

THE WITHERED ROOT OF SOCIALISM:
SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC REVISIONISM AND PARLAMENTARISMUS IN
GERMANY, 1917-1919

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 1: Historical Context..... | 8 |
| The German Question..... | 10 |
| WWI and Democratization..... | 20 |
| Chapter 2: The Philosophical Foundation..... | 25 |
| Bernstein’s Critique of Socialism..... | 26 |
| Marx and the ‘Primacy of Philosophy’ | 34 |
| The Reconciliation of Kant and Marx..... | 42 |
| Chapter 3: The Blueprint for Parlamentarismus..... | 52 |
| Conceptualizing Democracy..... | 53 |
| Necessity and Possibility..... | 58 |
| Die Volksvertretung..... | 63 |
| Die Beamtenfrage..... | 68 |
| Conclusion..... | 79 |
| Bibliography..... | 83 |
| Curriculum Vitae | |

Introduction

In 1784, the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant announced, “*Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another...* Nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except *freedom*; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason *publicly* in all matters.”¹ Over 130 years later, at the height World War I, a group of politicians and intellectuals associated with the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) took up Kant’s idea of enlightenment in an attempt to promote democratization in Germany. In their minds, the freedom to use reason in public affairs would lead to the establishment of specific form of parliamentary social democracy, or *Parlamentarismus*.

However, any history of democratization in Germany is problematic because German development in the first half of the twentieth century has shaped the way historians approach the history of the nineteenth century. The existence of Nazi Germany has subsequently shaped the study of German history, even for those who do not study Nazi Germany directly. Historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries find that they must address the Third Reich and the questions that its existence forces us to ask. To answer why the Third Reich occurred necessitates a series of questions revolving around German social, political, cultural, and intellectual development. Historians must ask, even if they do not want to, whether Germany was uniquely predisposed to the anti-

¹ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment (1784)?” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans., with introduction by Ted Humphrey (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, 1983), 41-42. All emphasis is from the original.

democratic and illiberal ideology of National Socialism. Even for those historians who have identified democratic ideas and movements that existed in pre-World War I Germany do so with the knowledge that their work contributes in some way to the understanding of the Third Reich.

In addition to the history of the nineteenth century, the history of the German Revolution of 1918, and whether it was really a revolution at all, compounds the problems of German democratization. On November 9, 1918, German sailors revolted, sparking an uprising that spread to the workers. The de facto military dictatorship that ruled Germany during the last half of the war handed control of the country over to the civilian, Social Democratic-led government. What the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which was already experiencing internal divisions arising from the conflicts over reform versus revolution and German war aims, achieved over the next months and years would be subject to intense scrutiny from contemporary observers and later historians alike. Did the rise and fall of the Weimar Republic between 1918 and 1933 indicate a failure of the SPD more so than a failure of democracy in general? Were there alternatives to the ideas and institutions upon which Weimar Democracy was built? These questions are just some of the problems inherent in the study of German democracy.

This thesis examines a group of German intellectuals and politicians who, during World War I, formulated and proposed a democratic ideology based on their interpretation of the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant and integrated his ideas with those of Karl Marx, the father of modern socialism. Their theory was an attempt to legitimize democracy in Germany at a time in which democratic reforms came

to the forefront of German politics. These thinkers advocated a non-revolutionary foundation for social democracy by emphasizing the role of human reason and agency in the process of democratization. Because they had abandoned the need for revolution, which most early nineteenth-century socialists believed was socialism's 'final goal,' these thinkers were known as revisionists. The revisionists' primary medium through which they espoused their views of social democracy was the journal *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, which ran from 1893 until 1933. The timeframe on which this argument focuses is the last two years of World War I, when Germany's failure to achieve a victor's peace opened new avenues for the center-left of the political spectrum to achieve democratic reform. But despite these opportunities, the possibility of achieving reform was under constant threat from both the increasingly radicalized right and the revolutionary left. Nevertheless, the revisionists sought to carry forward the process of democratization, and by doing so, reconnected with the ideas of the Enlightenment.

This reconciliation of Kant's idealism and Marx's materialism resulted in a form of parliamentary democracy based on Kantian reason and Marxian economic determinism. For the purposes of this thesis, the German term '*Parlamentarismus*' refers to the democratic system proposed by the revisionists. Although the word literally means 'parliamentarianism,' in the context of this argument, *Parlamentarismus* implies more than just a system of parliamentary government; it incorporates both structural and philosophical concepts relevant to revisionist ideology. By contrast, use of the English term 'parliamentarianism' refers to the general, and literal, concept of parliamentary government. While their philosophical methods largely corresponded to traditional notions of 'German thought' and placed a heavier emphasis on social, rather than

individual, justice, their overall project was similar to that of other European thinkers between the Enlightenment and the turn of the twentieth century, to the extent that they sought to find a philosophical foundation for representative government and mediate the conflicts between individual and social rights. Revisionism may have been a relatively small part of the German left, but the nature of revisionism allowed its proponents to be freer in their work because they were not as constrained by rigid adherence to party programs as their mainstream counterparts. Despite their small numbers, the revisionists are important because they allow us to understand more fully the role of ideas in the process of German democratization.

While the revisionists' goal was some form of socialism, democratization was the most urgent matter during the final two years of World War I. The revisionists had abandoned the Marxist assertion that the collapse of capitalism would lead to revolution and they instead advocated working within the existing framework of the state to achieve reform. As Peter Gay points out, a fundamental difference between Marx and the revisionists was Marx's belief that the state had to be destroyed before socialism could be implemented.² As Karl Kautsky, a preeminent Marxist ideologist who popularized Marxism during the early twentieth century, asserted in 1909, "Worried friends fear that the Social Democratic Party will prematurely gain control of the government *through* a revolution. However, if there is for us a premature attainment of power, it is the acquisition of an appearance of control of the government before the revolution, that is, *before* the proletariat has achieved real political power."³ In contrast, the revisionists

² Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Collier, 1962), 32.

³ Karl Kautsky, *The Road to Power: Political Reflections on Growing into the Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 90.

sought to transform the state through a process of democratization, which would revolutionize the way the people thought about their relationship to the state, which in the context of German history was particularly problematic. A genuinely democratic government would overcome the division between the people and the state by making the government directly responsible to the majority parties of the Reichstag, and thus accountable to the people.

As late as 1918, the revisionists insisted that no philosophical foundation yet existed on which a functional modern democracy could be constructed and so they sought to provide that foundation by using the philosophical framework provided by Kant and Marx to reveal the means to democratizing Wilhelmine Germany. Although they abandoned Marx's reliance on the dialectic, revisionists retained his economic determinism. In turn, they used Kant to show that economic determinism was both rational and efficacious. The revisionist politician Heinrich Peus explained the significance of the revisionists' task by asserting, "The division within the people between those who represent the theories of government and those who govern in reality is very damaging; both belong most closely together, both must fertilize each other, both must know that both the abstracting, seeking theory, as in accordance with the law of being, and the struggling practice of the governing of world and life through the people, within the immediate given reality, are necessary."⁴

The bulk of the source material comes from journal articles published in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, a biweekly publication addressing a range of topics, between 1917 and 1919. Although not an official party journal, and certainly less prominent than

⁴ Heinrich Peus, "Demokratisches Wahlrecht, aber was weiter?" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 14 (July 18, 1917): 716.

Neue Zeit and *Vorwärts, Sozialistische Monatshefte* nevertheless offers insight into a particular component of German thought. The writers for this publication, some of whom served as members of the Reichstag during the Weimar Republic, collectively offer a clear position on how the German government ought to have functioned. Through their writings, it becomes clear that they neither toed the line of mainstream Marxism, nor advanced an alternative form of proletarian rule. Instead, they advocated a form of parliamentary democracy. They believed that Germany's system of constitutionalist and authoritarian rule, its *Obrigkeitsystem*, had shown itself to be neither just nor functional.⁵

The structure of this thesis reflects the structure of the revisionists' theory. The first part of the argument focuses on the revisionists' elucidation of their philosophical foundation. They believed socialism possessed both a philosophical root and an economic root, but because the economic root had taken priority over the philosophical, the revisionists insisted that it was necessary to further develop a social democratic philosophy. The purely materialistic approach of the economics contrasted with the tradition of German philosophical thought and therefore this part of the argument contains discussions of Kant, Hegel, and Marx, but it is primarily an examination of how the revisionists interpreted and applied the theories of Kant and Marx. The second part of the argument examines how the revisionists sought to alter the way the people thought about the relationship between themselves and the state by encouraging the democratization of all aspects of government and by insisting that legislative and

⁵ Some revisionists referred to Imperial Germany's political system as 'constitutionalist,' while others used the term *Obrigkeitsystem*. While constitutionalism is generally viewed as a positive political development that limited the power of the ruling bodies, the revisionists used it almost pejoratively to highlight Germany's failure to advance to a more democratic system. Furthermore, both constitutionalism and the *Obrigkeitsystem* refer, from the revisionists' perspective, to the Hegelian conception of the state. This is why the revisionists can use the two terms to describe the same political system.

administrative bodies share the same democratic ideology as the people themselves. Their *Parlamentarismus* was the legitimate form of government for reasons that are directly linked to the revisionists' philosophy and specifically focused on stages of political development, representative government, and the administration of the state. The political reformation that the revisionists sought was the reinstatement of philosophy into the political sphere.

It is important to remember that the focus of this study is not on the actual institutions themselves. Rather, it is a study of how a specific group of intellectuals thought about democracy in general, and political institutions in particular. It is an examination of how revisionist Social Democrats thought about how these institutions related to the process of democratization, which itself was drawn from a process of working out certain philosophical problems. The purpose of this specific focus is to show that the revisionists, at this critical juncture in German history, felt compelled to formulate a genuine theory of democracy. Their reliance on other German philosophers, all of whom formulated their ideas under their own circumstances, illustrates a great deal about how German intellectuals worked. More importantly, it highlights how they attempted to create a new society from their philosophy and, perhaps, sheds light on why their ideas failed to take as deep a root as they anticipated.

Chapter 1: Historical Context

The intellectual history of the German revisionist Social Democrats is an important example of how German history contains both peculiarities and similarities to the development of other European states. The existence of such peculiarities does not imply a German *Sonderweg*, or special path. Nor do its similarities imply that Germany's development was identical to that of other Western states. They merely serve to illustrate that German intellectuals could draw from their past to propose a uniquely German form of democracy, even in the face of a widely anti-democratic social and political system. The revisionists recognized the flaws of the *Kaiserreich* and even attributed them to some level of German peculiarity, but they also claimed to have recognized a set of universal laws that guided the development of Western democracy. They used these ideas to integrate those elements of the Imperial system that worked and to remedy those that did not.

Emphasizing the role of socialist theorists in the process of German democratization also means that the bourgeoisie were not the sole agents of democratization in Germany. Marx had called the bourgeoisie's role in historical development the "the most revolutionary part" for its overcoming the feudal system and, as a consequence to its contributions to economic developments, it developed liberalism, which strongly advocated ideas such as individual liberty and representative government, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ However, because socialism generally rejected all aspects of bourgeois society, it remained almost exclusively in opposition to liberalism. Furthermore, few of Marx's prognostications came true, and for

⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books 1967; London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 222. Citations are to the Penguin Classics edition.

these reasons, socialists played a relatively small role in the process of democratization. This idea that a successful bourgeois revolution was a necessary for German democratization or that a well developed bourgeoisie was a precondition of the successful modernization of Germany's social and political spheres ignores the role of the non-revolutionary left. Revisionism, however, bridged bourgeois and socialism ideas. It did not reject bourgeois society to the degree of mainstream socialism and its democratic and reformist tendencies have had a significant impact on the rise left.

The primary task of this thesis is to outline the revisionists' theory of democracy, but it also places the revisionists within the larger context of German political development. The much-debated Sonderweg thesis argues that Germany's development was fundamentally different from that of other European states. Historians advocating a German Sonderweg tend to focus on the ideas and structures that led Germany to the Third Reich. Opponents of this idea focus on Germany's similarity to other states and the dangers of a normative approach. Although the argument that there is a direct line between the 1871 and 1933 is overstated, there were powerful anti-democratic elements in nineteenth-century Germany, including the otherwise liberal middle class. While the recent historiographical trends have downplayed the role of these anti-democratic elements, it is important to recognize their existence. There is another aspect of political development that has received less attention. In the larger history of socialism, the history of revisionist social democracy has mostly been told as a conflict between Marxists and revisionists. It is necessary to look at the theories proposed by the revisionists not simply for their contributions within the SPD, but for how they contributed to the democratization of Germany as a whole.

That there is some level of continuity between pre- and post- WWI ideas can hardly be disputed. The question is what that continuity was and how it was significant to the course of Germany history, with a particular focus on revisionism. My purpose is to neither affirm nor refute those arguments that place the origins of the Third Reich in the nineteenth century, but rather to explain the foundations and form of parliamentary democracy advocated in the pages of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in terms of its significance as a genuinely democratic political theory. *Parlamentarismus* was an ideologically distinct alternative to the choices between socialism and liberalism.

The German Question

This thesis explores the revisionist theory of democracy, so it is necessary to examine its place within the historiography of German political development, German social democracy, and European intellectual history during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The role of revisionism rarely appears in the larger context of German social and political development. With a few notable exceptions, even historians of social democracy limit revisionism to a phase in the history of socialism. Scholars who study revisionism, such as Peter Gay, Sheri Berman, and Manfred Steger, recognize that it was more than a phase of social democratic development and is important because it forced the left to abandon its singular focus on the economic conflict between the social classes and the resulting revolution, and to adapt to changing circumstances.⁷ For these reasons, it played a vital role in the success of establishing democracy after World War II, not only in Germany, but in other countries. The argument presented here, however,

⁷ Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Manfred B. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism: Eduard Bernstein and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

focuses on the significance of revisionism before World War II. It examines how revisionism addressed a broad range of social, political, and philosophical issues and subsumed them under the broad institution of democracy.

The collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Third Reich have dominated German historiography, both implicitly and explicitly, since 1945. The fundamental question is whether these events define German history. In other words, was the Third Reich the culmination of all German history prior to 1933 and, by extension, did 1945 mark a new beginning in German history? If the answer is affirmative, then the case for a German *Sonderweg*, which asserts that Germany developed differently than other Western European states and that this difference directly contributed to the Third Reich, seems logical. From this perspective, the focus is on Germany's failure to complete the process of democratization successfully undergone by other Western European states. If, however, one argues that the Third Reich was not the culmination of all preceding history, but rather an interruption in the process of social and political development largely caused by short-term factors, then the focus is on showing that Germany did not depart from a normative path of development and that the anti-democratic elements did not hinder democratization in Germany any more than they did elsewhere. By and large, current historiography rejects the *Sonderweg*, but the pro-*Sonderweg* historiography that dominated the 1960s nevertheless asks very important questions about German history.

