Political culture
and democratization

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In March 1908, political trouble was brewing in the suburbs of Cologne.[1] Elections to the Prussian state parliament (Landtag) were scheduled just three months hence, and the dominant party in the electoral district of Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth, the Catholic Centre Party, faced the prospect of open rebellion in its ranks. This district lay on the east side of the Rhine River and had been a secure seat for the Centre since the mid-1870s, when the mobilization of Catholic voters during the *Kulturkampf* made it a 'bomb-proof' bastion of party support. (The district's population was over 85 per cent Catholic.) Even though this district sent three representatives to the lower house of the Prussian Landtag, and even though its social profile was very heterogeneous, no other party stood a realistic chance of winning even one of those three mandates. Partly for this reason, in the spring of 1908 metal-workers in the city of Mülheim felt they deserved to have 'one of their own' in the Landtag—a true worker, not just a candidate who adhered to the Centre's programme or promised to lobby for working-class interests. In fact, local workers had been voicing this demand for three years. How would the Centre's nomination committee respond?

Decades earlier, local artisans (*Handwerker*) had expressed their own desire for representation in the Landtag. Eventually a safe Centre seat in a neighbouring constituency was found for one of their leaders. Then in the 1890s the area's Catholic farmers staked their own claim, nominating an independent agrarian candidate for the 1893 Landtag elections and for subsequent Reichstag elections.

This problem was temporarily solved in 1898 when Karl Becker was offered one of the district's three seats. However, although Becker was a farmer and executive member of the Rhenish Farmers' Association, his principal occupation was as a justice official in Siegburg, so he was not considered a 'real' agrarian. In 1903, when both Landtag and Reichstag elections were held, a 'true' farmer, Wilhelm Geyr, was offered the seat. But Geyr died in 1905 and a by-election was called. Local farmers insisted that Geyr be succeeded by another farmer (Hubert Schlick) who sprang from their ranks and understood their problems. But this insistence alienated Catholic workers, who now began their three-year campaign to secure their own nominee. They no longer wanted to be represented by someone drawn from those groups who dominated local party affairs—mainly priests, farmers, lawyers, teachers, and civil servants.

As new elections approached in March 1908, the problem seemed about to solve itself when Schlick decided not to stand for re-election: at last a safe seat was available for a worker. But the farmers again dug in their heels. Eventually an alternative solution was found: a judicial official who had held one of the three Landtag seats since 1893 and who also sat in the Reichstag, was persuaded to step down as Landtag deputy and devote himself entirely to his duties in Germany's national parliament. A railroad worker from Dortmund, locksmith Heinrich Beyer, was nominated in his place. Thus the Landtag district of Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth was represented from 1908 until 1918 by three Centre Party deputies who reflected the district's three most important occupational groups: agrarians, workers, and the urban middle classes.

This successful strategy to balance the interests of competing social groups with a local variant of 'proportional' representation broke new ground: it allowed party leaders to put an end to internal dissention and pre-empt other threats to a safe seat. Yet the case of Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth speaks to larger questions about the evolution of political culture in Imperial Germany, of which four will be highlighted in this chapter. It helps us understand, first, that Germany's political parties faced the challenge of mobilizing new recruits and balancing the interests of divergent social groups not only in national elections and not only in districts where opposing

parties squared off in fierce competition. Although the Centre Party held unassailable seats in other German parliaments, the situation in Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth reflected the complexities and inequities of the Prussian three-class suffrage. Whereas the longterm trend was towards ever-higher turnout rates for Reichstag elections, participation in Prussian elections stagnated at a much lower level. Hence it is necessary to explore the diversity of suffrage laws and parliamentary institutions in Germany's federal states to understand the dynamics of political modernization in the nation at large.

Second, the political manoeuvring in Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth illustrates how social groups staked their claims for representation—and how party leaders accommodated or resisted such claims—within a network of party institutions that was only loosely and ambiguously hierarchical. Although party machines became more centralized over time—though at vastly differing rates—it was not always clear who held the authority to nominate candidates, conclude alliances with other parties, devise policy initiatives, or undertake other kinds of consensus building.

Third, parties were successful only when they demonstrated to their voters that they could address and alleviate their everyday problems. The 'fundamental politicization' of German society was unstoppable; but the contours and appeal of mass politics looked different depending where you lived. The traditional face-to-face style of politics might persist in one locality, whereas elsewhere voters might feel slighted as anonymous members of a voting herd. A candidate might promise to attend to local needs, but would he follow through once elected? These questions became urgent as an older, more patrician style of politics (*Honoratiorenpolitik*) eroded more quickly in some parts of Germany than in others. Moreover, grievances could become neuralgic at one tier of politics and find easy remedy at another. A stick might be wielded to enforce party discipline in one parliamentary forum while a carrot was offered in another.

