Bismarck's imperialism, 1862-1890"; and "Industrial growth and early German imperialism." A good general text-book reflecting the same standpoint is Volker R. Berghahn, _Germany and the Approach of War in 1914_, together with the same author's _Modern Germany. Society, Economy and Politics in the Twentieth Century_. Two particularly influential essays are: Wolfgang Sauer, "Das Problem des deutschen Nationalstaates," and Fritz Stern, "The political consequences of the unpolitical German." Collections of representative essays translated from the German may be found in James J. Sheehan (ed.), _Imperial Germany_, and Georg Iggers (ed.), _The Social

History of Politics. Critical Prespectives in West German Historical Writing since 1945. Finally, the essays edited by Richard J. Evans, Society and Politics in Wilhelmine German, offered the beginnings of some alternative approaches and my own essays in From Unification to Nazism. Reinterpreting the German Past, try to explore these further. Finally, there are now a number of general historiographical essays reviewing the impact of the debates of the last twenty years concerning the course of German history under the Kaiserreich, which provide excellent access to the broader literature relevant to my discussion in this text: Robert G. Moeller, "The Kaiserreich recast? Continuity and change in modern German historiography"; James N. Retallack, "Social history with a vengeance? Some reactions to H.-U. Wehler's 'Das deutsche Kaiserreich'"; Roger Fletcher, "Recent developments in German historiography: the Bielefeld school and its critics," and the same author's "Introduction" to Fritz Fischer, From Kaiserreich to Third Reich. Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871-1945; Iggers, "Introduction," in Iggers (ed.), Social History of Politics; Richard J. Evans, "The myth of Germany's missing revolution."

4. This is especially clear in Wehler 1972.
5. Fraenkel 1964, p. 27.

6. Dahrendorf 1968, p. 14.

7. Bracher 1969, p. 1339.

8. Dahrendorf 1968, p. 398.

9. Wehler 1973, p. 14 (the quotation is taken from the Introduction, which is omitted from the English translation).

10. Wehler 1973, pp. 140, 238. (In references to Wehler's text-book I have retained by own translations of the original, which differ slightly from the formulations of the English translated edition; henceforth the page references to the latter will be given in parenthesis, in this case Wehler 1985, pp. 136, 245.)

11. For a good example of such an approach, see Winkler 1976. I have discussed the problem of fascism in this context in "What produces fascism: pre-industrial traditions or a crisis of the capitalist state?" Eley 1986, pp. 254-82.

12. Dahrendorf 1968, p. 404.

13. Puhle 1972, p. 53.

14. To argue that a common heritage of assumptions informs the work of many different historians isn't to argue that their approaches and interpretations are otherwise the same; and to question those assumptions isn't to impugn the value of previous writings or the value of their scholarly contributions. In fact, to argue that, say, liberals and Marxists share certain common conceptions

of progress, particularly in the later-nineteenth century context we are dealing with, is hardly a very original observation. To take a basic example: both Marx and Weber shared the same critique of the German bourgeoisie and its historic deficiencies, and for our purposes may be regarded as its respective pioneers. But to identify such an underlying community of discourse does not mean that Marx, Weber, and their associated traditions of analysis are being generally conflated. What it can suggest is that, if left unexamined, such assumptions perpetuate certain patterns of understanding and foreclose others. In this sense, my aim is to bring that well established tradition of explanation into question by exposing its logic, identifying some weaknesses and contradictions, and suggesting some of the possible consequences. My own suggestions are obviously not immune to criticism, and are offered as a basis for interesting debate.

15. Of course, this is not universally true of post-war non-Marxist developmental theory, and some central influences, most prominently Alexander Gerschenkron and Barrington Moore, have always positioned themselves more positively (or at least, ambiguously) in relation to the classical tradition. But the main weight of developmental theory, particularly where oriented towards policy issues in the Third World, was towards a

"non-revolutionary" conception of "modernization." See, for instance, the theoretical framework of Charles Tilly 1975, which was a deliberate (and slightly sheepish) attempt to re-engage this dehistoricized modernization theory with the founding experiences of European history from which it had been fairly systematically disconnected, but without re-admitting the centrality of the great revolutionary upheavals of 1517-1815; neither the Reformation nor the seventeenth century revolutions figure seriously in the otherwise impressive analyses of the volume. More recently, perhaps, the emergence of a flourishing and variegated body of historical sociology in Britain and the USA has created the conditions under which the questions previously articulated via the concept of bourgeois revoltuion might be revisited.