Marcus Kreuzer 'maps' out three main positions within the historiographical debates over German exceptionalism, which greatly assists in conceptualizing the

difficulties inherent in studying democratization and parliamentarization in Germany.⁸ Kreuzer labels these groups “pessimists,” “skeptics,” and “optimists.” The optimists believe Germany successfully underwent a process of parliamentarization that resulted from a gradual process of political development not substantially different that much of the rest of Western Europe. Conversely, the pessimists argue that the political institutions in Germany were too rigid to accommodate change and extra-constitutional forces within Germany impeded parliamentarization. Lastly, the skeptics see evidence of both successes and failures in the process of parliamentarization, finding that the repressive and divisive elements of German society ultimately outweighed the successes of parliamentarization over the long term.⁹

The pessimistic view contends that the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of National Socialism resulted from an anti-liberal and anti-democratic tradition that developed among a broad spectrum of German society during the nineteenth century, beginning with the elites and spreading to the bourgeoisie. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars such as Fritz Stern, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler argued that this tradition fostered authoritarianism and undermined democracy, and which ultimately culminated with the rise of National Socialism.¹⁰ These scholars point to the intellectual and cultural movements of Romanticism and Idealism, as well as the social and political impacts of the developing middle class, unification, and industrialization, which created

⁸ Marcus Kreuzer “Parliamentarization and the Question of German Exceptionalism: 1867-1918,” *Central European History* 36, no. 3 (2003): 327-57.

⁹ Kreuzer, “Parliamentarization,” 330-331. While Kreuzer insists that by comparing the existing historiography, the process of parliamentarization appears more advanced “than skeptics and pessimists assert,” he remains focused primarily on the study of political institutions and does not address the role of social and intellectual forces on the process of parliamentarization.

¹⁰ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969); Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972); Hans Ulrich-Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (New York: Berg, 1985).

an introverted, apolitical, and obedient German populace. Additionally, the middle class, who theoretically should have been the source of liberalism, instead allied themselves with the conservatives, who, under Bismarck's leadership, granted the middle class what it wanted most- a unified German state with the economic conditions favorable to modernization. By the eve of the First World War, Germany remained politically backwards, with a relatively weak middle class.¹¹

Dahrendorf exemplifies the pessimist approach by asking, "Why is it that so few in Germany embraced the principle of liberal democracy?"¹² The answer to the so-called 'German Question' focuses on the concept of "illiberalism," a term coined by Fritz Stern and borrowed by Dahrendorf. The German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel was one of the most significant contributors to illiberalism, according to this view. Hegel's idealism asserted that the legitimate form of the state was that which balanced reason and tradition, citing 1820s Prussia as an example of the actualization of the ideal.¹³ His philosophy was so influential that J.W. Burrow calls Hegel's advocacy of constitutional monarchy in his *Philosophy of Right* one of the major foundations for both German nationalism and German conservatism in the decades leading up to the First World War.¹⁴ In *The German Conception of History*, Georg Iggers emphasizes the extent to which the Hegelian concept of the state manifested in ways outside of politics proper, specifically

¹¹ The 'weakness' refers not to its economic or cultural impact, but to its political strength and its capacity for political modernization.

¹² Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy*, 14.

¹³ Dahrendorf, Chapter 13, "The Myth of the State" in *Society and Democracy*. See also Ulrich-Wehler, *German Empire*, 100-137. There is some debate as to the extent of Hegel's conservatism. See Norman Levine, *Divergent Paths: Hegel in Marxism and Engelsism*, Vol. 1: The Hegelian Foundations of Marx's Method (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006). The evidence for this argument comes mostly from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

¹⁴ Burrow, J.W., *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 125. See also Ulrich-Wehler, "The Ruling System and Politics" in *The German Empire 1871-1918*, 52-192.

as it influenced nineteenth century historicism. Although historicists believed in neither Hegel's dialectical method, nor his absolute idealism, they used his conception of the state as a justification for conservatism and authoritarianism, which illustrates how widespread this illiberal ideology was.¹⁵

Other scholars show that, at its most extreme, illiberalism spread into the German cultural identity. For example, Fritz Stern and Wolf Lepenies have gone so far as to claim that parliamentarianism was inimical to German identity and that being apolitical was a virtue.¹⁶ Lepenies argues that German intellectuals viewed *Kultur* as a "noble substitute" for politics, in this case meaning parliamentary politics. Lepenies, like others, believes that the 'German cultural elite' put the state above the liberal politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and thus rejected parliamentarianism as being culturally foreign.¹⁷

These various obstacles to German democratization warrant serious investigation; however, the approach outlined above risks overstating the degree to which the existence of these concepts actually blocked democratization in Germany. This historiography assumes that 1933 was a direct consequence of illiberalism and its focus on causality can be dangerously close to what Thomas Nipperdey calls "quasi-teleology," in which scholars work backwards from a specific chosen endpoint and focus on a single line of historical continuity.¹⁸ Their singular focus on the power of illiberalism obscures any achievements made by the proponents of liberalism and democracy. The great question is

¹⁵ Georg Iggers. *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*. Revised ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968).

¹⁶ Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism*; Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture*, 5.

¹⁸ Thomas Nipperdey, "1933 und Kontinuität der deutschen Geschichte" *Historische Zeitschrift*. 227, no. 1 (1978): 110

whether these processes actually failed and whether their failure actually constitutes enough of an impact to be a precondition of the Third Reich.

Historians such as David Blackbourn, Geoff Eley, and Richard Evans, challenge the Sonderweg historiography.¹⁹ They believe that such works unjustifiably draw a direct line of continuity between German history as a whole and the atrocities of the Third Reich. As Blackbourn and Eley insist, the main problem with emphasizing Germany's uniqueness is that it necessarily implies a normative approach to history. German history, they argue, must be studied on its own terms, not as a comparison to the British, French, or American history. Not only must the process of German democratization be studied on its own terms, but the concept of revolution and the role of the bourgeoisie must also be free from the normative approach. Finally, one of the problems with many approaches to German history is its emphasis on the liberal path. Dahrendorf's German question exemplifies this emphasis on the bourgeoisie and liberalism, which is itself a limitation.

Blackbourn and Eley's work, while it critiques the normative approach, is also not entirely free from it. Many scholars, including Dahrendorf and Stern, argue that one of the factors contributing to the rise of illiberalism was the weakness of the German middle class.²⁰ A common interpretation of the failure of 1848, the 'revolution from above' in 1871, and rapid industrialization during the late nineteenth century was that these circumstances interfered with bourgeoisie's political development. The result was a politically backward, yet economically modern state in which the bourgeoisie had

¹⁹ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley. *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Richard J. Evans, *Rethinking German History: Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

²⁰ In addition to Dahrendorf and Stern, see James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978), 272-283.

become attached to the anti-liberal, anti-democratic worldviews of the elites.²¹ However, as Blackbourn and Eley both stress, the bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Germany was neither weak nor underdeveloped. According to Blackbourn, the German middle class was a strong, but “discreet,” force in many spheres of German society. Its successful “silent revolution” was the development of a bourgeois civil society that largely defined German society as a whole. Even though the middle class did have some form of revolution, Blackbourn still admits that the German bourgeoisie failed in the political sphere, as it opted to retreat from proper politics and instead remained a driving force in the market, in civil society, and in local affairs.²² According to the skeptical view, the bourgeois revolution was successful, assuming that the definition of ‘revolution’ is not confined to a political confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, but as a larger process of economic progress and the social transformations that go along with it. Blackbourn and Eley suggest that it is more appropriate to speak of an “embourgeoisement of German society,” rather than a feudalization of the bourgeoisie.²³ The problem with Blackbourn’s approach is its emphasis on the necessity of the bourgeoisie in democratization. However, Sherri Berman argues that social democracy, not liberal democracy, triumphed after 1945.²⁴

The history of German social democracy is often self-contained, in that it focuses on the history of socialist theory and party programs and not as much on the role of social democracy in the process of democratization. Two classic studies of German social

²¹ Wolfgang Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State* (London: Arnold, 1995); Dahrendorf, Chapter 3 “Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution” in *Society and Democracy*; Ulrich-Wehler, *German Empire*.

²² David Blackbourn, “The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie: Reappraising German History in the Nineteenth Century” in *Peculiarities*, 159-292.

²³ Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities*, 13.

²⁴ Berman, *Primacy of Politics*, 6.

democracy that focus on the rise of reformism between the fin de siècle and World War I are Carl Schorske's *German Social Democracy* and Peter Gay's *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*.²⁵ Schorske follows the intra-party conflicts between the growing reformist tendencies and the increasingly radical faction on the extreme left. His primary goal is to show that these debates, which intensified after 1905, led to the party's split in 1917. Gay's work, by contrast, is an intellectual history of Eduard Bernstein and focuses on Bernstein's challenge to mainstream social democracy and his attempt to formulate a revised social democratic theory. Both focus on the role of ideas, but both are somewhat constrained by the narrow focus of the application of those ideas. The conflicts on which Schorske focuses relate to specific situations faced by the SPD, for example, how to respond to the Moroccan Crisis or to a specific election. Since the focus is on the split, the larger context of socialist thought is missing. Gay, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on Bernstein and one comes away with the assumption that Bernstein singularly defines the revisionist movement.

Even the more recent historiography of revisionism focuses on the continuity between Bernstein's ideas as laid out in his *Preconditions of Socialism* and the establishment of social democratic states after World War II.²⁶ There are two problems with this approach. First, while Bernstein represents many of the ideas of revisionism, he was not its sole proponent. Many other Social Democrats contributed to the formation of the revisionist ideology and their contributions must not be overlooked. Secondly, to also claim that early twentieth-century revisionism was a precondition for the development of

²⁵ Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Collier, 1962).

²⁶ Berman, *The Primacy of Politics*; Manfred B. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism*.

post-WWII social democracy overlooks the historical context in which each form of social democracy was active. The break from mainstream Marxism was likely necessary for the development of post-WWII social democracy, as reflected in the Bad Godesberg Program, but the SPD of 1959 was looking to establish its relevance in light of the success of the more liberal Christian Democratic Union. The revisionism that existed up through the First World War was more explicitly tied to the ideas of the Enlightenment and sought to establish an a priori basis for democracy. Sherry Berman's *The Primacy of Politics* shows that democracy and capitalism have long been at odds and that as far back as Marx, there had been a tradition within the socialist movement which insisted that democracy could bring about the end capitalism.²⁷ Bernstein emphasized this argument the turn of the twentieth century and found himself castigated by mainstream Marxists. Berman focuses on the normal definition of politics, but she does not examine the meaning that politics held for the revisionists, which was a belief that reason and knowledge would push people to act rationally and therefore toward democracy. In short, politics was rational activity

One final complication in the history of German democracy is contemporary Germans' own perspective of the Sonderweg. When historians discuss the Sonderweg, they generally refer to a post-1945 concept; however, it actually existed, albeit with different implications, before 1945. If we ask to what extent illiberalism impeded democratization in Germany, then it is important to acknowledge how Germans perceived themselves during this period. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Germans not only acknowledged their differences from the other European powers, but they used them as a source of pride, which appears to lend credence to the post-1945

²⁷See the introduction to Berman, *The Primacy of Politics*.

version of the Sonderweg. Mark Hewitson argues that Wilhelmine Germans acknowledged their state's unique path during the decades leading up to WWI and attributes it to the increased role of national politics and the state, rather than the social influences emphasized by Blackbourn and Eley.²⁸ Although he shares the emphasis on national politics with pro-Sonderweg historians like Hans Ulrich-Wehler and Fritz Fischer, he does not accept their conclusions that the pseudo-democratic institutions of Wilhelmine Germany delayed the 'normal' path of development. Rather, Hewitson argues that many Germans accepted the Imperial political system largely because of the way its peculiarities mediated particular interests, which fits with claims that German thought in the early and mid-nineteenth century had a significant impact on the German identity at the beginning of the twentieth century. The revisionists also acknowledged Germany's uniqueness, but unlike many others in Germany, they did not accept it.

The purpose of this thesis is to explain revisionism's role in the process of German democratization. While it acknowledges that illiberalism existed, it nevertheless illustrates that democratic theory was possible, despite its proponents drawing from the same German ideas that influenced illiberal thought. Additionally, rather than explain revisionism as the necessary transition from pre-World War II social democracy to post-World War II democracy, this thesis insists that it is necessary to study this revisionism in the context of what it sought to achieve in its immediate circumstance. The continuity between the Kant, Marx, and revisionism illuminates more about the possibility of democratization at the end of World War I than it does about the nature of social democracy after World War II.

²⁸ Mark Hewitson, "The Kaiserreich in Question: Constitutional Crisis in Germany before the First World War," *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (2001): 725-80.

WWI and Democratization

World War I presented both opportunities and problems for the process of German democratization. Throughout the war, there was not only a struggle between those who recognized the need for reform and those who sought to maintain the status quo, but there was also tension within the reformist camp, which was torn between supporting the war, effectively forcing them to side with their ideological opponents, and opposing the war while working toward domestic reforms that would eliminate their opponents' social and political status. At the outbreak of the war, 'the spirit of 1914' had a powerful unifying effect and reflected a widespread belief that Germany's 'encirclement' by hostile foreign powers justified the war along patriotic grounds. More importantly, this belief had even spread among the Social Democrats. As a result, German Social Democrats were torn between a patriotic position of supporting the German war effort and renouncing a war that their ideology had initially labeled a consequence of capitalist society. This awkward position manifested as a series of struggles within the SPD, between the left and the right, and between the Reichstag and the military leadership.

Although revisionism existed well before the outbreak of WWI, the effects of the war put immense strain on the German political system and, by 1917, these strains provided the revisionists an appropriate context to elaborate their ideas. By this time, there had been no significant breakthrough in the fighting, despite the previous two years having witnessed the costliest, most destructive battles of the war without the advantage shifting in any side's favor. However, several events in 1917 fundamentally shifted the dynamic of the war. In March, Imperial Russia collapsed and the Tsar abdicated. The Provisional Government that took its place was a coalition of liberals and democratic

socialists, but it remained committed to the war effort and continued disaffection with the war led to October Revolution, in which the radical Bolsheviks assumed power and quickly moved to end Russian participation in the war. The ostensible success of a socialist revolution in Russian initially appeared heartening to the socialists in Germany, including those who supported the war, while the withdrawal of Russia from the fighting appeared as an even greater success to the German war effort, which the confused state of German socialism. Finally, the United States' entry into the war in April 1917, prompted in part to Germany's resuming of unrestricted submarine warfare, posed a serious threat to the German war effort and Germany itself. With the failed German offensive in the spring and summer of 1918 and the success of the American military, the United States government increased the pressure for the complete democratization of Germany.

While the opportunity to push through democratic reforms opened by 1917, internal obstacles stood in the way of reform. The de facto military dictatorship of Erich von Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg as the third Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL), had assumed control of the German government in 1916. As heroes of the early battles on the Eastern front, their insistence on achieving a 'victor's peace' conflicted with the left's hopes to reach a 'negotiated peace' and clear the way for reform. The weakness of the civilian leadership strengthened OHL, as the Kaiser deferred to OHL, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg lacked the means to effectively lead any coalition of political parties, and the Reichstag only possessed the power to approve funding for the war. Ultimately, no part of the civilian government was able to find any traction with which to initiate and sustain the reform movement. In addition to the weakness of the civilian government, the conservatives solidly backed OHL, not only because they supported a victor's peace, but

also because a victor's peace would bolster the conservative alliance and thereby maintain its political and social standing.²⁹ As long as OHL and its conservative supporters remained in control, the left would find it difficult to overturn the Prussian three-tiered voting system and the barring of Reichstag ministers from serving in the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*), as well as removing the obstacles to entering the civil service.

Among the conservatives who so solidly backed OHL was a group of annexationists, most notably the Pan-German League that not only sought a victor's peace, but also to expand German territory. These groups undertook a successful propaganda campaign that made the idea of a negotiated peace untenable. In the face of these conservative cabals, the majority of Social Democrats found themselves in an awkward position in which they generally supported, or at least tolerated, the government's war effort, but opposed annexation. While they wanted a negotiated peace, any calls to end the war ran headlong into the opposition from OHL and its conservative supporters. The civilian leadership, represented by Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, was unable to counter the military leadership and its allies within the annexationist cabal. This represented weakness on the chancellor's part, and strengthened both the annexationists and the opponents of reform.³⁰

Even within the Social Democratic camp, there was tension over the support of the war and the desire for reform. At the outbreak of war in July 1914, the SPD's initial reluctance to support a capitalist war gave way to unanimous support from the SPD's

²⁹ Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 359.