Fourth and lastly, the parties' need to devise new strategies for success at the polls was predicated on an unrelenting increase in the political engagement of German voters and their wish to participate in elections that were fair and equitable. This was broad-gauged democratization, which should be understood as a mainly

social and cultural phenomenon rather than as one leading to a specific constellation of political institutions. Few Germans aimed to abolish the monarchy or introduce parliamentary government on the British or French model. Therefore, to understand how contemporaries interpreted political change and to gauge its historical significance, the last section of this chapter will historicize the notions of 'democracy' and 'democratization'. What bears emphasizing at the outset is that the rituals of casting a ballot were consensual in one way but they underscored difference too. Some Germans trouped to the polls to affirm social solidarities, others to declare their commitment to an ideology, still others to protest the discriminatory policies of an authoritarian state. Sometimes marking a single ballot allowed them to do all these things at once. Yet conflict never disappeared as a central feature of politics. The Centre Party's delicate balancing act in Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth provided one answer to the problem of conflict management; other parties in other regions explored different options. Either way, they were all tested in a political environment that was also being reshaped by changing relations of power between state and society.

The authoritarian state and its historians

Imperial Germany collapsed in November 1918 at the end of a war. Ironically, it had been born in the same way in January 1871. The founding of the empire took place at Versailles, outside Germany, and was dominated by the new Kaiser and his military entourage. Hence, in the view of left-wing contemporaries and later 'Whig' historians, Imperial Germany appeared to be an authoritarian and militarist structure, imposed on a German population that actually deserved a better state, a better constitution, a better government. Conservative scholars, by contrast, have tended to argue that Germany's future was not so clouded, especially if the First World War had not intervened. Both historiographical perspectives were reshaped by the historian Fritz Fischer, who emphasized lines of continuity between monarchism, militarism, and other aspects of authoritarian governance, on the one hand, and Germany's deep

involvement in two world wars, Nazism, and genocide, on the other. Yet today scholars still ask, 'What could have been done to avoid these catastrophes?'[2]

Unlike the situation in the British House of Commons, in Imperial Germany neither the national Reichstag nor any Landtag of a federal state was charged with responsibility for forming the government. Werner Frauendienst in the 1950s and Manfred Rauh in the 1970s suggested that Germany nonetheless experienced a process of 'silent parliamentarization'. They argued that the Reichstag not only achieved substantial legislative success, but was also able to expand its constitutional right to discuss, amend, pass, and reject legislation.[3] In their view, German political culture was on the right path and would have continued to advance had the First World War not disrupted this auspicious development. The 'silent parliamentarization' thesis, however, has now largely been discredited. The Reichstag never assumed control over state policy, nor did the majority of its members even want to. To understand why parliamentarism was not pushed more vigorously, historians have shifted the focus of their attention from high politics to the politicization of society. One influential interpretation reflecting this new focus was advanced by the German émigré historian Hans Rosenberg. Analyzing how the Agrarian League mobilized rural society after its founding in 1893, Rosenberg concluded that the league reflected only the 'pseudo-democratization' of the noble landowning class in Prussia. In Rosenberg's view, the *Junkers* successfully manipulated the middle and lower classes in the countryside by means of a nationalist and antisemitic ideology. Imperial Germany's 'political mass market', as Rosenberg later described it, did not spread democratic but rather decisively anti-democratic values and habits.[4]

A different but equally influential interpretation was advanced in 1966 by the sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius. Taking a longterm perspective stretching from the beginning of the 1870s to around 1930, Lepsius argued that the social basis of the major German parties was astonishingly stable. Unlike Rosenberg, Lepsius did not see blockages to reform principally as the result of elite manipulation of popular forces. He took voters' social and religious belief systems seriously. His most pioneering conclusion was that the

German party system suffered from a socio-cultural 'pillariza-tion'; that is, the division of the society into subcultures—which he called 'socio-moral milieux'—that stood, like pillars, sepa-rately and durably. Lepsius's scheme postulated the existence of four such milieux, each with its own values, interests, and social organizations. The Catholic milieu was represented by the German Centre Party; the urban Protestant working-class milieu supported the Social Democratic Party; the rural Protestant milieu support-ed the German Conservative and Free Conservative parties; and the urban Protestant middle-class milieu was drawn to the left-liberal and National Liberal parties. These four milieux provided voters—and non-voters, too—with stable organizational and ide-ological frameworks. Members of any given milieu would not usually leave the milieu into which they were born, except in certain circumstances—for example, if they migrated from the countryside to an industrial area. Lepsius's sophisticated model was a great advance over previous theories in helping to explain why constitutional reform did not move forward. Party lead-ers were usually born and raised in their distinctive milieu and experienced powerful feelings of belonging: indeed, they were as much prisoners as members of their milieu. This situation con-strained their ability to transgress the ideological horizons that demarcated their milieu's boundaries; hence they were usually unwilling to compromise with competing party leaders in par-liament. These constraints in turn made it very unlikely that the milieu-based parties would ever mutate into socially integrative parties—broad-based parties that could legitimately claim to rep-resent all social groups. It was not until the late Weimar Republic that a 'people's party' was able to draw support from all four milieux.[5]