16. As Jane Caplan says, over the last two decades or so there has been a withering away of the class subject in Marxist discussion, involving a growing "refusal of the closed and aprioristic totality of traditional Marxist social imagery, with its attendant structure of given correspondences between the economic and the political, its dependence on class subjects, its evolutionary teleology." In British Marxism this began with the Althusser reception in the early 1970s, proceeded through a variety of frequently tortuous discussions,

and reached an unsettling climax in Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (London, 1985). Common to this current thinking "is the belief that class alone is no longer an adequate concept of political analysis and practice, but that the prospective forces of radical social transformation are dispersed among a series of molecular social movements--feminism, local state activism, black caucuses, and so on. These are not waiting to be convened into unified political movement by the intervention of a presiding party, but have an efficacy derived precisely from pluralism rather than concentration." As Caplan perceptively notes, the theoretical skepticism about the older notion of the class subject these contemporary positions reflect also lies behind the argument in David Blackbourn's and my Peculiarities of German History, applied in this case to the collective agency of the bourgeoisie, as opposed to the proletariat. See Jane Caplan, "Myths, models, and missing revolutions: comments on a debate in German history," 1986, p. 97.

17. Laclau 1977, pp. 81ff.

18. There is a helpful discussion of the reductionism/economism problem in this particular context in Hall 1986, pp. 34-69.

19. Thompson 1978, p. 47. In the meantime (Thompson's essay was

originally published in 1965), twenty years of scholarship on the French Revolution have given these words even greater effect. There are now many discussions of the debate to which Thompson's essay was a central contribution. The most useful are: Johnson 1980, pp. 48-70; Nield 1980, pp. 479-505; Anderson 1980. See also Spohn 1983.

20. Stedman Jones 1977, pp. 86, 88.

21. Ibid. p. 87.

22. This is arguably one of the least understood problems in nineteenth century European history. For example, the inadequacies of Spring 1978, reflect the general absence of serious research in the area. On the other hand, some recent texts are very suggestive of where the latter might begin: Massey and Catalano 1978; Cannadine 1980; Davis 1979; Hussain and Tribe 1981; Schissler 1986; Winson 1982. The comparative volume edited by Blinkhorn and Gibson (forthcoming), should help remedy the gap.

23. For some general discussion of this point, see Therborn 1977.

24. This is very much the position of Christopher Hill, and seems to be that of Hobsbawm 1975. For a recent restatement of the former's views, see Hill 1980. See also this statement from Isaac Deutscher's Trevelyan Lectures, quoted by Hill 1971, p. 127f.: Deutscher

criticized "the traditional view" that "the bourgeoisie played the leading part, stood at the head of the insurgent people, and seized power." He argued that "this conception, to whatever authorities it may be attributed, is schematic and historically unreal. From it one may well arrive at the conclusion that the bourgeois revolution is almost a myth, and that it has hardly ever occurred, even in the West. Capitalist entrepreneurs, merchants, and bankers were not conspicuous among the leaders of the Puritans or the commanders of the Ironsides, in the Jacobin Club or at the head of the crowds that stormed the Bastille or invaded the Tuileries...Yet the bourgeois character of these revolutions will not appear at all mythical, if we approach them with a broader criterion and view their general impact on society. Their most substantial and enduring achievement was to sweep away the social and political institutions that had hindered the growth of bourgeois property and of the social relationships that went with it...Bourgeois revolution creates the conditions in which bourgeois property can flourish. In this, rather than in the particular alignments during the struggle, lies its <u>differentia specifica</u>." He continued: "The irrationality of the Puritan and Jacobin revolutions arose largely out of the clash between the high hopes of the insurgent

peoples and the bourgeois limitations of those revolutions. To the insurgent masses no revolution is ever bourgeois. They fight for freedom and equality or for the brotherhood of men [sic] and the Commonwealth." See Deutscher 1967, pp. 21f., 27.