³⁰ Craig, *Germany*, 359; Stefan Vogt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und soziale Demokratie: Die Sozialdemokratische junge Recht 1918-1945*, ed. Dieter Dowe and Michael Schneider, Historisches Forschungszentrum Der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. (Bonn: Dietz, 2006).

members in the Reichstag. This political unity across party lines and social strata, the so-called *Burgfrieden*, reflected the widespread belief that Germany was under attack from hostile nations. Although the unanimous support of the SPD only lasted until December 1914, the majority its members continued their support of the war. However, as the war dragged on, the rift begun in December 1914 widened. By 1917, the number of Social Democrats who opposed the war and the intensity of their opposition reached such a degree that the party split. On one side were the Majority Social Democrats (MSPD); on the other, were the Independent Social Democrats (USPD). The USPD was not comprised of the most radical Social Democrats, but simply those who opposed the war. As far as the revisionists were concerned, the general tone of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* reflected their continued support of the war, although Eduard Bernstein joined the USPD, along with some of his fiercest critics Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, as well as moderate Social Democrat Karl Kautsky. Within the larger context of democratization, this split reflected the difficulty inherent in the revisionists' continued support for the war along patriotic lines, while simultaneously calling for major reforms.

As the war dragged on, the strains it caused not only split the Social Democrats, but exacerbated class divisions and ultimately led to the end of the *Burgfrieden*.³¹ Food shortages and poor working conditions rekindled discontent among the working class, leading to an increase in the number of strikes and protests by 1917 and neither the SPD nor the trade unions were able to allay the workers' frustrations. The strikes and general discontent put pressure on the SPD to achieve some level of reform. Following a major strike in the spring of 1917, Bethmann Hollweg announced to the Reichstag that

³¹ Wolfgang Mommsen, Chapter 12 "The Social Consequences of WWI: The Case of Germany," in *Imperial Germany*, 217-232; Edgar Feuchtwanger, Chapter 8 "Germany during the War Years 1914-1918" in *Imperial Germany 1850-1918* (London: Routledge, 2001), 175-196.

democratic reforms were necessary, particularly voting reform in Prussia and attempts to close the gap between the legislative capacity of the Reichstag and the executive capacity of the *Bundesrat*. However, because Bethman Hollweg lacked support from any of the major political factions, his attempt to initiate reform failed. In July 1917, a coalition of the SPD, the Center Party, the Progressives and the National Liberals formed the *Interfraktioneller Ausschuss*, or Inter-party Committee, to discuss ending the war through a negotiated peace. Again, however, a meaningful outcome failed to materialize in the face of opposition from the OHL and their conservative supporters. Perhaps the most significant achievement of the *Interfraktioneller Ausschuss* was the forced resignation of Bethmann-Hollweg. Bethmann Hollweg's replacement, the more conservative Michaelis, accepted the peace resolution 'as he understood it,' which effectively killed the peace movement and the reform movement.³²

The events of 1917-1918 directly affected the authors writing for the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. While their articles were not necessarily addressing new ideas, the impact of the war heightened the need for democratization. The domestic problems that came to a head in 1917 led to a greater emphasis on the parliamentarization. With the failure to achieve reform in 1917, the articles from 1918 and early 1919 reflect the revisionists' return to the philosophical foundations of social democracy in an attempt to more clearly explicate their ideology in the face the defeat of their domestic agenda.

³² David Stephenson, "The Failure of Peace by Negotiation in 1917," *The Historical Journal* 34, no. 1 (1991): 65-86.

Chapter 2: The Philosophical Foundation

Friedrich Engels wrote in *The End of Classical German Philosophy*, “The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being.”³³ Attempts at answering this question dominated philosophy during the Enlightenment and continued on through the works of Marx and the revisionists. This relationship between thinking and being, and more specifically, between thinking and action, provided the foundation on which the revisionists constructed their theory of social democracy. They reminded their fellow socialists that Marx was a philosopher and that his works must be understood as the product of his philosophy. Bernstein attempted to break the grip of the “scientific socialism” through a return to Kant. Bernstein’s Kantianism was largely an application of Kantian critique to socialism and did not use other elements of Kant as a basis for socialism.³⁴ Within the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, the revisionists combined Kant’s epistemology and transcendental idealism with Marx’s historical materialism to give socialist philosophy a more substantial foundation that could be put to practical use in the social and political spheres. The revisionists’ use of philosophy is important because it was the key to their understanding of the world and therefore was the key to democratization. Their particular philosophy explained the world in a way that gave social democracy both a rational and an empirical basis that was universal in its exposition of the world and its ethics.

³³ Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950), 29. This was originally published in 1888.

³⁴ This was not the first attempt at neo-Kantian socialism. Hermann Cohen explicated a Kantian basis for socialism in the mid-nineteenth century by extending Kant’s social ethics into a socialist ethics. Although similar to the revisionism detailed here, Cohen was not a Marxist and therefore had little reason to retain any elements of Marxist philosophy. The revisionists insisted that certain elements of Marx’s philosophy were vitally important to the social democratic movement and therefore Marx remained a central figure. Interestingly, there were no explicit references to Cohen in the articles cited in this thesis. For a more detailed account of Herman Cohen’s neo-Kantian socialism see Harry van der Linden, *Kantian Ethics and Socialism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).

Revisionist social democracy, because it claimed to be based on universal truth, abandoned the concept of class struggle and replaced it with the desire for cooperation and a faith in the human capacity for reason. Ultimately, the result of the revisionists' merging of Kant and Marx was reinstatement of human agency in social democratic ideology.

Bernstein's Critique of Socialism

Eduard Bernstein was the first prominent Marxist to openly critique mainstream Marxism, when he famously declared that the socialist movement, not than the 'final goal of socialism' was of the utmost importance. To its critics, this revisionism amounted to little more than an attempt by a "petty-bourgeois democratic progressive" to convince the SPD to abandon all for which it stood.³⁵ The so-called Revisionist Debate that began in 1898 was the most substantive and open critique of Marxism by another socialist to date. Although Bernstein's ideas differed from many the revisionists who wrote for the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* during World War I, his challenge to the SPD was a major turning point in the development of social democracy in Germany. He sought to eliminate the notion of scientific socialism by replacing science with Kant's notion of critique and use this critical socialism as the underlying principle of social democracy. This implied that it was the duty of Social Democrats to critique the dogmatic assumptions of scientific socialism and thereby reinforce the ethical foundation found to be lacking in the static nature of contemporary Marxism. For much of his life, Bernstein remained a dedicated adherent of mainstream Marxism, but as Peter Gay explains, his "skeptical and empiricist

³⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, "Social Reform or Revolution" in *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Dick Howard, 52-134. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 134.

sympathies” forced him to challenge mainstream Marxism.³⁶ By abandoning Marx’s dialectical method, and replacing it with what Peter Gay calls a “unilinear concept of progress,” Bernstein made a significant departure from Marxism.³⁷

Revisionists believed that focusing too much on the strictly economic aspect of socialism weakened social democracy because the circumstances facing Germany during the first two decades of the twentieth century did not correspond to Marx’s prognostications. Nor did it allow socialist theorists to respond to these changes in any meaningful way. It was not enough for them to emphasize the philosophical root; they had to roll back the underlying assumption about the economic root, which revolved around the belief that socialism was a science. This belief in scientific socialism was problematic for two reasons. If Marxist socialism was a science, then it was difficult to challenge the conclusions that Marxists drew. Second, any discussion of ‘science’ required a common definition, not only among people at a particular time, but also a common understanding of science over time.

Between Kant’s time and the outbreak of WWI, the understanding of ‘science’ had undergone a number of revisions. Kant understood science as a set of rational categories that explain the relationship between objects of the natural world and the way we understand them. For Hegel, science was metaphysics because it was the only way to uncover the absolute truth that lay behind all aspects of existence. Marx’s materialist conception of history asserted that the foundation of social relations was based on economic factors that could be ‘scientifically’ verified, as the majority of Marxists insisted. By the twentieth century, science referred to an empirical inquiry of the natural

³⁶ Gay, *Dilemma*, 143-144.

³⁷ Gay, *Dilemma*, 146.

world. Although Bernstein rejected the notion of scientific socialism, he was influenced more by his contemporary understanding of science than by what Kant or Marx understood as science and his critique of Marxism was shaped by that concept.³⁸

Scholars of Bernstein attribute his revision of Marxism to his lack of formal training in philosophy and his confused definitions of science.³⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, Europe's intellectual current had shifted toward a scientific worldview based on empiricism and positivism and an altogether different kind of materialism than what Marx had advocated.⁴⁰ While Bernstein relied on Kant's more metaphysical interpretation of 'science' as "systematically ordered knowledge," he combined Kant's definition with the more empirical definition that fit the scientific standards of the late nineteenth century.⁴¹ While Bernstein maintained that he never resorted to "gross empiricism" but always to understand the relations of physical and mental phenomena,⁴² his recognition that events failed to correspond with Marx's predictions was largely driven by such empiricism. By the 1890s, Bernstein recognized that actual circumstances no longer corresponded to what Marx had predicted and he began to question the validity of mainstream Marxism. German workers were experiencing a more favorable situation than when Marx and Engels made their most significant theoretical contributions. Social Democracy and trade unionism continued to gain popularity, despite the growing

³⁸ Gay, *Dilemma*, 159.

³⁹ Gay, *Dilemma*, 143-144; Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, edited and translated by Henry Tudor, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xxv.

⁴⁰ Essentially, there are three different interpretations of the term 'science' that are relevant to this argument: the Kantian, the Marxist, and the Natural. Kant used a metaphysical definition to justify the natural sciences. It was a hybrid of empiricism and rationalism, which will be examined below. Marx's science was historical materialism, which asserted that the means and modes of production determine the changes in society and history provided the evidence for these changes. The natural science of the late nineteenth century was empirical and positivist.

⁴¹ Gay, *Dilemma*, 144-146.

⁴² Eduard Bernstein, "Idealism, Theory of Struggle, and Science" in *Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein, 1900-1921*, edited and translated by Manfred Steger (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 108.

prosperity of the working class.⁴³ Despite the apparent fact that society was moving away from an impending revolution, Bernstein did not claim that Marx was incorrect or mistaken, but instead questioned the interpretation of Marx advocated by so many social democrats. By focusing on the assumption that socialism was a science, Bernstein insisted that Marx and Engels never intended for their theory to be a closed doctrine, but always open to critique.⁴⁴

The process of challenging scientific socialism therefore involved a series of claims, both implicit and explicit, that reinforced the role of philosophy in German social democracy in the twentieth century and helped bring about a more effective and democratic socialism than what traditional Marxism allowed. Refuting the belief that socialism was a science removed revisionism's greatest obstacle: it made socialism capable of adapting to change, specifically allowing socialists to fully embrace parliamentarianism and use the existing framework of the state to work toward the greater goal of social justice. Bernstein addressed what he believed were the inherently problematic assumptions behind scientific socialism. "To view socialism as a pure science means to indulge in metaphysical speculation instead of dealing with reality. In the same vein, will must be curtailed by science...As soon as we subjugate science to our will, we petrify the dynamism of critique into static dogmatism."⁴⁵ Socialism required a foundation on which to base its policies, but had to be able to adapt to changing

⁴³ For more information on the economic and social situation of Germany in general and the workers in particular, see: Carr, William. "The Germany of William II 1890-1914." In *A History of Germany 1815-1990*, 4th ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), 163-86. Feuchtwanger, Edgar. "The Wilhelmine Age." In *Imperial Germany 1850-1918* (London: Routledge, 2001), 99-118. Schorske, Carl E. "Background: The Erfurt Synthesis and the Rise of Reformism" in *German Social Democracy 1905-117: The Development of the Great Schism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1955), 1-27.

⁴⁴ Eduard Bernstein, "How is Scientific Socialism Possible?" in *Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein, 1900-1921*, edited and translated by Manfred Steger (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 98-99.

⁴⁵ Bernstein, "Idealism, Theory of Struggle, and Science," 110.

circumstances and Bernstein insisted that his critique of scientific socialism provided the middle ground.

In *The Preconditions of Socialism*, which outlined his overall critique of social democracy, and in a series of articles published in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* from 1900-1901, Bernstein explained the relationship between science and socialism, but more importantly, he pointed out the limits of scientific socialism. Science, as defined by Bernstein, is “experience building upon established knowledge” and socialists generally held two of Marx’s discoveries to be scientific: the materialist conception of history and surplus value.⁴⁶ Bernstein used the latter to make his point. Discovering surplus value, however enlightening, did not make socialism a science. The discovery itself had little bearing on the course of social development; it only elucidated a fundamental aspect of the capitalist society. While Marx and Engel explained that the existence of surplus value was “the herald of a dawning socialist society,” Bernstein found where Engels later claimed that it was not surplus value that heralded the new socialist society, but the increasing awareness that the mechanism of surplus value was exploitative. Therefore, the existence of surplus value alone was not sufficient proof that the capitalist order would collapse.⁴⁷

Bernstein acknowledged that socialism strove toward goals “in accordance with knowledge capable of objective proof; that is, knowledge which refers to, and conforms with, nothing but empirical experience and logic,” but was careful to differentiate between being a science and being scientific.⁴⁸ He explained that science contains both

⁴⁶ Eduard Bernstein, “How is Scientific Socialism Possible?” 89.

⁴⁷ “How is Scientific Socialism Possible?” 93.

⁴⁸ Bernstein, *Preconditions of Socialism*, 9.

pure theory and applied theory.⁴⁹ Pure theory is universally valid because it comprises the sum total of relevant data, whereas applied theory is subject to change as knowledge increases. Rather than claim that Marxism was an applied science and therefore had to adapt as knowledge increased, Bernstein still maintained that the foundation of Marxism remained in the realm of pure science.⁵⁰ However, pure science was not a closed doctrine. The laws of nature that provide the foundation of a pure science can not be fundamentally altered, but the manner in which they are understood can change. In an attempt to clarify his position, Bernstein compared Marxism as a pure science to agricultural chemistry or electrical technology, the basic laws of which remained constant, but allowed for a myriad of possibilities as knowledge increased, all of which could be incorporated without fundamentally altering those laws.⁵¹

As one would expect, shortly after the publication of “How is Scientific Socialism Possible?,” Bernstein found himself forced to defend his definition of science. An anonymous reviewer offered an alternative definition of science, which was “the methodological generation of lawlike [sic] regularities in nature and society, classified in homogenous systems.”⁵² Scientific socialism, then, was the “uniform regularity of the social will” built upon the “necessary and inevitable conditions of human development.”⁵³ Finally, the reviewer challenged Bernstein’s rejection of scientific socialism on the basis that it arises from volition. Bernstein countered these objections by claiming that one cannot logically strive for what already exists. Once astronomers have

⁴⁹ Echoing the argument in Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. and ed. Michael Friedman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁵⁰ Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, 11. See also Tudor’s introduction to *The Preconditions of Socialism*, xxiii.

⁵¹ *Preconditions of Socialism*, 9.

⁵² Qtd in Bernstein, “Idealism, Theory of Struggle, and Science,” 105.