Lepsius first presented his thesis of socio-moral milieux in a short essay based not on primary research but on analysis of the secondary literature. Even though critics have never under-mined his basic insight, they have correctly noted that his picture was too static. The political scientist Karl Rohe in the early 1990s pointed out that 'closed' milieux comprising socialists and Catholics were fundamentally different from the more 'open' milieux of liberals and conservatives. In 1997, Jonathan Sperber demonstrated that voters switched frequently between different

parties—or at least much more frequently than Lepsius's model could accommodate.[6] Margaret Lavinia Anderson has offered the most decisive challenge to any 'static' interpretation of Imperial Germany's political culture. Her book *Practicing Democracy* (2000) argues that universal manhood suffrage after 1867 enmeshed male adults 'in ever more procedures and practices' which contributed directly to 'the growth of an increasingly democratic culture in the decades before 1914'. Anderson's book can thus be seen as the culmination of more than twenty-five years of revisionist research, mainly by Anglo-American scholars, that emphasizes the dynamic and 'modern' contours of Imperial Germany's political culture.[7]

Remarkably few of these Anglophone scholars have paid much attention to the impact of regional diversity on German domestic politics. What happens when we take the spatial dimension of politics more seriously? For one thing, it challenges both the 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' views of Imperial Germany's political development. By the 1860s, southern Germany in general, and the Grand Duchy of Baden in particular, had already tested the viability of closer cooperation between monarchical government and the state parliament. Even though formal parliamentarization was never achieved before the monarchies fell in 1918, statesmen and party leaders in Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria were consciously testing new ways to advance Germany's political modernization. The Landtag suffrage in each of the southern German states had been significantly broadened—made more democratic—by 1910. These reforms often produced parliaments with actual or potential left-wing majorities, which state governments could not ignore. However, the Prussian Landtag remained a reactionary stronghold of right-wing parties, because all attempts to reform its plutocratic three-class suffrage failed (most notably in 1910). But Prussia was not alone: restricted or decisively undemocratic suffrages characterized other state parliaments, mainly in northern Germany (including Mecklenburg and Saxony). The deputies sitting in these parliaments were even less interested than members of the Reichstag in reforming the constitutional foundation of Imperial Germany, for two reasons. First, they were afraid of what democratization would mean for the fate of their own parties in individual Landtage. Second, they were well aware that the delicate

constitutional balance between federalist traditions and central-izing tendencies worked out in 1867–71 would be put at risk by constitutional reform across the board and by parliamentarization specifically. Neither of these reform trajectories overcame the roadblock represented by the Prussian Landtag.[8]

Scholars continue to seek new ways to interpret the contradictory traditions, developments, and options available to those who wanted to entrench or reform the political system established at the outset of the imperial period. To avoid emphasizing one feature of German political culture in a one-sided way—to 'balance elements of reform and stasis, of progressivism and traditionalism'[9]—historians have stressed the pluralistic aspects of German political culture. Thomas Nipperdey's two-volume study of Imperial Germany famously suggested that the empire must be painted in innumerable shades of grey, because these more accurately capture the reality of Imperial Germany than any black-and-white portrait.[10] James Retallack has suggested aban-doning the idea of 'one Germany' in order to discover 'many Germanys'.[11] Dieter Langewiesche has argued that the first Ger-man nation state was too contradictory to allow historians to claim that its politics culture was marked by any one coherent style.[12] While this emphasis on ambiguity and diversity has obvious mer-its, we should not forget that politics continued to revolve around questions about power and the articulation of power—questions that to ordinary Germans were decidedly *unambiguous*. How, then, were the various parts of Germany, the rival political styles, the countless shades of grey actually configured, and how were they interrelated?

Before attempting to answer these questions in the balance of this chapter, it may be helpful to explain that by speaking of political culture rather than just 'politics' historians have signalled their interest in exploring the *subjective* dimension of politics: the social-psychological ambiance of a system of rule, the subjective relationship between the state and its citizens, and the system of norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and sentiments that seem self-evident to groups and people involved in political activity. Those norms and values condition people's appraisals of what is possible in the political realm.

Nation building and social pillarization

In January 1871 the 'inner consolidation' of the nation was far from complete. Nation building had just begun. Bismarck hoped that the political parties he deemed to be 'friends of the empire' (*Reichsfreunde*) would form a steadfast 'national' coalition; but these hopes were dashed when unanticipated outcomes were generated by the anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf*, the campaign against Social Democracy, and the struggle of ethnic minorities to protect their rights. The definition of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' was in turn always tied up with the question of how Germany's representative bodies should be elected. Hence suffrage questions proved to be a persistent thorn in the side of Bismarck and others who believed that national consolidation depended on a pliant electorate.