25. Marx 1973, p. 192f.

26. Hall 1986, p. 51, also for the following quotation.

27. Stedman Jones 1977, p. 86.

28. Thompson 1978, p. 47. This aspect of Thompson's argument has also been taken up by Corrigan and Sayer 1985.

29. This is also the argumentation of Blackbourn's part of The Peculiarities of German History (although the latter is also more than that): "The discreet charm of the bourgeoisie: reappraising German history in the nineteenth century," pp. 159-292. In the meantime, the idea has also been taken up by Jürgen Kocka as the basis of a major research project at the University of Bielefeld, "Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit und bürgerliche Gesellschaft. Das 19. Jahrhundert im europaischen Vergleich." See Kocka 1986a and 1986b. However, as Kocka's work still shows (so far at least), it is possible both to acknowledge the cultural dimension of the argument and at the same time to retain the older conception of the German bourgeoisie's political subordination and failure.

30. For the latter, see the following exegeses: Sassoon 1980,

pp. 204-17; Buci-Glucksmann 1979, pp. 207-36; Ginsborg 1979, pp. 31-66, together with Davis's own Introduction, _ibid_., pp. 11-30.

31. My thinking in this direction was originally stimulated by a paper presented by Perry Anderson on the subject of bourgeois revolutions to a group in Cambridge in spring 1977.

32. Tom Nairn's writings on nationalism in the mid-1970s were very stimulating on this subject. See Nairn 1977, esp. pp. 92ff., 329ff. In a strong form the idea of "uneven and combined development" originates with Trotsky 1906, and has been exhaustively and critically discussed in Lowy 1981.

33. Not that non-Marxists have been any better! For a helpful start, see Ginsborg 1979. One of the most lucid presentations of the problem in the abstract may be found in Perry Anderson's reply to Thompson, _Arguments Within English Marxism_, pp. 59-99, esp. 73-77; for Thompson's original statements, see Thompson 1978, pp. 103-397, esp. 276-95.

34. Karl Marx 1975, p. 425f.

35. See, for instance, Brenner 1978, which is notably inconclusive on this score.

36. His most recent statement directly on the subject is the essay cited in note 24 above. But see also the "Conclusion" to Hill 1975, pp. 278-84. For a sense of

the older certainties, see the Special Tercentary Number of The Modern Quarterly on the English Revolution "1649--1949," New Series, 4 (Spring 1949), with contributions by (among others) A. L. Morton, Christopher Hill and E. D. (Edmund Dell).

37. See Hilton 1976, and the debate around Brenner 1976. The contributions to the latter have been collected in Aston and Philpin (1985). Another recent general survey of the debate, Holton 1985, ignores the issue of bourgeois revolution completely.

38. For a good introduction to the former, see Richardson 1977, pp. 89-125, and for the latter, Aston 1970. More recently, there have been some signs that the willingness of British historians to engage with the problem of the English Revolution may be reviving. See Stone's recent statement, 1985, pp. 44-54. Despite its own excessive caution, there is a useful survey of current approaches in Coward 1986, pp. 9-39. The author's nominalist answer is: Yes, but we can't define what kind of revolution it was, as all general models of revolution are by definition suspect. On the other hand, Jonathan Clark, the aspirant high priest of an extremely peculiar new right history, manages to get through an entire book on the subject of "revolution and rebellion" without ever discussing the immediate effects of the Civil War on "state and society" at all

(Cromwell, Commonwealth, and Protectorate are completely absent from the account). See Clark 1986.

39. These comments refer in the first instance to work in the English-speaking world, where the sequential impact of Alfred Cobban and Richard Cobb in their different ways effectively pre-empted ambitious generalizing about the character of the French Revolution. They apply far less to work in France itself, where the character of the Revolution remains a matter of hot and lively debate (not least, one assumes, in the context of the forthcoming celebrations of 1989). For a taste, see the following: Soboul 1971; Furet 1971; Mazauric 1975; Vovelle 1977. A collection of Furet's essays is now available in English: Furet 1981.

40. As partial exceptions we may note the following: Stone 1972; Furet 1981; Lucas 1973. See also Baker 1981.

41. Winkler 1979, p. 15.

42. I have tried to make a start at analyzing the character of the Imperial state in my part of _Peculiarities of German History_, pp. 127-43.

43. This latter context is brilliantly invoked in Caplan 1986, pp. 94-98.

44. I have discussed this question more fully in my part of _Peculiarities of German History_, pp. 98-126, and in _Reshaping the German Right_ 1980, pp. 293-315. See also "Capitalism and the Wilhelmine state: industrial growth and political backwardness, 1890-1918," in _From_

Unification to Nazism, pp. 42-58. David Crew has also explored this line of argument in Crew 1979, pp. 1ff, 119ff., 145ff., 221-4.

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