⁵³ Qtd in Bernstein, “Idealism, Theory of Struggle, and Science,” 105.

predicted an eclipse of the sun, he explained, one cannot will it because it is already shown to be certain. However, one can will the end of “exploitation, oppression, and poverty” because they are neither certain nor inevitable.⁵⁴ It becomes clearer to see that Bernstein directed his critique toward mainstream socialism’s tendency to take Marx’s predictions for granted, without any consideration as to whether they precluded rational action or misrepresented the actual social will.

It might appear that Bernstein was claiming that socialism was not a science in a strict sense, while simultaneously claiming that it was a pure science. However, his explanation of pure science reveals his fundamental point and where he takes up Kant. Pure science relies on the critique of the existing knowledge. Not only does Bernstein base his definition of science, at least in part, on Kant’s definition of science, but he also used Kant’s method of critique as the basis for justifying the scientific methodology of socialism. Bernstein asked, “Is scientific socialism possible and how?”⁵⁵ Regarding the first part of the question, he answered that it was not. In response to the second part, Bernstein wrote, “Critique is the premise of scientific knowledge.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the term he believed most accurately described socialism was ‘critical socialism.’ Bernstein never intended to portray socialism as altogether lacking the methods of science, but he cautioned that “a theory or doctrine is often labeled as scientific because its structure reflects the formal requirements of scientific deduction,” but was not necessarily a

⁵⁴ Bernstein, “Idealism, Theory of Struggle, and Science,” 106.

⁵⁵ Bernstein asks this question directly in “How is Scientific Socialism Possible?” 95.

⁵⁶ Bernstein, “How is Scientific Socialism Possible?” 106. Bernstein credits Antonio Labriola with coining the term.

science.⁵⁷ He still believed that socialism, more than any other political movement, relied on a scientific approach to determine the proper course of action.

In short, Bernstein believed that socialism was not a science, but that “of all social and political groupings, socialism is closest to science, because... it is freer in its critique of the existing social reality than any other party or movement. After all, critique is the premise of scientific knowledge. Society is a living, ever-evolving organism, and that party or class which has most to gain from progress is naturally more interested in the expansion of knowledge than any others.”⁵⁸ This illustrates how Bernstein combined Kant’s view of science as how we see the world with the more modern view of science of how the world actually is. However, Bernstein’s revisionism fell short of offering clear direction. It effectively countered the dogmatism of scientific socialism, but it still lacked a firm answer to the question of how to effectively translate critique into political action. Bernstein insisted that socialism was not a science because it was predicated on a future event; that is, the collapse of capitalism and the subsequent rise of the classless society.⁵⁹ Socialism was thus an “image, a blueprint and theory of a certain social order” as well as a “movement toward a certain social order.” Both, he asserted, contained an idealistic element, “either the ideal itself or the movement toward such an ideal.” Socialism was something that should be striven for. When Bernstein asserted, “That which is usually termed the final goal of socialism is nothing to me, the movement everything,”⁶⁰ he was accused of abandoning the ultimate premise of Marxism. The most important element of Bernstein’s argument was that it placed the emphasis on the everyday activities of

⁵⁷ Bernstein, “How is Scientific Socialism Possible?” 98-99.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 99-100.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 98-99.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Bernstein, *Preconditions of Socialism*, 190. Bernstein was quoting himself, in this case.

socialists. Socialist activity was not a means to the end, but rather were ends in themselves.⁶¹

Marx and the Primacy of Philosophy

Nineteen eighteen was a momentous year for many reasons, all of which intensified the revisionists' calls for parliamentarization. Russian participation in the war ended with its signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Germany launched a major offensive in the western front in an attempt to end the war. When this offensive failed, the war finally ended and Germany collapsed into revolution. By comparison, the centennial of Marx's birth in May of that year might seem insignificant. However, to the revisionists, it was important and the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* dedicated the entire May 1 issue to discussions of Marx. The articles in this one issue provide a unique insight into the revisionists' perception of Marx and his role in their social democratic movement. However, they also show how the revisionists reacted to German left's failure to achieve reform in 1917 and consequently returned to the philosophical foundations of social democracy. With Germany's chances for a victor's peace dimming, the revisionists used the commemoration of Marx as an opportunity to formulate their social democratic philosophy. These articles make it clear that rather than using Marx's work as the sole basis for socialism, revisionists used his work as one of two philosophical components of socialism. In fact, revisionists frequently used Marx as a point of departure from Marxism, which, despite the name, they believed was not consistent with Marx's intentions. The commemoration of Marx in 1918 provided the opportunity for revisionists

⁶¹ Introduction to *Preconditions of Socialism*, xxix.

to lay out their ideas, both to chip away at mainstream socialism's monopoly on Marx's ideas and to offer a more holistic socialist philosophy.

Through these articles, the revisionists emphasized Marx's role as a philosopher, which illustrates that philosophy revealed the basis, not only of the social democratic movement, but "of everything human."⁶² For the revisionists, Marx's significance was not limited to his the social and economic discoveries, but to the fact that philosophy was the means by which Marx employed to made his discoveries and, more importantly, philosophy revealed the means to effecting change. As the revisionist Alfred Moeglich wrote, "The creators of social democracy, Marx and Lassalle, proceeded from philosophy and by their exploration for truth later hit upon the economic driving force as the basic element of all social comprehension of the world."⁶³ Therefore, to understand the foundations of revisionist ideology, it is necessary to examine the significance of this idea of 'Marx as philosopher' and, more importantly, Marx as the "ethical driving force" of revisionist social democracy.⁶⁴

Marx asserted in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, "The philosophers have *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point however is to *change* it."⁶⁵ Although explicitly mentioned only a few times in the May 1 issue of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, this "monumental final thesis on Feuerbach," is perhaps Marx's most

⁶² Alfred Moeglich "Die neue Sozialdemokratie und das neue Programm," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 7 (May 19, 1919): 457.

⁶³ Alfred Moeglich, "Eine verkümmerte Wurzel des Sozialismus," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 2 (January 2, 1918): 92. Ferdinand Lassalle was a member of the Communist League who advocated working within the state in order to effect change. Some of his ideas were incorporated into the Gotha Program of 1875. Marx criticized the Gotha Program in part because of Lassalle's influence, which he believed undermined the workers' efforts by seeking concessions from the state.

⁶⁴ Hugo Lindemann, "Die ethische Treibkraft in Marx" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 8 (May 1, 1918): 392-397.

⁶⁵ Karl Marx "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1978), 145.

significant statement for understanding the revisionists' interpretation of his philosophy.⁶⁶ In this one sentence, Marx criticized other philosophers for not taking their work beyond mere explanation of the world and asserted what he believed was the role of philosophy. Marx believed that people could not solve problems merely by explaining the nature of being. He believed people should solve problems through a process of removing philosophical contradictions. According to the revisionist Hugo Lindemann's, Marx "shows [the proletariat] not an economic, but an ethical goal."⁶⁷ Philosophy was not only socialism's source for acquiring the knowledge necessary to effect political change; it was also an ethical foundation. For Marx, understanding the nature of being allowed the proletariat to alter its consciousness and made it revolutionary. The outcome of such awareness would ultimately lead to the rebuilding of a society free from the contradictions that had made the previous historical epoch untenable. This thesis on Feuerbach illustrates Marx's belief that philosophy was a necessary component to any political movement.

Based on the revisionists' critiques, the predominant form of Marxism as codified in the Erfurt Program of 1890 was not a political movement that could directly effect substantial change. In fact, a prominent criticism of the Marxists was that they sat idly by and waited for the inevitable revolution to occur.⁶⁸ As Karl Kautsky, one of the SPD's main Marxist theorists, explained in 1909, "The Social Democratic Party is a revolutionary party, but not a party that makes revolutions."⁶⁹ While Kautsky was a relatively moderate Marxist, on the extreme left of the SPD, ideologists like Rosa

⁶⁶ Moeglich, "Eine verkümmerte Wurzel des Sozialismus," 93.

⁶⁷ Lindemann, "Die ethische Treibkraft in Marx," 395.

⁶⁸ This was brought to the forefront by Bernstein during the Revisionist Debate.

⁶⁹ Kautsky, Road to Power, 34.

Luxemburg cast reform and revolution as antithetical, arguing that any attempts at reform within the present historical epoch only served to distract from the final goal of socialism.⁷⁰ The extent to which the SPD attempted to maintain its ostensibly doctrinaire Marxism culminated with the Dresden Resolution in 1909, which limited, or barred according to at least one revisionist, cooperation with other parliamentary parties by insisting that any attempt to achieve reform within the existing framework necessarily conflicted with the revolutionary foundation of socialism.⁷¹ According to the revisionists, there needed to be a re-examination of socialist philosophy, more specifically, of Marx's role as a philosopher, which could provide a foundation that would more effectively guide a socialist movement. The explanations of Marx's philosophy given in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* were as much a critique of mainstream socialism as they were arguments regarding Marx's true intentions. These carefully crafted interpretations of Marx were intended to provide a starting point on which a political movement could be built.

It is important to remember that the revisionists cast their ideas not as a departure from Marx's thought, but as a return to what they believed more accurately represented Marx's intentions.⁷² They recognized the failure of Marx's predictions to come true, but insisted that this did not discredit the use of philosophy to effect change. The SPD had failed to effect substantial change and as the revisionist Wally Zepler asserted, its weakness was due to "a philosophical degeneration" that contradicted Marx's

⁷⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, "Social Reform or Revolution." In *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Dick Howard, 52-134. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁷¹ Hugo Poetzsch, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und das Parlamentarismus," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 20/21 (October 10, 1917): 73.

⁷² This is most explicitly explained in Lindemann, "Die ethische Treibkraft in Marx" and Wally Zepler, "Was bedeutet Marx für den Geist unserer Bewegung?" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.8 (May 1, 1918): 407-412.

“intellectual-ethical core.”⁷³ Revitalizing socialist philosophy was vital to the success of social democracy. Restoring philosophy to its rightful place in the socialist movement and correcting misapplications of Marx’s ideas was a revival of an existing ideology. As Zepler asserted, “The party came to this dead end because, despite the sheer endless appeal to Marx, in the final analysis it has not kept alive his spirit, it has not understood that his noblest legacy lay in his ethos, in the connecting of ingenious thought with the highest power of ethical willing.”⁷⁴

The perceived disconnect between Marx’s philosophy and the explanation of the political economy offered by the SPD led Moeglich to describe true Marxism as being nourished by two roots- one economic and one philosophical.⁷⁵ Marxists, however, left the philosophical root to wither by ignoring it and instead overemphasized the economic root, which made Marxist socialism appear scientific. Although this idea of scientific socialism set Marxism apart from the earlier utopian socialism of Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and others, it also crippled the socialist movement by forcing it to abide by a rigid economic foundation that no longer matched reality. The fundamental problem, according to the revisionists, was mainstream Marxism’s “unilaterally mistaking [Marxism] as an economic problem,” which conflicted ethically-driven politics that mandated socially justice government.⁷⁶ Revisionists saw this not a merely as matter of misinterpretation, but rather as the omission of half of Marx’s theory. Claiming to be taking his lead from Engels’ “bitter complaints” on the subject, Moeglich linked

⁷³ Zepler, “Was bedeutet Marx?” 410.

⁷⁴ Zepler, “Was bedeutet Marx?” 412.

⁷⁵ Moeglich, “Eine verkümmerte Wurzel” and “Die neue Sozialdemokratie.”

⁷⁶ Moeglich, “Eine verkümmerte Wurzel,” 92. Regarding terminology, dogmatism as a Kantian definition is linked to Bernstein’s use of Kantianism and finding the middle ground between skepticism and dogmatism.

revisionist social democracy to Marx's and Engel's decades-old claims that everything had been done to nourish the economic root at the expense of the philosophical root.⁷⁷

The philosophical root is difficult to define with the same precision as the economic because it is not reflected by any quantifiable concept, e.g. surplus value. As Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach indicates, the philosophical root, because it is separate from the economic root, should not only serve to explain the world, but it should also direct human activity toward ends that are not reduced to the economic, but in accordance with reason. Although Marx had proclaimed philosophy to be the 'intellectual weapon' of the proletariat, Moeglich lamented, "The philosophical element was repressed in the practice of nascent socialism and so it has remained to the present day."⁷⁸ Given that economics was the determining factor only 'in the last instance,' as Marx and Engels frequently asserted, revisionist made a concerted effort to address other aspects of human existence. Therefore, their philosophical root contained elements of epistemology and deontology.⁷⁹ It addressed the tension between idealism and materialism, and it encouraged the critique of the status quo. While each of these ideas will be addressed in more detail in the following paragraphs, the immediate point is that the revisionists' used the concept of 'Marx as philosopher' to separate themselves from mainstream socialism. Using this critique as a starting point for a reappraisal of socialist philosophy allowed revisionism to overcome the SPD's opposition to democratic reform within the existing framework of the state and created an opening in which social democracy could develop without the need for revolution, which the circumstances by mid-1918 made all the more

⁷⁷ Moeglich, "Die neue Sozialdemokratie," 457.

⁷⁸ "Eine verkümmerte Wurzel des Sozialismus," 92.

⁷⁹ Epistemology is the study of knowledge, especially the sources and limits of knowledge. Deontology is a moral philosophy based on duty; that is, what one ought to do.

pressing. The belief in this ‘withered root of socialism’ is important because it represents the revisionists’ emphasis that socialism was not merely a description of the world or a description of social relations along purely economic lines, but that there existed a separate and equally necessary philosophical component that could direct democratic activity along ethical lines.

It was essential for the revisionists to revitalize the philosophical root by expanding on what little philosophy of socialism already existed. Their emphasis on the philosophical root of Marxism allowed them to reconfigure socialism to fit the circumstances in which they lived, while simultaneously drawing on existing ideas and institutions. Specifically, they used philosophy as the justification for their departure from the dominant theoretical foundation of Marxism, which had provided a very limited justification for parliamentary government and limited cooperation with the other political parties. Mainstream Marxism could never be a political movement because its adherents chose to remain focused on pointing out the inadequacies of the political economy and had no basis on which to actively address those problems.

By emphasizing Marx’s own use of philosophy, these revisionists sought to transform what they believed had become merely an explanation of social and economic development into a viable political movement that expanded beyond the political economy, even if it retained some level of economic determinism. Rather than focus solely on economic matters to determine the party’s position on political matters, the contributors to the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* sought to expand the understanding of socialism by elucidating both the epistemological basis of socialism and by incorporating a deontological element. Revisionism preserved Marx’s status as the cornerstone of

socialism because he had uncovered the foundations of human development and because they believed Marx was an ethical figure around which they could build a movement. They also left open the possibility of incorporating other philosophical perspectives and the formulating of new ones. “The philosophical foundation of socialism is not yet complete; it is barely begun and forms the great task of the future,” wrote Moeglich.⁸⁰

As Bernstein pointed out two decades earlier, many of Marx’s prognostications failed to materialize. This was due, at least in part, to perceived flaws in Marx’s dialectical methodology. The revisionists wanted to abandon the dialectical method and expose what they insisted was Marx’s original intent. In the end, these revisionists transformed social democracy into a non-revolutionary, democratic movement in which Marx was still a significant figure, but they changed the dialectical materialism that guided nineteenth century Marxist socialism into a linear reform movement. The inexorable march toward revolution became an ethical call for progress. To differentiate science from the ideal, to show that political activity was an end in itself required knowledge of the goal and Bernstein claims to have meant, “The movement is everything to me because it bears the goal within itself.”⁸¹ The question, then, was how to understand the full significance of the knowledge that socialism provided. A more methodical examination of Immanuel Kant provides the answer because revisionism represented the merging of Kantianism and Marxism. According to revisionists, both philosophies were necessary to achieve a social democratic state. Kant allowed Marx’s

⁸⁰ Moeglich, “Eine verkümmerte Wurzel,”95.