The National Liberals and the Conservatives were most troubled by universal and equal male suffrage, which Bismarck had introduced in 1867 and was carried forward in the German Empire's constitution of 1871. To Bismarck, equal suffrage was a popular—and successful—means to undermine the kind of liberal opposition that had hampered his attempts to control the Prussian Landtag before 1866. Rooted in the paternalist rural culture of his upbringing, Bismarck could not imagine that the lower classes would vote for anyone other than conservative candidates. The liberals, by contrast, were deeply suspicious of the 'levelling' principle of 'one man, one vote'. In 1865 the liberal Leopold von Hoverbeck identified the danger that universal suffrage posed for liberal men of wealth and influence: 'We, who are working for the people's freedom, are not provided with a solid social basis.'[13]

Catholics had good reason to welcome the new, broader suffrage. Catholic voters generally followed the advice of their priests and favoured Centre candidates over those presented by the liberals or conservatives. As a reaction to the *Kulturkampf* laws in the early 1870s, Catholic leaders found that universal suffrage helped them organize mass demonstrations and convince members of the Catholic milieu to turn out to the polls to elect Centre Party or Polish candidates (the latter were overwhelmingly Catholic

and, if elected to parliament, almost always allied with the Centre Party caucus). Thus a reciprocal relationship existed between the introduction of universal suffrage and milieu formation: the democratizing effect of the Reichstag vote allowed Catholics to resist attempts to stigmatize them as outsiders and 'enemies of the empire' (*Reichsfeinde*), while the experience of discrimination galvanized new cultural solidarities within the emergent milieu that could be expressed through the ballot box.

Such 'affirmative voting', as historian Stanley Suval has labelled it, transformed Imperial Germany's political culture.[14] In fact articulating protest and affirming group solidarities became more important than victory. 'Pragmatic' voting, by contrast, focused on actually winning the parliamentary seat. It might be seen as the appropriate behaviour under an electoral system where one candidate was expected to win a majority of votes in a given constituency. If a minority candidate had no chance of winning the local seat, why waste time with voting at all? This reasoning helps explain why majority systems usually produce low turnouts. Pragmatic voting made more sense under an unequal system such as the Prussian three-class suffrage, where it was more likely that a single candidate would win an outright majority. That is why liberal and conservative parties, which did well under unequal suffrages, endorsed pragmatic voting. Doing so gave them little incentive to reform inequitable voting systems or to develop efficient, centralized party organizations.

For Reichstag elections, more than two parties usually competed on the first, main ballot; since one candidate rarely won an absolute majority, a run-off ballot was frequently necessary to decide the winner. During the first ballot, however, even hopeless candidacies allowed minority parties to 'show the flag' locally. The SPD was the first party to field candidates in all 397 Reichstag constituencies, for exactly this purpose: to rally the troops and maximize the party's votes nationally. The Centre Party did the same in regions with a significant Catholic population, but it was the socialists who really perfected affirmative voting. This process started during the period of the Anti-Socialist Law, from 1878 to 1890, which both consolidated the urban Protestant working-class milieu and gave the Social Democratic Party an effective political organization. In the Reichstag elections of 1878, SPD candidates gained 8 per cent

of the popular vote, and their party held 9 of 397 Reichstag seats. By the Reichstag elections of 1890, the SPD's share of the popular vote had risen to 20 per cent—more than any other party—which translated into 35 seats in the Reichstag.[15]

If the system of allocating Reichstag seats had been more fair, the SPD in 1890 would have won more than 35 seats. For example, the two Conservative parties together also won about 20 percent of the popular vote in 1890, while the Centre Party won almost 19 percent; but after the election 93 conservative deputies and 106 Centre deputies sat in the Reichstag. This discrepancy between a party's share of the popular vote and the number of seats it won in the Reichstag arose largely because the boundaries of Reichstag constituencies were never redrawn between 1871 and 1918, despite massive demographic shifts. In 1871 all constituencies had approximately 100,000 eligible voters, and each one elected a single Reichstag deputy. By 1912 a single working-class suburban district of Berlin had 338,000 eligible voters, yet it still elected exactly the same number of deputies—one—as the tiny rural district of Schaumburg-Lippe, which had only 10,700 eligible voters.[16] The non-socialist parties, which drew most of their support from the countryside, were happy to condone such passive gerrymandering. Another important factor was the two-ballot system. The second and final ballot often pitted a socialist against a non-socialist candidate. In such cases conservatives and liberals usually supported each other against the socialist. Third and lastly, the campaign strategy of the SPD contributed to the gap between votes won and seats won. Socialists nominated candidates even in districts where they had no chance of winning. This was a costly strategy in some ways, but it paid dividends in others. No other party employed this strategy as systematically as did the SPD.

For the disadvantaged groups in society, then, affirmative voting facilitated political emancipation. The two most strongly organized milieux—Catholic and socialist—began to challenge the political ascendancy of the liberal and conservative middle classes. Both of these milieux, often referred to as 'subcultures', provided their members with practical advantages in their everyday lives: their own sporting clubs, cultural associations, and cooperative societies, for example. At the same time, both milieux inculcated in their members an understanding of political participation that

undermined the classic liberal model. Voting could now be seen as a demonstration of social power. This lesson was not lost on the Protestant educated middle classes.

Lecturing on the dangers of socialism in 1874, Heinrich von Treitschke, a professor of history at the University of Berlin, articulated what many middle-class Germans thought about 'socialism and its patrons'. Treitschke was not principally upset by the results of the most recent Reichstag elections, where the socialists had done well: 'at least they mirror quite well the prevailing mood of the nation', he commented acidly. What most roused his ire was the 'complete moral degradation of the crowd'. 'There can be no doubt whatsoever,' he told his listeners, that 'universal suffrage has promoted among the masses a fantastic overestimation of their own power and worth.' He continued:

The irreconcilable contradiction between the democratic equality of political voting rights and the necessarily aristocratic organization of society . . . turns him into a faithful follower of demagogues. . . . Universal suffrage amounts to organized licentiousness; to the recognized arrogance of superior foolishness; to the superciliousness of the soldier towards the officer, of the journeyman towards the master, and of the worker towards the entrepreneur.

