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# THE UNSCRIPTED REVOLUTION: MALE SUBJECTIVITIES IN GERMANY, 1918–1919\*

‘I am pretty well versed in the histories of various revolutions, but I don’t think there has ever been a revolution as gutless as the one we are having here’. This damning indictment of the events in Germany in the aftermath of the First World War was delivered by Ernst Däumig on 11 January 1919. A leading voice in the Independent Social Democratic Party (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), Däumig took a political position between the reformist Majority Social Democrats (Mehrheitssozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), who dominated the provisional government and had called an election of the constitutional assembly, and the Spartacists (Spartakusbund), who had just founded the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) and were now staging an ultimately unsuccessful uprising in Berlin. Yet he was envious of the ‘Russian comrades’, who had ‘worked tirelessly day and night’. His frustration implies that neither the scripts with which he was familiar from his study of past revolutions nor the newly available Bolshevik model seemed applicable to the situation in Germany in 1918–19. He put this down to a lack of masculine vigour, accusing the current revolution of being *lendenlahm* — literally ‘lame in the loins’ — a criticism levelled from the vantage point of a detached observer.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin, RY 19, II/143/2: Protocol of the meeting of the work councils within the Independent Social Democratic Party, 11 Jan. 1919.

Rephrased, Däumig's views can serve to introduce the key arguments of this article. The German Revolution of 1918–19 constituted an exception to the rule, recently formulated by Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein in an ambitious comparative volume, that revolutions are 'scripted', that is, they draw on the memory of past revolutions to develop their own narrative frameworks.<sup>2</sup> This revolution's unscripted character was closely related to the diversity and complexity of male subjectivities, if not, as Däumig believed, their deficiency. The revolution ultimately failed, not so much objectively, according to any historiographical benchmark, as subjectively, in the sense that revolutionaries themselves so often narrated it as a failure. To make this case, this article endeavours to combine microhistory and intellectual history. It will explore interactions on the street or the shop floor, where working men refashioned their subjectivities and marshalled them against their opponents. But it will also analyse discourses in newspapers and pamphlets, for left-wing intellectuals and politicians had high expectations of male subjectivity. The two dimensions were intertwined, and should therefore be treated in conjunction.

This approach requires a broad understanding of 'subjectivity'. Regenia Gagnier has helpfully noted that the concept can comprise a person's self-construction and body in relation to others; a particular or partial as opposed to an objective view; and the tension between autonomous agency and subjection to external constraints. She also demonstrates how in nineteenth-century Britain subjectivities were heavily gendered and central to different genres, including autobiographies, novels and social surveys, as well as political discourses such as those of liberalism and Marxism.<sup>3</sup> A similarly versatile understanding is evident in the growing literature on the 'subjective side of revolution', which foregrounds gendered identities, bodies and emotions, reflecting the difficulties of identifying objective causes and factors.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, a range of studies has highlighted

<sup>2</sup> Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920* (New York, 1991), esp. 8–14.

<sup>4</sup> Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2014), 4. Important case studies include William M. Reddy, 'Sentimentalism and its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution', *Journal of Modern History*,

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various attempts to create a 'new man' (as well as, to a lesser extent, a 'new woman') in periods of sudden transformation since the late eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The focus has expanded from discourses of radical rupture to less evident continuities between pre-revolutionary and revolutionary times.<sup>6</sup> And the interplay between contemporary constructions of subjectivity and interactions on the ground is being analysed, providing fascinating insights into revolutionary experiences and lives, especially in France after 1789.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, subjectivities feature prominently in the recent historiography of Weimar Germany. The theme appears congenial to a period of cultural experimentation and political division. The 1920s built on the Wilhelmine spirit of 'life reform' but were much less constrained by censorship and convention. Hence historians as well as scholars of film, literature and the arts are exploring a bewildering diversity of contemporary subject constructions and subject positions.<sup>8</sup> With regard to the revolution of 1918–19, Kathleen Canning has repeatedly stressed the significance of popular protests during the war, in which women played a key role, and the introduction of female suffrage in its aftermath. Together, they opened up a space for the new subjectivities of the voter, member or delegate, for citizenship as practice and imagination. Canning by no means plays down the substantial differences between

(n. 4 cont.)

lxxii, 1 (2000); Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Classic treatments are Mona Ozouf, *L'Homme régénéré: essais sur la Révolution française* (Paris, 1989); Richard Sites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford, 1989). See also Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> David Andress (ed.), *Experiencing the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013); Peter McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789–1799* (Basingstoke, 2006); Haim Burstin, *Révolutionnaires: pour une anthropologie politique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> See, especially, Kathleen Canning, Kerstin Barndt and Kristin McGuire (eds.), *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects: Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920s* (New York, 2010). Earlier contributions include Claudia Schmölders and Sander L. Gilman (eds.), *Gesichter der Weimarer Republik: eine physiognomische Kulturgeschichte* (Cologne, 2000), and several chapters in Moritz Föllmer and Rüdiger Graf (eds.), *Die 'Krise' der Weimarer Republik: zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt, 2005).

socialist, liberal and conservative women, nor the fact that their activism triggered fears for the established gender order and desires for its restoration. But she insists on the political breakthrough which the revolution of 1918–19 constituted for women, and cautions against measuring it against the unhistorical yardstick of ‘emancipation’.<sup>9</sup>