⁸¹ Eduard Bernstein, “A Statement” in *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898*, ed. and trans. by H. Tudor and J.M. Tudor with an introduction by H. Tudor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 194.

historical materialism to be rooted in the actual world without taking away human agency.

The Reconciliation of Kant and Marx

Like the vast majority of early twentieth century socialists, the revisionists believed that Marx was socialism's central figure because his economic determinism revealed the fundamental truth governing social relations. The revisionists writing for the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* at the end of World War I recognized a flaw in what they perceived as a one-dimensional Marxism. While historical materialism revealed the nature of social relations as being based on economic determinism, without further explication, it only served to explain social relations as a system of cause and effect in which individuals merely respond to economic stimuli. It negated the impact of reason on historical change by failing to explain how the existence of a certain set of laws that guide and determine reality can generate knowledge that can then be put to practical use to alter the economic reality. To correct the socialist philosophy, the revisionists used Kant's transcendental idealism to better explain Marx's historical materialism. Only by using both sets of ideas could the revisionists propose a social democratic philosophy that explained the relationship of the mind and of being while also providing a deontological backing. Whereas Bernstein had focused on the belief that scientific socialism was a static ideology because Marxists viewed it as a closed socio-political doctrine, these revisionists believed that socialism had stagnated because it focused solely on explaining the nature of social relations and ignored the purpose of philosophy, which was to provide a justification for practical action.

Heinrich Peus distilled the revisionist project in the following manner, “If we want to say what Karl Marx achieved in the final essence, what it is that we may correctly call Marxism, it is not only the idea of the economic interpretation of history, but rather its practical application to economic and political critique and the action that springs from it.”⁸² Although appearing to be a straightforward interpretation of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Peus sought to direct his readers’ attention to fact that Marxism failed to generate action from knowledge. By 1917, and continuing through 1918, the revisionists realized that establishing a democratic government in Germany was becoming increasingly possible due to the strains the war had placed on the existing economic and social system. However, with the opportunity for reform that had presented itself as early as 1917, there also came an increased threat from the right. While many on the left pushed for reform, the right insisted that a victor’s peace was still possible and this tension between victory and peace even found its way into the SPD, which split in 1917 over the issues of war aims. To help social democracy take advantage of the situation, the revisionists knew it was necessary to overcome the perception that any ideology based on Marx’s historical materialism rendered the individual a “mere marionette of the law of causality.”⁸³ Revisionists affirmed that economic determinism constituted the basis of social democracy, but they emphasized that social democracy was impossible to install without first understanding the nature of the underlying social reality. Determinism was a problematic concept because it appeared to strip away freedom and reason. According to

⁸² Heinrich Peus, “Marxismus und Demokratie” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.8 (May 1, 1918): 400.

⁸³ Otto Koester, “Zur Philosophie des Sozialismus” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.11 (June 25, 1918): 601.

Kant, causality and freedom exist in opposition with one another.⁸⁴ If revisionists explained human activity as being purely causal, that is, if economic existence causes an individual to act in certain manner, then humans were neither free nor rational. To reconcile the opposition between determinism and freedom, revisionism relied on Kant's differentiation between the laws that determine the natural world and those that govern reason. The merging of Kantianism and Marxism shaped revisionist social democracy into a movement that acted in accordance with the actual world and was therefore a universal and ethical movement.

As Bernstein had explained, socialism was both a means to an end and an end in itself. It was a critique of the existing social reality, a movement toward a new social reality, and the new social reality. Critique was Bernstein's solution to the difficulty of reconciling the relationship between thinking and being. In his discussion of the limitations of scientific socialism, Bernstein had pointed out a relationship between interest and cognition. "Socialism as *science* depends on *cognition*, socialism as *movement* is guided by *interest* as its noble motivation."⁸⁵ Cognition generates interest, Bernstein explained, but it does not generate action directly. Revisionists built on this interpretation of Kant to link knowledge and reason, and to show that rational action was made possible by cognition, but was not caused by cognition. Those who believed that the individual is a 'marionette of the laws of causality,' failed to distinguish between the

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (First published 1781, 1787; London: Penguin, 2007), 405. Citations are to the Penguin edition. This argument appears in the "The Antimony of Pure Reason, Third Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas." Although the citations are to the Penguin edition, the pages of the original first and second editions are frequently given, as well. IB472-475, IA444-447.

⁸⁵ Bernstein, "How is Scientific Socialism Possible?" 95. Bernstein used Kant's definition of 'interest' referring to "that by which reason becomes practical, *i.e.* a cause determining the will." Immanuel Kant, "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals" in *Basic Writings of Kant* ed. with an introduction by Allen W. Wood (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 217n.

laws determining the empirical world and those that guided the use of reason.⁸⁶ However, revisionist socialism was still based on the economic determinism inherent in the materialist conception of history, which forced the revisionists to elucidate the relationship between reason and material existence more clearly than what Marx's assertion that social existence determines consciousness had done. The revisionists used Kantian epistemology to show that historical materialism, although deterministic, was the true means of understanding the world and they used Kantian deontology to direct socialist activity along those lines.

Marx had contributed to the development of philosophy by returning to the study of the actual world because he believed his predecessors had inverted the relationship between actual things and their mental counterparts. Although Marx owed much to Hegel's philosophy, Hegel's insistence that reality was but a manifestation of a degree of the Absolute Idea was also Marx's main target. As the philosophically-minded revisionist Otto Koester explained, Marx believed that Hegel had placed a greater emphasis on the idea than on the actual thing and therefore 'turned Hegel right-side up' when he asserted that consciousness does not determine being, but that social being determines consciousness.⁸⁷ However, Marx also claimed, "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstance and upbringing... forgets that it is men who change circumstances."⁸⁸ On the one hand, Marx indicated that being determines action; on the other, he clearly believed that action could alter being. There was no inconsistency to

⁸⁶ Koester, "Zur Philosophie des Sozialismus," 599. In addition to the previously cited explanation from *Critique of Pure Reason*, see also Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, trans. with introduction by James W. Ellington, 2nd ed. (First published 1793; Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

⁸⁷ Koester, "Zur Philosophie," 598-599.

⁸⁸ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1978) 145.

Marx's position, but rather symbiosis between the human mind and the actual world. Marx believed people must use practical activity to reconcile society's philosophical contradictions. While the economic position was deterministic 'only in the final instance,' as Marx and Engels qualified, the human mind is still capable of altering economic existence.

The problem with Marx, according to the revisionists, was that socialist intellectuals had turned him into a "socialist dogmatist" whose ideas "preclude human will."⁸⁹ The materialist conception of history explained the nature of human relations as being based on material factors, specifically the individual's relationship to the means of production, and that that material existence determined the individual's consciousness. However, by misrepresenting the role of Marx's economic determinism, Marxists had stripped socialism of its efficacious foundation and turned it into a fatalistic ideology, rather than providing the foundation for action that could reconcile philosophical contradictions. As Peus explained, revisionism insisted that such a misinterpretation of historical materialism turned Marxism into a mere explanation of events that occur without human intervention.⁹⁰ When socialists attempted to introduce human agency into historical materialism, it appeared contradictory. The 'obstetric view' of Marxism, which explained the role of the proletariat as being an 'obstetrician' who would use the knowledge of social development to ease the birthing pangs of the new society, failed to adequately address how action was possible through knowledge. Koester realized and anticipated the question, "How can the individual, itself a cell forming in the embryonic

⁸⁹ Peus, "Marxismus und Demokratie," 400.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

future state, at the same time perform the service of helping give birth?”⁹¹ Revisionists claimed to have found the solution to these problems by using Kant’s philosophy to explain how practical activity arises from economic determinism, which reaffirmed the individual’s role as an agent of historical change.

Understanding Kant’s epistemology is crucial for understanding the revisionist worldview. Kant believed that the human mind did not passively accept the world around it, but that it contains an *a priori* framework of categories that allows it to understand the world in a particular way. He believed knowledge related to objects in two ways, “either as merely determining it and its concept, or as also making it actual. The former is theoretical, the latter practical knowledge of reason.”⁹² In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, first published in 1781, and its companion piece, *The Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*, Kant addressed the long-standing tension between rationalism and empiricism. Specifically, he focused on the role of causality, which he believed was a fundamental means by which we understand the world. Unlike the skeptical empiricist David Hume, who argued that causality was merely the ordering of empirical events, Kant asked how we could claim to speak of cause and effect without already possessing some basic knowledge of existence, time, space, and, most importantly, of causality itself. He asserted, “Without sensibility no object would be given us, without understanding no object would be thought.”⁹³ Through his mediating of the conflict between pure rationalism and pure empiricism, Kant insisted that we focus not on discovering the nature of things, but rather on the nature of knowledge and the critique of

⁹¹ Koester, “Zur Philosophie,” 600.

⁹² Preface to the second edition to *Critique of Pure Reason*, 15. (Pages ix-x in the original publication).

⁹³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 86. (IA511B75)

that knowledge. Bernstein focused on this critique of knowledge as a fundamental element of social democracy, but he did not address Kant's ethics.

In *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explored practical reason, which is the foundation for human action. He realized that if causality, as it pertains to the empirical world, was applied to reason, it precluded freedom, which is the same problem that socialists faced a century later. Kant determined that there exist two different modes of thought, which are independent of one another and subject to two different sets of laws. One governs the sensible world and the other governs the intelligible world, and it is only through the latter that reason becomes practical. "The *will* is a kind of causality belonging to living beings in so far as they are rational, and *freedom* would be this property of such causality that it can be efficient, independently on foreign causes *determining* it; just as physical necessity is the property that the causality of all irrational beings has of being determined to activity by the influence of foreign causes."⁹⁴ Freedom is therefore the use of reason.

All rational beings must view themselves from these two separate, but not mutually exclusive perspectives. Like any object, the individual exists as an appearance in the empirical world and is subject to natural laws of that world. In the context of historical materialism, this means the individual is as much a part of materialism as the means of production and subject to the same determinism. However, each individual's mind is capable of generating thought that is governed solely by reason. Despite their independence from the laws of the natural world, the laws of reason "require a judgment sharpened by experience in order to... distinguish in what cases they are applicable... and... to procure for them access to the will of man, and effectual influence on

⁹⁴ Kant, "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals," 203.

conduct.”⁹⁵ This final point illustrates the connection between the two perspectives, which the revisionists used to reconcile the tension between determinism and rational, practical action.

Peus further elaborated on the relationship between knowledge of the world and the capacity to act according to that knowledge, vis-à-vis Kant and Marx,

The chemist as is generally known can produce wonderful benefits; but in doing so, he applies the relationship known to him by natural laws to chemical matters. He does not prescribe nature, but rather follows it in order to control it. Marx tells humankind: It should not seek what speculatively may be thought of as logical, but rather what is discerned on the basis of (particularly economic) actuality as possible thought and possible action of the will. Marx strove to free humanity’s thinking from mere fantasy, to subordinate it to reality and thus to make practically effective. With its doctrine of the dependence of thought on being, Marxism does not abrogate the action of the will, but rather makes it effective, possible, free.⁹⁶

Kantianism not only allowed socialists to recognize the nature of social existence, it also allowed them to act rationally. To rational beings, the application of reason is as much a part of nature as the world itself, and people are subject to both.⁹⁷ There is no *a priori* knowledge of social development, but there exists the ability to acquire and understand that knowledge and put it to use. Historical materialism, as an explanation of social development, is independent from the ability to use reason to determine action, but still requires experience and knowledge of the world. Following Kant’s logic, Koester

⁹⁵ Kant, “Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals,” 147. It is worth mentioning that Kant and Marx should not be as neatly reconciled as the revisionists claimed. They do not explain, for example, that Kant explicitly claimed that desire for material objects was the antithesis of the use of pure reason and could not be part of moral law since they were objects of desire and part of the actual world. Such desires were inherently irrational. Since Marx claimed that the relationship to objects of the senses (the means of production) determines consciousness, it is far more difficult to explain their role in Kant’s definition of reason. However, the revisionists’ task was to continue the task of critique and to continue building a philosophical foundation. Their interpretations of Kant and Marx are more self-fulfilling.

⁹⁶ Peus, “Marxismus und Demokratie,” 400-401.

⁹⁷ Kant explained that nature “is the existence of things, so far as it is determined according to universal laws,” and showed that causality explained natural phenomena. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 35.

insisted, “Wherever we explain natural phenomena..., we do it under the perspective of the law of causality. Wherever we consciously and systematically act...we no longer consider the world under the perspective of cause and effect, but rather from ends and means.”⁹⁸

Marx’s historical materialism showed that economic activity was the essence of human nature. However, the causality associated with Marxist determinism was only one mode of thought. Using reason to determine one’s course of action is not determined by the same causality that determines the natural world. Man is free to act according to ends and means, and thus arguing that “social development is not a fate for the people, but rather its work.”⁹⁹ This illustrates how Kant and Marx together formed the nexus of revisionist social democracy. It is no exaggeration to claim that, for the revisionists, Kant had as profound an influence on socialism as Marx did. To revisionists, transcendental idealism complimented Marx’s materialism. Kant’s philosophy explicated the reciprocity between the mind and the world and it is that how we come to possess knowledge through the interaction of the two. “Marxism makes the human will active in the true sense... It says: Study the world of man, comprehend its relationships to natural law, understand its thought and willing from the actuality of the economic life... and then influence humanity in accordance with this knowledge.”¹⁰⁰

In Kant’s idealism, theoretical knowledge is limited to objects of perception and is governed by causality. Humans are part of the natural, empirical world, but also a part of the transcendental world of ideas. Practical reason asserts that morality transcends the

⁹⁸ Koester, “Zur Philosophie,” 601.

⁹⁹ Qtd in Koester, “Zur Philosophie des Sozialismus,” 601-602. Koester is quoting the book *Princip oder Romantik?* by Adler.

¹⁰⁰ Peus, “Marxismus und Demokratie,” 401.

empirical laws of theoretical knowledge and is instead governed by reason and freedom. The humanist element of Marx illustrates that the essence of Being is determined by human relations, which themselves are determined by economic existence. The two perspectives both focus on the role that humans play. Thus to the revisionists, idealism and materialism complimented each other. According to Koester, “Kant’s idea of a *General History with Cosmopolitan Intent* had the same prime cause as Marx’s economic view of history. And Marx’s postulate on the individual to work for the developing socialism is carried by the same basic outlook borne as the Kantian ethic. Therefore, Social Democracy has the right to refer to Kant as well as Marx: more, however, the duty to re-develop the vestigial philosophy of socialism and thus develop an intellectual basis and an ethical push for that realization.”¹⁰¹

Marxist determinism of was no longer a stagnating force. Instead, it focused the revisionists’ commitment to their social democratic reforms. By having a firmer understanding of social and political activity, as shaped by both reason and material factors, the uniqueness of the revisionists’ democratic ideology becomes clear. Moving from these philosophical foundations to the more specific discussions of the democratic state illustrates how the revisionists’ linked their discussions of knowledge and ethics to a set of blueprints for *Parlamentarismus*.

¹⁰¹ Koester, “Zur Philosophie des Sozialismus” 604.