Treitschke, though, was intelligent enough to realize that there was no way to turn back the clock. 'Abolishing the electoral law, once given, would only provoke the long-awakened wantonness of philistinism even more vehemently.'[17]

Not all of Treitschke's fellow-travellers in the National Liberal and Conservative parties were as willing to resign themselves to the unintended consequences of universal suffrage. Plans to revise, limit, or even abolish universal suffrage circulated in centre-right and right-wing circles for decades. German liberalism had always had a strong elitist component, and this made it easier to consider cooperating with Bismarck and the Conservatives when schemes were discussed to limit 'damage' caused by universal suffrage. In the 1880s the National Liberal Party avoided statements explicitly supporting the Reichstag suffrage: its 1884 platform supported the principle of the secret ballot, but it did not mention the universal or equal aspects of the Reichstag suffrage. It must be emphasized, however, that sympathizing with reactionary policies and executing

them are different things. All liberals, even National Liberals, were well aware of the risk of trying to overturn 'the electoral law, once given'. So the National Liberals never initiated any explicitly anti-democratic legislation. Instead they and the Conservative parties supported government legislation that sought 'redress' on other fronts. The *Kulturkampf* and the Anti-Socialist Laws must be understood as part of this strategy, which also included new laws passed in the late 1880s extending both the Reichstag and the Prussian Landtag legislative periods from three to five years. This 'reform' was intended to diminish the speed and intensity of political mobilization. Whether it actually did so is less clear.

All these efforts to defend, roll back, or 'compensate' for universal suffrage took place in a political climate shaped by fear and hope. The brightest hope of all was for a new monarch who would succeed Kaiser Wilhelm I and enact some of the reforms advocated by left liberals. This hope died in 1888 when Kaiser Friedrich III reigned for only 99 days before succumbing to throat cancer. When Friedrich's son, Wilhelm II, ascended the throne, fear proved to be more durable than hope. Over the next ten years, one of the strongest fears was that Wilhelm and the other German princes would unleash a *coup d'état* (*Staatsstreich*) by dissolving the Reichstag, radically changing the constitution, and abolishing universal suffrage. But the *coup* never happened, nor was it ever seriously planned, for good reason. Like Treitschke, most responsible authorities in Germany were aware that such a move would result in civil war. Nor were Reichstag deputies willing to legislate themselves out of existence. It is therefore difficult to ascribe as much substance to this threat as historians have done in the past. Nevertheless, even the notion that such a move could be contemplated in high political circles made German politicians, both before and after Bismarck's departure from office, reluctant to demand further democratization or parliamentarization.

New departures at the *fin de siècle*

Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted political peace at home to open the way for an imperialist policy. As well as voicing his disdain for

universal suffrage and party politics, in the mid-1890s he endorsed a range of reactionary projects. These included efforts to curtail the activities of the socialist movement and to restrict civil liberties. By the end of the decade, the practical results of all this bluster were meagre. But in 1898 German constitutional affairs stood at a crossroads. In the midst of a Reichstag election campaign that year, the Social Democrats and left-wing members of the Center Party spread rumours that the government planned to revise the Reichstag suffrage. The government was forced to make a public disclaimer that it had no reactionary intentions, but the damage was done, and the pro-government parties fared badly at the polls. Thus, after the turn of the century, the idea of withdrawing the democratic suffrage became obsolete.

We cannot understand the significance of this turning point by considering only Prussia and the Reichstag; we must also consider Germany's periphery. In 1896, reactionary groups in the Kingdom of Saxony succeeded in implementing the constitutional rollback that Wilhelm II was unable to accomplish in national politics. In the face of growing SPD victories in Saxon Landtag elections since 1890, National Liberals and Conservatives in the Saxon parliament took the offensive and replaced Saxony's relatively liberal suffrage with a three-class voting system similar to that in Prussia. This new suffrage drove more and more socialist deputies out of the Saxon Landtag with each election until none were left in 1901. This was a Pyrrhic victory, though. The SPD launched a resounding protest against this brazen act of disenfranchisement in Saxony, which led to a landslide victory in the Reichstag elections of 1903. Socialists won 22 of 23 Saxon Reichstag constituencies, whereas previously they had held only 11. This sensational breakthrough sent a double message: Reactionary constitutional policy could not be pushed through even at the level of the federal states—the danger of a backlash was not worth the risk. Moreover, once an overly reactionary course was off the table, those groups seeking further constitutional reform could go on the offensive. Three decades of constitutional stagnation were over.

From 1900 onwards, the dominant political discourse in Imperial Germany was no longer about how to roll back universal voting rights or retard political modernization, but how to expand such rights and accelerate democracy's progress. This secular change

no longer concerned only men. It was around the turn of the century that the movement for female suffrage became popular in Germany. Nevertheless, the idea of democratizing suffrage laws for Germany's federal Landtage generated more publicity than female suffrage. Most German states experimented with suffrage reforms, even if they were still less democratic than the Reichstag model. Prussia became the most prominent exception.