Chapter 3: The Blueprint for Parlamentarismus

Koester summarized the connection between the knowledge derived gained from recognizing the actuality of economic determinism and the ethical action it generates when he asserted, “Equipped with such knowledge of the tendency active in the current society, we are now presented with the choice: with the proletariat for socialism or against the proletariat for capitalism, thus there can be no doubt which direction the categorical imperative points our will.”¹⁰² To work ‘with the proletariat for socialism’ meant striving for democracy. Because they believed that democracy was the means to achieving socialism, the revisionists abandoned the mainstream socialists’ opposition toward the state and chose instead to work within the existing framework of the state to achieve a democratic republic based on reason and duty. The revisionist conceptions of parliamentary democracy and republicanism were not, however, the same *Vernunftrepublikanismus* of Friedrich Meinecke and other later proponents of the Weimar Republic. *Parlamentarismus* was predicated on building from an existing democratic foundation based on a German philosophical tradition rather than a begrudging ex post fact acceptance of democracy that many Weimar Liberals labeled as rational republicanism.¹⁰³ Understanding *Parlamentarismus* requires an understanding of how the revisionists thought about democracy, the nature of government, and state administration. Any notion of ‘revolution’ would only occur in the way the people thought about their relationship between themselves and their state.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Koester, “Zur Philosophie,” 602-603.

¹⁰³ Andreas Wirsching and Juergen Eder, ed. *Vernunftrepublikanismus in der Weimarer Republik: Politik, Literatur, Wissenschaft*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ Again, this idea is not dissimilar to other political theorists, whether it is Locke, Hegel, Marx, or Rousseau.

In terms of the history of German democratization, the full significance of the revisionists' attempt to advocate a specific form of *Parlamentarismus* can best be understood in the context of World War I. The war highlighted what revisionists recognized as the inherent flaws of Wilhelmine Germany, and in so doing illustrated the necessity of pushing for *Parlamentarismus*. At the same time, the war also provided the opportunity to shape their ideas into a more concrete form. The revisionists' call for democratization in the form *Parlamentarismus* was a direct response to the necessity and opportunity the war created. The ideas presented in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* between 1917 and 1919 were not entirely new, but they took on a new sense of urgency. Without the pressure of the war, the revisionists' call would have had far less traction.

Conceptualizing Democracy

The revisionists' *Parlamentarismus* was not just a proposal for a political system; it was a relationship of ideas, of philosophical and practical elements, that addressed the relationship of the people and the state. Rather than discussing a specific system of government, it is necessary to think of *Parlamentarismus* as the revisionists' way of conceptualizing a specific political system in order to legitimize democracy against alternatives from across the political spectrum. At its core, parliamentarianism focused on the proper relationship between the people and the state. When viewed from the revisionists' standpoint, their philosophical method revealed it the only legitimately democratic form of government. Since 1871, Germany had had a parliament whose members were elected through universal male suffrage. However, neither the existence of a parliament nor the fact that all men could vote made Germany a democracy, in the eyes

of the revisionists. Germany, as the revisionist economist Hermann Kranold asserted, was a *Scheindemokratie*, an institution bearing the form of democracy, but not the content.¹⁰⁵

The appearance of a democratic parliament belied its genuinely undemocratic functioning, as Bismarck intended.¹⁰⁶ This is what the revisionists sought to remedy, to a limited extent through a restructuring of the government, but largely through a reorientation of how the people thought about their relationship to the government.

The revisionist journalist and politician Ludwig Quessel, who wrote several articles on parliamentarianism, highlighted the problem associated with constitutionalism when he stated, “It ranks among the peculiarities of our intellectual existence that there were people in Germany who, from the backwardness of our political civilization... anticipated a strengthening of Germany in the world. They babbled of a specific *German freedom* and did not realize that behind this slogan, they hid general human bondage.”¹⁰⁷ While he directed this accusation at no specific individuals, those who accepted the common Hegelian conception of the state as the pinnacle of German freedom were the likely targets.¹⁰⁸ His remarks also cast these ideas as the German manifestation of constitutionalism in general, rather than an entirely unique aspect of the German cultural and national identity. Like Hegel’s view of constitutional monarchy, Quessel defined parliamentarianism by its ideal place at the apex of political development. On July 18, 1917, the day before the non-binding Reichstag Peace Resolution passed, he outlined three stages of this development, which he claimed “have directed the European people in

¹⁰⁵ Herman Kranold, “Die Pflicht zum Parlamentarismus” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.24 (November 28, 1917): 1217.

¹⁰⁶ Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, (New York: Penguin, 2003), 1-21; Ulrich-Wehler, 24-31; Craig, 50-60.

¹⁰⁷ Ludwig Quessel, “Das parlamentarische Regierungssystem für Deutschland” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.14 (July 18, 1917): 721. The emphasis is from the original.

¹⁰⁸ This argument from Hegel appears in his *Philosophy of Right* and *Philosophy of History*. See also Iggers and Burrow.

strict constancy from autocracy, beyond constitutionalism, to parliamentarianism.”¹⁰⁹ In the first stage, which he admitted had all but disappeared from Europe by 1914, all political power rested with the monarch, who dictated the law to his or her government. At the time of Quessel’s writing, most European states were in the next stage of development, in which a constitution dispersed the monarch’s power through a representative body, a judiciary, and administrative officials. Despite being represented by parliament, the people still “exert no direct influence on government affairs.”¹¹⁰ Quessel acknowledged that the people experience an “incipient freedom” under constitutionalism, even if the mechanism of constitutionalism failed to generate actual freedom.¹¹¹ With the people still removed from power, a state of constant tension exists under constitutional government, as the bureaucracy and the parliament vie for power. As a likely legacy of the bureaucratic mentality arising from the Prussian reform era in the early nineteenth century, Quessel recognized that the administration was more directly involved in the affairs of state, and therefore defined constitutionalism as the “absolute rule of the bureaucracy within framework of the law.”¹¹² Germany was still stuck in the Hegelian conception of the state at the beginning of World War I, but as the war progressed, it became increasingly apparent that Germany needed reform.

According to Quessel, constitutionalism reinforced the gulf between the people and the state, resulting in tensions that rendered its continued existence unsustainable. His

¹⁰⁹ Quessel, “Das parlamentarische Regierungssystem für Deutschland,” 721. It is worth noting the Quessel placed the context of this development in Europe as a whole, thereby implying that Germany’s development was inherently a part of European development.

¹¹⁰ Quessel, “Das parlamentarische Regierungssystem,” 721.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 721. This concept is not unique to any one philosopher or school of thought. It can be seen Locke, Kant, Hegel, and Marx, all of whom had radically different philosophies ranging from empiricism to historical materialism.

¹¹² Ibid, 721. Karl Mannheim asserts that there was a tendency in Germany to “turn problems of politics into problems of administration.” Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Harvest, 1936), 118.

claim that constitutionalism was inherently weak reflects the revisionist belief in the inevitable failure of bourgeois liberalism, but not necessarily because of its relationship to economic matters. Parliamentarianism was a necessary outcome because of the conflict between the parliament and the bureaucracy under constitutionalism. Progressing from the constitutionalism to the parliamentarianism would require few changes in the structure of government and would instead require a willingness to recast the relationship between the people and the government. Regarding 'the people' as a singular entity, parliamentarianism reacquires the monistic character of absolutism by making the government responsible to the people. In the words of another revisionist, the process of parliamentarization would be "the substitution of one government power, namely the bureaucracy, by another, namely the people."¹¹³ As Quessel and others illustrate, the revisionists thought about parliamentarianism as a linear process that did not correspond to Marx's dialectical development. Nor did they focus predominantly on the relationship between those who controlled the means of production and the workers. Indeed, there was no caveat explaining that economic forces determined the political affairs, although as the philosophical foundations of revisionism indicate, the revisionists still believed in some level of economic determinism. Unlike Marx's dialectical history, Quessel's stages of development are more similar to what Peter Gay calls a "unilinear concept of progress."¹¹⁴ Change should occur in stages, but it was of neither dialectical nor revolutionary nature.

As part of the conflict within the constitutional system, overcoming the special interests, which revisionists insisted were an inherent feature of constitutionalism, is

¹¹³ Kranold, "Die Pflicht zum Parlamentarismus," 1217.

¹¹⁴ Recall that Gay applied this term to Eduard Bernstein's revisionism.

another part of the process of democratization and parliamentarization as part of a process. Taken together, Quessel's discussions of democracy as a step in a larger process of altering the relationship between the state and the people with critiques of contemporary democracy indicates that constitutionalism, bourgeois democracy, and liberalism were essentially the same in the mind of the revisionists. In March 1917, during the initial calls for reform, Heinrich Peus cited a recent speech by the conservative Count Yorck von Wartenburg, in which von Wartenburg criticized the Western parliamentary tradition for its being dominated by financial institutions, religious interests, and the private dealings of ministers conspiring to govern against the will of the people. Peus agreed with von Wartenburg's assessment, but drew a different conclusion. Rather than using examples of corruption to discredit democracy in general and to justify conservative rule, Peus argued that von Wartenburg described only *bourgeois* democracy.¹¹⁵ The revisionist jurist Wolfgang Heine also defined parliamentarism in contrast to bourgeois constitutionalism. According to Heine, the government, being comprised of special interests, retains power while the parliament acts merely as the "supernumerary, the choir, which is appointed to murmur approvingly."¹¹⁶ Part of the transition from constitutionalism to parliamentarism is the people's recognition of the general interest and their determination to actualize it. The political parties, as representatives of the people, ought not to agree with the government out of convention, because then the parties are not acting freely. Rather, they must form coalitions based on a mutual recognition of the general interest.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Heinrich Peus, "Die Demokratie auf dem Marsch" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 6 (March 28, 1917): 279-280.

¹¹⁶ Wolfgang Heine, "Der Weg zur Demokratie" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.1 (January 8, 1918): 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

As a system of government, the revisionists offered several definitions of parliamentarianism, each with a slightly different emphasis, but united in their call for a re-conceptualizing of the relationship between government institutions and the people. According to Hugo Lindemann, many mainstream social democrats who opposed parliamentarianism simply defined it as a system of government in which the majority party selects the ministry.¹¹⁸ Lindemann remarked that this definition ignores the formation of coalition governments, which precluded both England and France, two of Europe's established parliamentary systems. The formation of coalition ministries was a prerequisite for democratic parliamentarianism because all people needed to feel responsible for the state.¹¹⁹ The question for the revisionists to answer was 'Why must Germany move toward *Parlamentarismus* and the sense of responsibility that it entailed?'

Necessity and Possibility

Revisionists conceived of parliamentarianism as existing at the intersection of necessity and possibility. Necessity possessed two meanings, one practical and the other theoretical. Practical necessity reflected the precarious situation in which Germany found itself by 1917, while philosophical necessity referred back to the stages of development. From a practical standpoint, parliamentarianism was necessary for Germany's survival, or, at the very least, for its survival as a great power. Revisionists blamed the World War on the inherent flaws of the constitutionalist stage of development, in which private interests dominated political affairs. Internal and external pressures created a series of crises in Germany by 1917, which only escalated over the next year. The war created

¹¹⁸ Hugo Lindemann, "Die nächste Aufgabe der Partei" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 20/21 (October 10, 1918): 1020.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1020.

food shortages, strikes, calls peace by inter-party coalitions, and promises of reform from the Kaiser. By the end of 1917, as little had been accomplished domestically as had been accomplished militarily; however, it was clear that the *Burgfrieden* was unraveling. Between Woodrow Wilson's initial declaration of his Fourteen Points in January 1918 and his notes to the German government in October of that year demanding full parliamentarization, it was becoming increasingly apparent that Germany's best chance to retain any semblance of its pre-war status was to democratize and that required fundamental changes to the country's political and social system. In the context of revisionist theory, however, the practical necessity of parliamentarianism makes more sense when viewed in conjunction with its philosophical counterpart. The idea that the nature of reality revealed both the necessary functioning of the actual world and, through a proper understanding of the actual world, created the possibility for change. The philosophical element therefore reveals how revisionists thought about their circumstances and the role of reason in political development. Only within the context of necessity and possibility did the revisionists believe democratization possible. As the articles in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* indicate, 1917 was significant for the development of *Parlamentarismus*.

The war appeared to prove Quessel's point that parliamentarization was necessary for Germany's continued development and increasingly possible by 1917. Not only did these revisionists blame the constitutionalist system for involving Germany in a devastating World War, but they also believed that that system had been unable to meet the financial demands of the war to the same degree as its parliamentary opponents,

namely France and Great Britain.¹²⁰ Quessel pointed out that German intellectuals had “finally acquired the insight that our *Obrigkeitsystem* is no match for the parliamentarianism of the enemy powers and its removal is a national necessity.”¹²¹ Quessel elaborated by citing the French and British military experiences, not just in World War I, but from the time that each had implemented parliamentarianism, as evidence of the parliamentary system’s superiority over constitutionalism. He praised the parliamentary cooperation used to meet the demands of modern warfare, crediting parliamentarianism for England’s history of military success against the numerically superior French and for France’s reconstruction after its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.¹²² However, it was Germany’s confrontation with England in 1914 that provided the most obvious evidence that parliamentarization was necessary. As Quessel explained, the British managed to raise and supply a new fighting force, despite the virtual annihilation of the British Expeditionary Force in 1914. At the same time, the British managed to raise additional tax revenues, while Germany’s tax revenues had declined, and the British provided benefits to veterans, widows, and orphans.¹²³ Because parliamentary government relied on genuine representation and cooperation, only it was

¹²⁰ It is important to acknowledge that many of the contributors to the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* were supporters of the war effort. They believed the war itself was unnecessary, and opposed expansionist war aims, but as patriotic Germans, they certainly did not want to see Germany defeated. Eduard Bernstein ended his relationship with the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* over its stringent support for the war effort, and, ironically, joined the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) along with his intellectual nemesis Rosa Luxemburg.

¹²¹ Quessel, “Das parlamentarische Regierungssystem,” 719-720.

¹²² Regarding the history of parliamentarianism in England, Quessel seems to have conflated the existence of a parliament as a representative body with the spirit of parliamentarianism that he and the revisionists advocated. England and France fought no wars against one another between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the outbreak of WWI. Additionally, the process of parliamentarization in the United Kingdom lasted throughout the nineteenth century. Not until the early twentieth century did the House of Commons become powerful enough to advance, in Quessel’s terminology, to ‘parliamentarianism.’

¹²³ Ludwig Quessel, “Die nationale Leistung des Parlamentarismus,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 18 (September 12, 1917): 908.

capable of meeting the tremendous demands of modern society. Hugo Poetzsch concurred, asserting, “The World War yielded... the recognition that the parliamentary system of government must be striven for as a pressing necessity for the continued development of Germany.”¹²⁴ Responding to his own hypothetical question regarding the most important domestic task facing the Social Democrats in 1917, Lindemann answered, “The formation of our constitution for parliamentary government. On this one point... hinges the entire political future of our people.”¹²⁵ Clearly, the circumstances facing Germany in 1917 made the revisionists acutely aware of the precariousness of delaying reform.

In addition to the necessity of ending the war as advantageously for Germany as possible, the revisionists also elaborated on the philosophical necessity of parliamentarianism. The revisionists’ insistence on reconnecting with German philosophy was driven by a perceived need to base its political movement on a fundamental truth. *Sozialistische Monatshefte* contributor Hermann Kranold’s proclaimed, “Neither enrichment of knowledge, nor transfiguration of being is now the task, but rather the application of knowledge to correcting mistakes.”¹²⁶ Kranold’s demand that his fellow Germans apply their knowledge to advance to the third stage of development was a call for political action, but it contained philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the use of reason. The revisionists’ *Parlamentarismus* was the result of a philosophical inquiry into the nature of government, similar to the approaches of other influential political philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or even the American revolutionaries. While revisionist support of

¹²⁴ Poetzsch, “Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie,” 1051.