Another important development that gained momentum around 1900 was the willingness of parties to challenge the right of the government to recommend the election of candidates belonging to the 'state-supporting' parties. These were the parties of the old Bismarckian 'cartel'—the German Conservatives, the Free Conservatives, and the National Liberals. During election campaigns, especially in Prussia, the government and its local administrators had regularly communicated their support for these parties, sometimes discretely, sometimes openly. For example, in Prussia, the county councillor (*Landrat*) might call together the local notables in any given constituency and urge them to form an election alliance in aid of the 'national' (that is, the cartel) candidate. Sometimes the *Landrat* did not hesitate to present himself as the perfect candidate to facilitate such an alliance. More often, his office served as a clearing house for negotiations, information, and encouragement to the state-supporting parties. For the pre-1898 period, the importance of this role can hardly be overestimated, because the 'nationalist' parties were still burdened by only rudimentary organization. Thus county councillors, not party functionaries, often took in hand the task of distributing leaflets and intimidating voters. Especially at the middle and higher ranks of the civil service—Bismarck himself did not hesitate to let his wishes be known—clear signals could tilt the balance in favour of the cartel candidate. This strategy was pursued successfully in the Reichstag election campaign of 1887, which resulted in a great victory for the cartel parties.

At the end of the 1890s, however, things changed. For the Reichstag elections of 1898, the Prussian government tried the same tactic that had worked so well in 1887, this time proclaiming that the state-supporting parties needed to rally voters on behalf of naval expansion. But the government and its allied parties failed miserably. It was not just liberals in urban areas who refused to

follow governmental 'advice'. The Agrarian League openly contested the choice of county councillors as rural candidates. Other interest groups also supported the kinds of arguments raised in the Rhenish district of Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth, demanding that 'one of their own' represent them in far-away Berlin. This trend became stronger with each passing election: in rural and urban areas alike, in small villages and big cities, local committees nominated candidates who shared their own roots, lifestyles, and traditions. Thus social groups, not state authorities, showed themselves capable of meeting the challenges of mass politics.

This development marked a decisive turn in what Margaret Lavinia Anderson has called the 'learning process' of 'practicing democracy'. This does not mean that political mobilization happened overnight. Recall that the Catholic milieu had been mobilized in the 1870s, the urban Protestant working-class milieu in the 1880s, and the rural Protestant milieu (though more gradually) in the 1890s. Moreover, the government continued to try to rally the nationalist parties, with some success in 1907. However, Reichstag elections in 1912 again produced socialist gains and a reversal of nationalist fortunes, displaying more clearly than ever that voters were not willing to support the government's preferred parties.

A key point in evaluating the significance of these various trends at the local, regional, and national levels is that they had a reciprocal effect. Locally, the fact that usually no party won an absolute majority on the first ballot meant that party alliances became de rigueur. But with increasing frequency all parties wanted to 'show the flag' throughout Germany, so alliances became more complicated and unpredictable. The same was true in Germany's national parliament. From 1879 to 1906, the Centre Party often participated in majorities supporting government legislation. But when Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow in 1907 attempted to tar the Centre with the same 'unpatriotic' brush he applied to the Social Democrats, the trick backfired, albeit two years later, when the Centre and the Conservatives teamed up to force his departure from office. From 1909 to 1914, Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg pursued a 'policy of diagonals'. But just as his county councillors had lost decisive influence at the base of political society, Bethmann Hollweg could not draw on unequivocal support from any of the Reichstag parties.

The National Liberals played an important role in accelerating these changes. During the 1890s, the party had lost much of its rural base, and by the turn of the century its leaders were reconsidering the party's *raison d'être*. Should it try to recapture its rural following, or appeal to society's wealthiest and most privileged classes, or serve as advocates for big business? And where would it find the most dependable allies? Gradually, the leaders of the National Liberal Party came to the conclusion that their party must first and foremost defend Germany's *national* interests. After 1900 National Liberal fortunes rose because the development of Germany's new, mass-based associations was in the same direction. As nationalist pressure groups and economic interest groups rose in number and influence after 1900, they brought to German political culture new ideals and a new political style. The new ideals revolved around social 'fairness' and national 'community', while the new style helped to enliven National Liberal politics at the grass-roots level. One such association was the Society for Social Reform. Founded in 1901, this society sought to redress the failed integration of the socialist working class into the German nation, again on the premise that a solution was not going to come from 'on high'. As Baron Hans von Berlepsch—a former minister of commerce in Prussia—put it in 1901, 'The social development of our time requires fairness and not just favours.'[18] To advocate 'fairness' was not to endorse the Social Democratic Party, but it was not meant to marginalize it either. Hesitantly at first, and then with more confidence, liberals and socialists began to organize their electoral campaigning on the principles of cooperation and compromise. Progress was slow—slower in the National Liberal camp than among left liberals—but steps towards reconciliation were evident on the eve of the First World War.

As members of Germany's urban Protestant middle classes followed this trend, they reoriented their focus towards the 'politics of togetherness'. They found 'togetherness' in nationalist, militarist, and imperialist associations, and in gatherings and festivals that celebrated the empire. Among the most successful organizations to achieve a mass membership after the turn of the century was the German Navy League, which soon numbered more than one million members. The Pan-German League and the Colonial Society retained a more exclusive membership and style of politics,

whereas the veterans' associations became even more popular than the Navy League: they included almost three million members on the eve of the First World War.

To be sure, these associations pursued different agendas. Nevertheless, they provided Germans with an 'equal opportunity' forum for cultivating feelings of national belonging. They did so at all levels of politics—at the local *Stammtisch* (the table reserved for 'regulars' at the local pub, where branches of the national societies would typically meet); during the celebration of Sedan Day or the Kaiser's birthday; and at nationwide festivals such as those in 1913. Blue-collar workers rarely found their way into these associations: they were often considered unworthy, and the SPD condemned national, military, and colonial chauvinism as a matter of principle. However, the social exclusivity of these associations is less significant than their ability to foster a utopian belief in the power of political togetherness and symbolic politics. When teachers, artisans, and shopkeepers gathered at the *Stammtisch* or in mass marches, they focused on the vision of a 'national community'. Sometimes this was rendered as a 'people's community'—an idea that gained popularity around 1900, long before the Nazis made the *Volksgemeinschaft* the centrepiece of their ideology. For Wilhelmine Germans, this 'national community' would overcome inner division, class conflict, and party wrangles. Instead of succumbing to these differences, the 'national community', they thought, would function as an organic, harmonious whole, just as communities and families did (or were meant to). It was a utopian solution that seemed in August 1914 suddenly to come within Germany's grasp.[19]

Paths towards democracy

As the historian Brett Fairbairn has suggested, to review the evolution of Imperial Germany's political culture means 'to historicize democracy', 'to unpack the historical processes of democracy', and to admit 'that by today's standard no country was democratic a century ago'.[20] Germans from 1871 to 1914 were working on three different and yet overlapping models of 'democratization',

understood historically. The first is the increasing trend to go to the polls and vote; this model focuses on the actual usage of constitutionally guaranteed individual political rights. The second is a grass-roots political movement, which increasingly demanded and favoured parliamentary candidates who shared the local ties or social background of their voters. The third is the fascination with the politics of togetherness, and with symbolic participation instead of formal political participation. All three models of democratization broadened the social basis of political participation, and all turned on the question of how to translate the pressures resulting from rapid social change and segmentation into 'fair' political representation and successful political management. However, they all failed to overcome social pillarization in Imperial Germany, and none of them charted a path to parliamentary democracy.

Universal and equal suffrage defined one of those uncertain paths. Introduced to provide the new nation state with popular support, in the 1870s and 1880s the suffrage principally facilitated the political protests of socio-moral milieux whose members suffered discrimination at the hands of the state. Paradoxically, universal suffrage became a permanent integrative symbol of the nation state and yet drew a line between the two milieux (Catholic and working class) who profited most from it and the other two milieux (rural and urban middle class) who continued to regard the suffrage with disdain or antipathy. Many middle-class Protestants in both urban and rural Germany identified universal suffrage with the negative features of mass politics. Yet they followed the rules of the game and eventually mobilized new supporters. Although supportive of the authoritarian state in principle, the members of these Protestant middle-class milieux refused to abide by the attempts of state authorities to control and channel political participation.

The second model of democratization evolved out of the first. When occupational groups like those in Sieg-Mülheim-Wipperfürth demanded 'one of our own' to represent them, the 'language of us' continually gained ground. As backward and narrow as this perspective seems in one regard, it was progressive in others. When local party committees demanded parliamentary representatives in parliament who shared their social background

or local outlook, they blocked the professionalization of parliament, thereby ensuring that even deputies operating in the realm of high politics remained attuned to grass-roots opinion. The need to accommodate the demands for representation from different occupational groups also routinized conflict management at the local level. Nevertheless, politics based on the 'language of us' did not set Germany on a one-way path towards a democratic constitution or parliamentary democracy. Both paths were blocked by social pillarization. The culture of compromise generated at the local level usually remained *within* the four socio-moral milieux, and rarely proved conducive to strong, long-lasting alliances between them. This made it less likely that the parties representing these milieux would form alliances durable enough to challenge the authority of the state. Hence it was democratization itself, based on and accelerated by introduction of the universal suffrage, that blocked Germany's transition to a parliamentary form of government.

The third path towards democratization, the idea that the nation would be united on the basis of the 'politics of togetherness', could not overcome these obstacles, though this outcome was not pre-ordained. In countless club meetings, local gatherings, and festivals across the land, Germans from diverse social backgrounds met on a regular basis. Political participation no longer unfolded according to formal rules or in defence of economic interests exclusively; increasingly it became a matter of reflecting the experience of togetherness in symbolic ways. The politics of 'us', of togetherness, of harmony, of consensus always required an 'other' against which it could define itself, and often this 'other' was constructed in the context of imperialist aggression. But such emotionally rooted feelings of national belonging were not found only in Germany. Nor was the Nazi version of the 'people's community' the only form that such desires for national belonging could have taken. The future still lay open in 1914. On the eve of the First World War, Germans were eagerly working on different, and even contradictory, ways of democratizing their political culture. They could not know in which direction these paths would lead.