¹²⁵ Lindemann, “Die nächste Aufgabe der Partei,” 1119.

¹²⁶ Kranold, “Die Pflicht zum Parlamentarismus,” 1216.

parliamentarianism might appear to have been purely practical, the majority of German socialists had only limited support for parliamentary government, with the most radical rejecting it outright. Like many other political theories, the revisionists sought to provide a much deeper support for their political ideology than pure practicality.

Because of the revisionists' philosophy, the necessity of parliamentarianism was a fundamental element of their conception of history. The Kantian-Marxian hybrid sought to define the relationship between necessity and possibility, the intersection of which reflects the revisionists' perception of democracy. Peus observed, "It is clear that democracy is only a process of development that brings us ever closer to the ideal. Democracy is not brought about by any decree, but thereby the highest in its development is made possible."¹²⁷ True democracy was the result of a process, guided by the laws of development, which rendered it necessary. However, it was not a process that occurred without direct human action. Corresponding to the idea that parliamentarization of the Germany was necessary, revisionists also pointed out their unique opportunity to democratize the country. The opportunity presented itself in the days and weeks following the Revolution of November 9. Heine pointed out that the war "vanquished" the stigmatization of the left, if only temporarily.¹²⁸ The threat of a counterrevolution made the process of democratization both necessary and pressing. Claiming that only a "rapid and thorough democratization" could stave off counterrevolution, Heine illustrates one of the great weaknesses of the German left during this revolutionary period. A perceived need to democratize Germany with all possible haste, coupled with a belief that the German people as a whole were uneducated in the democratic tradition, meant that

¹²⁷ Peus, "Demokratie auf dem Marsch," 280.

¹²⁸ Heine, "Der Weg zur Demokratie," 1.

democratization along revisionist lines would be exceedingly difficult. In other words, the revisionists sought to do in a matter of months what had been accomplished over decades in France, England, and United States. But as Quessel admonished in 1917, “Germany, being subject to the laws of development, must ascend to the third stage of development or perish.”¹²⁹

Die Volksvertretung

The revisionists believed *Parlamentarismus* was both a way of thinking about democracy and a necessary stage of development, but it is important to look more thoroughly at how they thought about the nature of the parliament itself. While there was some discussion within the pages of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* about how the Reichstag should function, most of the discussion focused on the relationship between the Reichstag and the people. To the revisionists, democracy meant the “self administration, regulation, and execution of all collective matters of the people through the people themselves.”¹³⁰

Parliamentarianism was based on republicanism and one of its main justifications was its ability to channel the will of the people through a representative body of the people (*Volksvertretung*). As Peus explained, “The *Volksvertretung* must not regard itself only as a body of council but also must operate as body of will. The sovereignty of the people must find real expression through its representation.”¹³¹ The spirit of the people manifested through the *Volksvertretung* to form a more representative government than what existed under constitutionalism.

¹²⁹ Quessel, “Das parlamentarische Regierungssystem,” 720.

¹³⁰ Peus, “Die Demokratie auf dem Marsch,” 280.

¹³¹ Heinrich Peus, “Klarheit und Wahrheit” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 19 (September 26, 1917): 974.

As republicans, the revisionists made a definite connection between Rousseau's concept of the General Will and their own concept of the 'people's will,' which they made all the more noticeable by specifically acknowledging Rousseau's role in European political development. Unlike John Locke's theory that the social contract ensured the protection of property, Rousseau argued that people submitted to the General Will both for protection and because it allowed them to remain free, insofar as no individual's will could impose itself on another's.¹³² However, like much of the rest of the revisionists' theory of democracy, the notion of the people's will borrowed heavily from the German philosophical tradition by linking freedom and reason, in much the same way Kant linked them. The appeal to reason played a prominent role in the formation of the people's will, which was then reflected in the *Volksvertretung*.

Unlike Rousseau's classically-influenced theory of sovereignty,¹³³ by which the people legislate directly and thus was only suited to small states, the revisionists insisted that the size and complexity of the modern state necessitated a political body to represent the people's will. Like its Rousseauian counterpart, the socialist people's will was not the sum total of all individual wills, but rather a reflection of how the people cast their votes. Using the issue of voting rights as his foundation, Peus suggested a link between representative government, democracy, and the will of the people. At its core, he argued that the suffrage question in Germany at the end of the First World War was more than a matter removing legal impediments to democracy. Again building on the aforementioned account of the stages of development and the distinctions made between constitutionalism and parliamentarianism, Peus argued that it was not only necessary to

¹³² The two main sources of Locke's and Rousseau's arguments are found in *Second Treatise on Government* and *The Social Contract*, respectively.

¹³³ Rousseau did not use the term "democracy" because it referred to government.

eliminate the Prussian three-tiered voting system, but like other aspects of democratization, insisted that the people themselves must become imbued with a democratic spirit. The “mere dispensing of ballots,” he insisted, was not the substance of democracy.¹³⁴ If the casting of ballots was the sole criterion, his fellow revisionist Hugo Lindemann asked, “Have we not had a democratic franchise in the Reich for more than forty years?”¹³⁵ The transition into the third and final stage of development was not to be a solely practical matter, but also a philosophical one. The right to vote and the right to cast equal votes were powerful manifestations of the people’s will. Without these two characteristics, there would be no people’s will and thus no democracy. However, the right to vote “must find its supplement in the determination of the parties of the people and the factions in the parliament.”¹³⁶

Like Locke and Rousseau, Peus argued that the will of the majority was the will of the people and was forced to accept democracy’s inherent flaws, which occur when the size of the minority approaches the size of the majority and the impact of the majority disproportionately outweighs that of the minority. “The goal can not be that a majority simply terrorizes a minority, but rather that the majority has the duty to conduct its policies in a manner that protects the common welfare.”¹³⁷ Conversely, the majority could not completely acquiesce to the minority because a situation would then arise in which the minority would control the majority, negating the principle of democracy. While the use of reason and a democratic education would render this “as marginal and innocuous as possible,” according to Peus, parliamentarianism becomes necessary

¹³⁴ Peus, “Demokratisches Wahlrecht aber was weiter?” 715.

¹³⁵ Lindemann, “Die nächste Aufgabe der Partie,” 1023.

¹³⁶ Peus, “Demokratisches Wahlrecht aber was weiter?” 717.

¹³⁷ Peus, “Klarheit und Wahrheit,” 975.

because it provides the means to forming a will of the people through the formation of coalitions.¹³⁸ If no people's will can be formed, then each political party has a duty to cooperate with the other parties, using their will and their sense of responsibility to the whole people, to form a general will. This differed from the adversarial nature of party politics found in Britain, the United States, and even Wilhelmine Germany itself. "In the parliament, a party must do more than campaign for its fundamentals; there it has the important task: to form the people's will."¹³⁹ Under these circumstances, the government could not ignore the parliament by claiming that no general will existed, as it had done during the Wilhemine era.

According to Peus, "It does not yet suffice, however, that in the parliament a will is available that wants to govern and bear responsibility."¹⁴⁰ While Parliament could not to derive the will of the people on its own, the German people were "addicted to authority," Peus argued, and they believed that to vote is merely to "elect [a] law giver."¹⁴¹ While this was a step forward, he insisted that the people must learn to be genuinely responsible and to use the franchise to exercise that responsibility. As Quessel asserted, "Parliamentarianism means individual responsibility. And it is the fear of responsibility that allows the German left parties, which are accustomed to mere opposition, to consistently shy away from parliamentarization."¹⁴² However, this individual responsibility was to transcend the immediate needs of the individual and be placed in the service of the whole through educating of the people, that is, through the use

¹³⁸ Peus, "Demokratisches Wahlrecht, aber was weiter?" 716.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 716.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 717.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 717.

¹⁴² Quessel, "Die nationale Leistung des Parlamentarismus," 911.

of reason.¹⁴³ The role of the SPD as an opposition party did not fit this idea of responsibility. As Kranold pointed out, for nearly a century the German left had had the opportunity to discuss and propose a set of democratic principles, but, with the exception of 1848, “carefully avoided participation in these debates.”¹⁴⁴ While Peus pointed out that there were genuine opponents of democracy, primarily among the conservatives and liberals, the SPD still fluctuated “between the convenient position of criticism and opposition and the menace of full responsibility.”¹⁴⁵ The revisionists saw the SPD as the bearers of genuine democracy, had to win over members of their own party. Poetzsch traced this tendency toward opposition back to the earliest formation of the SPD. In 1903, the party adopted a provision in the Dresden Resolution that forbade the party to seek power within the bourgeois society.¹⁴⁶ While some members accepted the need to use the parliament for reform, Poetzsch asserted, “There is no denying that German social democracy never went beyond a Platonic love for the parliamentary government.”¹⁴⁷

If the SPD underestimated parliamentarianism, Heinrich Heine claimed it was because of the party’s longstanding belief in agitation and opposition, which it had to overcome for parliamentarianism to work. “One earns no new rights without taking on new duties...One cannot demand the rule of the people if one is not ready to grab sovereignty in the name of the people.”¹⁴⁸ The *Volkvertretung* represented the channeling of reason into a people’s will. Beginning in 1917 and accelerating in 1918, Germany stood at the brink of a transformation into a new mode of government, but had

¹⁴³ Quessel, “Die nationale Leistung des Parlamentarismus,” 909-912.

¹⁴⁴ Kranold, “Die Pflicht zum Parlamentarismus,” 1215.

¹⁴⁵ Heinrich Peus, “Vorwärts zum politischen Handeln!” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 23 (November 14, 1917): 1156.

¹⁴⁶ Poetzsch, “Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie,” 1051.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1058.

¹⁴⁸ Heine, “Der Weg zur Demokratie,” 4.

to take one final step by assuming responsibility. Upon taking that step, one of the last questions remaining was the administration of the state.

Die Beamtenfrage

As an advocate of a classical republicanism, Rousseau believed people should govern themselves directly and not through a representative body, according to revisionist politician Edmund Fischer.¹⁴⁹ In contrast, the revisionists' republicanism would use the *Volksvertretung* as a means of channeling the public's will and transforming will into legislation. It was not to be an administrative body. A modern state with a population of 80 million required a technically skilled and bureaucratically organized civil service, which Germany already possessed. Well before the outbreak of World War I, the German civil service epitomized the efficiency of bureaucratic administration. Despite its being ostensibly disinterested in political affairs, many on the left and center-left considered it a bulwark against democracy. The civil service was a form of institutionalized illiberalism. However, eliminating the civil service was neither desirable nor possible. Therefore, a discussion of the German civil service sheds light on one of the institutions accused of resisting the democratization of Germany and it was a central element of the revisionists' conception of democracy.¹⁵⁰ The revisionists faced the daunting task of reconciling the civil service with democratic parliamentarianism. Well aware of the need for a skilled civil service, revisionists believed key elements to successful parliamentarization were easing the eligibility requirements for entering the civil service and altering the way

¹⁴⁹ Edmund Fischer, "Das Beamtentum der Zukunft" *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 6 (April 28, 1919): 389-390.

¹⁵⁰ Wolfgang Mommsen, *Imperial Germany*, 117; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 118-119;

people, including the civil servants themselves, thought about the relationship between the civil service and the people.

As an institution that predated Germany unification and whose existence was one of the fundamental questions during the revolutionary period from 1918-1919, the civil service merits serious examination. Historians such as Eberhard Kolb and Hans Mommsen explain that one of Weimar's perceived weaknesses was the left's unwillingness to destroy Wilhelmine institutions, including the bureaucracy.¹⁵¹ How the revisionists addressed the *Beamtenfrage*, or the civil service question, reinforces the claim that *Parlamentarismus* referred to a broad concept of democratic ideology. Edmund Fischer admitted in 1919, "To the problems that are to be solved with the building of democracy in Germany, also belongs the *Beamtenfrage*."¹⁵² As we have seen, one fundamental difference between constitutionalism and parliamentarianism was the bureaucracy's dominance within the constitutionalist system and it was on that detail that the Revolution of November 9, according to one revisionist, struck the old system of the civil service "like lightning" and created an opportunity for social democracy to fill the civil service with a democratic spirit.¹⁵³

The history the civil service, in conjunction with how the revisionists thought about democracy in general, provides the foundation on which the revisionists offered their reform of the civil service. It also highlights two related aspects of history, one illustrating the effects of social and structural changes to Germany, the other illustrating

¹⁵¹ Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, trans. P.S. Falla (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988; repr., London: Routledge, 1992), 111. Citation is to the Routledge version. Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, trans. Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 29,52-8.

¹⁵² Fischer, "Das Beamtentum der Zukunft," 389.

¹⁵³ Georg Flatow, "Der Sozialismus und die höheren Beamten," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.3 (March 3, 1917): 154.

the impact of developing ideas. During the eighteenth century, political and military modernization brought with it an increased need for a bureaucratic administration to carry out the functions of the state.¹⁵⁴ The highest-ranking civil servants firmly entrenched themselves in state life and their newly won prestige allowed them to position themselves closer to the aristocracy, even being awarded noble titles themselves.¹⁵⁵ During the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, the role of the administrative officials increased as a result of the reorganization of the southern German states into the Confederation of the Rhine. During the Restoration that followed Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat in 1815, the civil service became an inseparable part of the state. James Sheehan calls this process "the consolidation of the *Beamtenstaat*," which was as prevalent in the southern German states as it was in Prussia.¹⁵⁶ Sheehan offers two examples that illustrate the justification behind the strength of the civil service and the extent to which the Germans granted it the power to administer the law. The Prussian politician and jurist Friedrich Karl von Beyme maintained that the civil service allowed Prussia to act in the spirit of representative government, rendering its actual absence unnoticeable. Similarly, Eduard Gans argued that the civil service and the subjects do not stand opposed to one another, but that the civil servant acts on behalf of the subject, representing him.¹⁵⁷ By the middle of the nineteenth century, the *Beamtenstaat*, or civil service state, had essentially become a substitute for constitutional monarchy.

¹⁵⁴ J.G.A. Rohl, "The Higher Civil Servants in Germany, 1890-1900," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2 no. 3, 1967: 101-21. The German civil service included around one million members at the turn of the century, but this number includes teachers, and postal workers and minor officials. Other civil servants include judges and prosecutors. The higher civil servants refer mainly to the few hundred members working for the ministries and in the Reich offices.

¹⁵⁵ James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1866*, ed. Allan Bullock and F.W.D. Deakin, *The Oxford History of Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 142-143.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 425-427.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 428.