[1] For the following, see Klaus Müller, *Politische Strömungen in den rechtsrheinischen Kreisen (Sieg, Mülheim, Wipperfürth, Gummersbach und Waldbröl) des Regierungsbezirks Köln von 1879 bis 1900* (Ph.D. diss., University of Cologne, 1963), 270–2, 350–65, 370–88; Anni Roth, *Politische Strömungen in den rechtsrheinischen Kreisen (Mülheim,*

Wipperfürth, Gummersbach, Waldbröl und Sieg) des Regierungsbezirks Köln 1900–1919 (Ph.D. diss., University of Cologne, 1968), 145–75; Thomas Kühne, *Handbuch der Wahlen zum Preussischen Abgeordnetenhaus 1867–1918* (Düsseldorf, 1994), 712–15; and Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht und Wahlkultur in Preussen 1867–1914. Landtagswahlen zwischen korporativer Tradition und politischem Massenmarkt* (Düsseldorf, 1994), 355–7.

2 For a recent literature review, see Thomas Kühne, 'Demokratisierung und Parlamentarisierung', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft,* 31 (2005), 293–316. See also Kühne, 'Die Jahrhundertwende, die "lange" Bismarckzeit und die Demokratisierung der politischen Kultur', in Lothar Gall (ed.), *Otto von Bismarck und Wilhelm II. Repräsentanten eines Epochenwechsels?* (Paderborn, 2000), 85–118.

3 Werner Frauendienst, 'Demokratisierung des deutschen Konstitutionalismus in der Zeit Wilhelms II.', *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft,* 113 (1957), 721–46; Manfred Rauh, *Die Parlamentarisierung des Deutschen Reiches* (Düsseldorf, 1977).

4 Hans Rosenberg, 'The Pseudo-Democratization of the Junker Class' (orig. 1958), in Georg Iggers (ed.), *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing since 1945* (New York, 1985), 81–112.

5 M. Rainer Lepsius, 'Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur', in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Deutsche Parteien vor 1918* (Cologne, 1973), 56–80. For my evaluation of recent criticisms (and misunderstandings) of Lepsius's model, see Kühne, 'Demokratisierung', 306 ff.

6 Karl Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen in Deutschland. Kulturelle Grundlagen deutscher Parteien und Parteiensysteme im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M., 1992); Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser's Voters: Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 1997).

7 Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 2000); cf. Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (orig. 1980), 2nd edn (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991); Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886–1914* (Boston, 1984), 152–82.

8 Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht.*

9 James Retallack, *The German Right, 1860–1920: Political Limits of the Authoritarian Imagination* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2006), 129.

10 Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918,* 2 vols, vol. 2, *Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (Munich, 1992), 905.

11 James Retallack, *Germany in the Age of Kaiser Wilhelm II* (Basingstoke, London, New York, 1996), 92.

12 Dieter Langewiesche, *Politikstile im Kaiserreich. Zum Wandel von Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Zeitalter des 'politischen Massenmarktes'* (Friedrichsruh, 2002), 3–5.

13 In a letter to a friend, 30 July 1865, cited in Ludolf Parisius, *Leopold Freiherr von Hoverbeck,* 2 vols in 3 (Berlin, 1900), ii. pt. 2, 55.

14 Stanley Suval, *Electoral Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985).

15 See Gerhard A. Ritter with Merith Niehuss, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch. Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Munich, 1980).

16 Ibid. 28.

17 Heinrich von Treitschke, 'Der Sozialismus und seine Gönner' (orig. 1874), in Treitschke, *Zehn Jahre Deutscher Kämpfe,* 2nd edn (Berlin, 1879), 500–1. For a longer extract in both English and German see http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=590.

18 Cited in Rüdiger vom Bruch, 'Bürgerliche Sozialreform im deutschen Kaiserreich', in vom Bruch (ed.), *'Weder Kommunismus noch Kapitalismus'. Bürgerliche Sozialreform in Deutschland vom Vormärz bis zur Ära Adenauer* (Munich, 1985), 137, 131.

19 See Gunther Mai, ' "Verteidigung" und "Volksgemeinschaft". Staatliche Selbstbehauptung, nationale Solidarität und soziale Befreiung in Deutschland in der Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges (1900–1925)', in Wolfgang Michalka (ed.), *Der Erste*

Weltkrieg. Wirkung—Wahrnehmung—Analyse (Munich and Zurich, 1994), 583–602; Robert von Friedeburg, 'Klassen-, Geschlechter- oder Nationalidentität? Handwerker und Tagelöhner in den Kriegervereine der neupreußischen Provinz Hessen-Nassau 1890–1914', in Ute Frevert (ed.), *Militär und Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1997), 229–44.

[20] Brett Fairbairn, 'Membership, Organization, and Wilhelmine Modernism. Constructing Economic Democracy through Cooperation', in Geoff Eley and James Retallack (eds), *Wilhelminism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890–1930* (Oxford and New York, 2003), 35.

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