Hegel was again an influential figure in German political development, this time in justifying the *Beamtenstaat*. Many scholars also rightly identify Hegel's 1821 treatise *The Philosophy of Right* as an expression of Restoration political development, the influence of which extended well beyond Hegel's death in 1831 and included thinkers who accepted neither his philosophical methods nor his overall philosophical project.¹⁵⁸ In *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel traced political development as it progressed from its most basic structure, in the form of the family, to civil society and finally as it culminated in the form of the state. Phrasing his discussion of the state in terms of the subordination of civil society's particular interests to the universal interests of the state, Hegel never departed from his dialectical method and absolute idealism. However, several of later sections contain arguments that support the *Beamtenstaat* independently of Hegel's overall philosophy, specifically his discussion of the executive power and the role of the civil service. Hegel distinguished between the power of the prince to make decisions and the role of the executive branch, which in this case was the civil service, to carry out those decisions. Even though Hegel cast his conception of the state as the actualized Idea and the intersection of the particular and the universal, the role of the civil service was "the particularization of the universal will."¹⁵⁹ By this he meant that the officials' roles transcended the particular interests of civil (i.e. bourgeois) society and subordinated them to the universal interests of the state. The civil service therefore was tasked with applying universal principles to particular or individual cases. However, administrative tasks were subject to the power of the prince, who was the "pinnacle and starting point of the

¹⁵⁸ Sheehan, *German History*, 430-432; Burrows, *Crisis of Reason*, 132-133; Ulrich-Wehler, *German Empire*, 101; Regarding the latter point, see Iggers, *German Conception of History*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 211.

whole,” and not to the people themselves.¹⁶⁰ Despite Hegel’s absolute idealism, the general functioning of the state and the bureaucracy in the late nineteenth century largely matched his outline, which was then reflected in the revisionists’ critique of the administration of the state.

Even if Hegel’s claims of the particularization of the universal had created a rational and just civil service, the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck ensured that the civil service would not remain genuinely apolitical. Following unification in 1871, Bismarck strengthened the position of the civil service as an instrument of illiberalism and the Prussian model of civil service became the Imperial model. In the 1880s, Bismarck’s Interior Minister, Robert von Puttkamer, took over the task of ensuring the conservative character of the civil service.¹⁶¹ While Bismarck made some reforms easing the entry requirements, the government still drew its civil servants from a pool of applicants who had studied jurisprudence, practiced law, and passed the entrance exams. Suggestions that would have made it easier for workers to achieve the requirements needed to become civil servants met with stiff resistance.¹⁶² Most importantly, the government retained the right to refuse admittance to the civil service for political reasons and to force those of liberal persuasions into early retirement and although there were no laws barring civil servants from serving in the Reichstag, they were strongly discouraged from serving, creating the illusion of being apolitical. As the history of the German civil service, indicates, it was not an apolitical institution. Rather, the policies

¹⁶⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 228.

¹⁶¹ Craig, *Germany*, 157-158; Ulrich-Wehler, *German Empire*, 65-68. Additionally, as J.C.G. Rohl points out, the term ‘civil servant’ (Beamter) included a number of public officials, including teachers and mail carriers. However, here we are limiting the term to those involved in government administration. The revisionist Georg Flatow lists several of the “higher civil servants,” including schoolmasters, judicial and civil law officials, professors, and administrative officials, to name a few.

¹⁶² Rohl, “Higher Civil Servants,” 105.

put in place during the Wilhelmine period ensured that it was “politically homogenous” along conservative lines.¹⁶³

The existence of a civil service was necessary for the modern state to function, but was not without complications. The revisionists praised the civil service for its expertise and for its dutiful and effective administration of the state. The problem lay with the political leanings of its members, the conservative nature of which presented an obstacle to democracy. Revisionist Georg Flatow called attention to this dichotomy, describing the civil service as “very dutiful and, in non-political affairs, objective, well skilled, and incorruptible... but anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and strongly monarchical.”¹⁶⁴ Since the German government, which was still dominated by the conservatives, determined the composition of the civil service, which reinforced its anti-democratic tendencies, the social democrats’ task was not only to alter the composition of the civil service, but also to alter how its members thought about their relationship to democracy, the state, and the people. “The most beautiful constitution and administrative laws are of no use if the spirit of the old remains,” remarked Flatow.¹⁶⁵

There was no widespread call for replacing the civil servants themselves, as that would have been contrary to the insistence that any transition be as smooth as necessary. Edmund Fischer acknowledged the exigency of reconciling an anti-democratic but proficient civil service with the revisionists’ call for democratic reform. “With the democratic rebuilding (*Neubau*) in Germany,” Fischer asserted, “one may not copy cut-and-dried examples of the past or of other countries, but at this juncture, must make use

¹⁶³ Ulrich-Wehler, *German Empire*, 66.

¹⁶⁴ Flatow, “Der Sozialismus und die höheren Beamten,” 153.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

of the traditional, which has proven itself as good and practical.”¹⁶⁶ Fischer argued that the ‘traditional path’ of Western political development, which spanned from Athens to medieval England and culminated with the founding of the United States, was neither feasible nor desirable for Germany. That traditional path was the path of bourgeois democracy and constitutionalism.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, neither Montesquieu’s nor Rousseau’s theories of self-administration stood up to the demands of modern society and Fischer even claimed that Rousseau’s theory of democracy was little more than the refining of a practice that dated back to antiquity and lasted through the medieval period.¹⁶⁸ Fischer used these examples to argue that Germany required its own system of state administration by a technically adept, bureaucratic civil service imbued with a democratic spirit. In short, he suggested that Germany already possessed that form of administration; all that was required was its democratization.

Emphasizing the utility of traditional institutions, as Fischer did, is often a characteristic of conservative thought, but the revisionists were still socialists. It is *how* they determined what was ‘good and practical’ that set them apart, as the previous chapter illustrates. A civil service was as important to the revisionists as it was to the liberals and conservatives, all of whom recognized the efficacy of such an administrative body. How well the civil service carried out its official tasks was never the problem. The problem was how the civil service fit into the conception of a parliamentary state. Government and administration were two separate spheres, in many ways operating independently of one another, yet they were linked by their connection to the people. Fischer acknowledged that democracy and bureaucracy were often irreconcilable because

¹⁶⁶ Fischer, “Das Beamtentum der Zukunft,” 389.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 391-392.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 389-390.

of the latter's tendency to remove the people from direct administration of the state. Nevertheless, he called the reconciliation of the two institutions "the great task of the next epoch."¹⁶⁹

Ludwig Quessel also advocated the separation of powers between government and the administration. "In the *Obrigkeitsystem*," he insisted, "it is the bureaucracy in which the legislative and the executive power merge."¹⁷⁰ Because he believed bureaucracy in a constitutionalist state was responsible to neither the parliament nor the people, Quessel echoed B.G. Niebuhr's century-old claim that the administration of the state was more important than its constitution.¹⁷¹ However, Quessel agreed that that was true only under constitutionalism, the stage of development in which the monarch shares power with the parliament and the civil service. Quessel argued that in reality, parliament was unable to hold the civil service in check, resulting in "the absolute rule of the bureaucracy."¹⁷² The great advantage of *Parlamentarismus* was it that would eliminate the tension between governance and administration, replacing any motivations for self-interest with the desire to work for the people. The civil service would take care of the administration of the state, while the parliament and the government would legislate and execute laws. The revisionists did not want the two to overlap in their respective duties. They wanted each side to have clearly defined roles, but they also did not want them to be antagonistic in an attempt to avoid a situation in which the either parliament or the administration sought to undermine the other's work, which is what Bismarck and Puttkamer intended.

¹⁶⁹ Fischer, "Das Beamtentum der Zukunft," 389.

¹⁷⁰ Quessel, "Die nationale Leistung," 912.

¹⁷¹ Qtd in Sheehan, *German History*, 425.

¹⁷² Quessel, "Das parlamentarische Regierungssystem," 721.

To achieve the necessary reconciliation, the revisionists proposed that the civil service be democratized and politically educated on the benefits of democracy. It was nonsense, they insisted, to advocate for a politically disinterested bureaucracy. Lindemann reminded his readers that the common justification for a disinterested civil service was that it formed a counterbalance to the ‘special interests’ of the political parties.¹⁷³ Since political parties were vital to the parliamentary system, serving the people rather than special interests, the old argument no longer was no longer relevant. Similarly, Georg Flatow accused the bourgeoisie of having fought with the “feudal classes” for the right to be incorporated into the civil service, but only to further their own interests. Using the civil service as a means to persevering class interests ran counter to its democratization.¹⁷⁴

Some revisionists believed that the officials should be allowed to openly advocate political opinions. Peus, for example, insisted that the “political incapacity” of the civil service was detrimental to the state. Its members needed to be free to think and do as they felt they must, relying on the same deontological ethics as any other member of society. “The constriction of political freedom of the civil servants is firstly an atrophy of the rights of the civil servants as citizens.”¹⁷⁵ Not only was a civil service necessary for the form of parliamentarianism demanded by the revisionists, but a politicized civil service. Peus argued that the conflict between the people’s representatives in the legislature and the political independence of the civil service could be remedied if the civil service and combines its expertise with the will of the people’s representatives.

¹⁷³ Lindemann, “Die nächste Aufgabe der Partei,” 1022-1023.

¹⁷⁴ Flatow, “Der Sozialismus und die höheren Beamten,” 152, 154.

¹⁷⁵ Heinrich Peus, “Die Beamten und die Politik,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, no.20/21 (October 10, 1917): 1059.

Politicizing the civil service was “a question of political education of people.”¹⁷⁶ In short, the civil service should think no differently than any other citizen because the categorical imperative impelled them just the same.

The revisionists sought to overcome the Wilhelmine government’s interference in the composition of the civil service, believing there should be few obstacles to becoming a civil servant. Fischer argued that the educational requirements alone are unable to guarantee a competent official. Except where common sense dictated otherwise, as with those in the medical field, he argued that educational requirements for the officialdom were inconsistent with democracy, particularly when there were no such limitations for ministerial positions.¹⁷⁷ Flatow not only demanded that the civil service be open to all qualified persons, he demanded that everyone must be able to achieve the necessary qualifications, insisting, “Access to the higher offices may henceforth remain closed to no competent person on material bases.”¹⁷⁸

The civil service was an indispensable part of modern democracy and like suffrage and the parliament, its existence alone did not guarantee democracy. The revisionists hoped that ‘knowledge sharpened by experience’ would reveal the path by which Germany would achieve democratization. “The barriers of democracy will have to fall, which were erected within the civil service between... the officials and the people.”¹⁷⁹ To achieve a functioning parliamentary democracy, the civil service would have to be instilled with the same democratic spirit as the people, the parties, and the parliament. The only way to achieve this kind of uniformly democratic thought was apply

¹⁷⁶ Peus, “Die Beamten und die Politik,” 1059.

¹⁷⁷ Fischer, “Das Beamtentum der Zukunft” 393.

¹⁷⁸ Flatow, “Der Sozialismus und die höheren Beamten,” 155.

¹⁷⁹ Fischer, “Das Beamtentum der Zukunft,” 394.

the Categorical Imperative, with the understanding that economic existence determined the foundations of thought.

The civil service best represents the intersection of ideas and action as proposed by revisionism. The civil servant, according to Mannheim, had a “socially limited horizon” that prevented him from recognizing that behind every law was “the *Weltanschauung* of a specific social group.”¹⁸⁰ Revisionism not only sought to overcome the civil servant’s failure to recognize the origin of the law which he administers, but also to replace the particular social interests that lay behind the law with the universal and ethical worldview that was inherent in the revisionist theory of democracy. The civil service, like suffrage and *Volksvertretung*, represents a specific application of idea to practice, thereby illustrating the link between the purely philosophical foundations of revisionism and functioning of a democratic government.

¹⁸⁰ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 118.

Conclusion

German revisionists dedicated themselves to working out a democratic ideology based on what they believed were a set of fundamental truths arising from the reconciliation of Kant's transcendental idealism and Marx's historical materialism. Similar to methods that liberal philosophers used in the eighteenth century to assert the existence of the individual's natural and inalienable rights and to advocate representative government, revisionists legitimized their *Parlamentarismus* on the basis of the knowledge derived from the material world and the socially just action generated from that knowledge. Kant's philosophy provided a link between knowledge and freedom, which cast Marx's economic determinism as a liberating and efficacious force. Although neither Kant nor Marx proposed any specific course of action, the revisionists' reconciliation of their ideas provided a guideline for discovering the underlying principles of social relations and acting rationally based on that understanding.

Revisionism was unique from mainstream socialism. The common interpretation of Marxism taught that changes in the state apparatus reflect a change in the consciousness of the proletariat and the awareness of the true nature of reality would manifest in an overthrow of the bourgeois, industrial society and the erecting of a socialist state, and finally the dissolution of the state altogether. The revisionists rejected the dialectical element of Marxism, and thus had no need for revolution. However, they still believed that political change occurred through a transformation of consciousness. Declaring that all people possessed the same framework of knowledge and the same capacity for reason, both of which were shaped by economic reality, the revisionists reconciled Kant and Marx. *Parlamentarismus* was their attempt to continue building on

the philosophical foundations of the Enlightenment and to apply them to the political sphere.

There was certainly a substantial amount of continuity between Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic. The old elites never completely lost their status and existing institutions like the civil service remained largely intact. Revisionists proposed few changes to the structure of German government, which is an indication that they viewed democratization primarily as a mode of thought that leads to democratic action, rather than the existence of a parliament or the act of voting. In philosophical terms, they recognized that the formal elements of democracy already existed, but that they lacked democratic content. Unlike their mainstream Marxist counterparts within the SPD, the revisionists believed that working within the state to develop and nurture democratic thought among the people, as well as within the government and the bureaucracy, was the means to achieving democratic reform. Rather than stifle politics or push them into the background, the revisionists encouraged political discourse. If the German people were encouraged to think about politics, that is, to make use of their reason to determine political action, then they would logically favor social democracy.

It is no coincidence that the revisionists offered a fairly complete outline for *Parlamentarismus* during World War I because the war was a climacteric for Germany. According to the revisionists, the war highlighted the failures of the constitutionalist system. Not only was it responsible for involving Germany in the war, but it also failed to successfully execute the war. As a result, Germany stood on the brink of defeat militarily and it stood on the brink of collapse domestically. By 1918, it was clear that Germany could not achieve a victor's peace and was unlikely to avoid a defeat, but transitioning

into the third stage of development was still possible and absolutely necessary. While Quessel's stages of development illustrated a general trend, the revisionists' vision of *Parlamentarismus* justified the use of existing institutions and ideas and was therefore unique. Consequently, any supposedly 'traditional path' of Western political development would not have been suitable for Germany. The revisionists' return to Kant, which complimented Marxism, reveals the connection between the Enlightenment and twentieth-century social democracy. Significantly, this German form of democracy was the product of the left, rather than the bourgeoisie, which has most often been identified as the bearer of democracy.

Despite their committed effort to the development of *Parlamentarismus* in Germany, the circumstances immediately following the end of the war prevented the successful implementation of *Parlamentarismus*. Even though the constitution of 1919 addressed many of the problems associated with Imperial Germany and democracy gradually achieved a level of acceptance by the middle class during the Weimar years, German democracy faced other hurdles. Compounding the economic and foreign policy problems resulting from the war, the rationally-minded revisionists were forced to confront the rise of anti-rational ideologies, especially from the right. The end of the war reflected a sharp break from many of the worldviews held prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. While the Weimar Republic superficially fit many elements of revisionism, the severity of economic collapse, coupled with the widespread and unprecedented resentment over the resolution of the war precluded any chance for the revisionists' rational republic from becoming reality. With such a comprehensive democratic ideology, it is difficult to argue that German socialism failed in 1918 and 1919. The lack

of revolutionary change makes sense from the revisionists' perspective. Even if these revisionists remained a minority, the weakening of the ideology outlined in the Erfurt Program of 1890 indicates some level of revisionism within mainstream German socialism after November 9, 1918. There, we must also look elsewhere to find the causes of Weimar's collapse, particularly at the radical right-wing ideologies that also emerged after November 9. It seems plausible, after taking into account the existence of democratic ideology of the left, to argue that the collapse of the Weimar Republic was not a failure of German Social Democracy, per se. Rather, it was the overwhelming success of the radicalized right.

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