Canning thus contributes to the conceptual renewal of a historiography that has long focused on political ideologies, movements and organizations.<sup>10</sup> She also joins a trend towards reappreciating a revolution that has classically been seen as stuck, failed or betrayed. Since the 1960s, moderate politicians of the Majority Social Democratic Party such as Friedrich Ebert have been criticized for overreacting to popular unrest and relying on Free Corps (Freikorps) units to crush radical uprisings. They have been blamed, furthermore, for missing opportunities to usher in a lasting transformation of society and thus prevent the later right-wing assault on the Republic.<sup>11</sup> While this interpretation is still popular, particularly on the left in Germany, at least among scholars there is now greater sympathy for these moderate forces. The argument is that they remained true to their own convictions, established a democratic constitution and a welfare state under difficult circumstances, and can hardly be blamed for failing to anticipate Weimar’s terminal crisis fourteen years later.<sup>12</sup> While the fresh look at

<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Canning, ‘Claiming Citizenship: Suffrage and Subjectivity in Germany after the First World War’, in Canning, Barndt and McGuire (eds.), *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects*; Kathleen Canning, ‘Das Geschlecht der Revolution — Stimmrecht und Staatsbürgertum, 1918–19’, in Alexander Gallus (ed.), *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918–19* (Göttingen, 2010); Kathleen Canning, ‘Gender and the Imaginary of Revolution in Germany’, in Klaus Weinbauer, Anthony McElligott and Kirsten Heinsohn (eds.), *Germany, 1916–1923: A Revolution in Context* (Bielefeld, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> See also Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto, 2015), ch. 1, who argues that the revolution relaxed censorship, was widely interpreted as a sea change in sexual culture and broadened the movement for the emancipation of gay men, lesbians and transvestites.

<sup>11</sup> Eberhard Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik, 1918–1919* (Düsseldorf, 1962); Reinhard Rürup, *Probleme der Revolution in Deutschland, 1918–1919* (Wiesbaden, 1968). See also, in a similar vein, Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, trans. Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones (Chapel Hill, 1996), ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Angela Schwarz, ‘9. November 1918: Deutsche Revolution’, in Dirk Blasius and Wilfried Loth (eds.), *Tage deutscher Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2006); Conan Fischer, ‘“A Very German Revolution”? The Post-1918 Settlement Re-evaluated’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London*, xxviii, 2 (Nov. 2006).

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what the more moderate democratic forces actually thought and did is fruitful, it remains open how radical currents can be integrated into the emerging new picture of Germany in 1918–19. And such a picture would need to take into account the often noted disjunctures between party politics of any kind and the volatile popular protest that was so central to the period.<sup>13</sup>

In highlighting working men's subjective liberation and historicizing the Majority Social Democrats' notion of selfhood, this article contributes to the reappraisal of the German Revolution. However, it also insists that the revolution suffered from severe problems, which simultaneous attention to moderates and radicals and an approach combining microhistory and intellectual history bring into sharp relief. It can be credited with significant democratic achievements, but contemporaries overwhelmingly played them down or, in the end, denied their revolutionary character. This is remarkable and calls for analysis. Because neither the objectivism of Marxist theory nor the history of past revolutions offered a usable script, subjectivity was expected to initiate, guarantee or contain a sudden transformation of society; and, given the prevailing gender stereotypes, the emphasis was on male subjectivity. But it was too complex for any of this, entailing as it did liberation from wartime discipline and the robust pursuit of self-interest, violent outbursts against representatives of the old order and calls to the new authorities for protection against a reactionary backlash (section I). The German left, from moderates such as Ebert to radicals such as Karl Liebknecht, struggled to find an

(n. 12 cont.)

As in so many other respects, Detlev Peukert's work was trailblazing for this reinterpretation: Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (London, 1991), ch. 2. During the debate in the 1980s, Heinrich August Winkler, *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1918–1924* (Berlin, 1984), chs. 1–2, struck a balance between criticizing and defending moderate Social Democrats.

<sup>13</sup> See the seminal article by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, 'The German Revolution, 1918–1920: Political Revolution and Social Protest Movement', in Richard Bessel and E. J. Feuchtwanger (eds.), *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany* (London, 1981). See also Martin H. Geyer, 'Munich in Turmoil: Social Protest and the Revolutionary Movement, 1918–1919', in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *Challenges of Labour: Central and Western Europe, 1917–1920* (London, 1993). Important recent studies of this tension are Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918–1919* (Cambridge, 2016); John Ondrovicik, 'All the Devils Are Loose': *The Radical Revolution in the Saxon Vogtland, 1918–1920* (Harvard Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2008).

answer to this conundrum. Intellectuals and politicians of all persuasions endeavoured to establish a narrative with male subjectivity at its centre. The respective versions stressed proletarian stamina, moral idealism or rational self-control. But none of these attempts could give direction to the multifaceted transition from wartime to post-war society (section II). Hence, when contemporaries assessed the revolutionary balance sheet in autumn 1919, tales of defeat abounded (section III). In so far as the German Revolution did in the end find a narrative for itself, it was a narrative of failure.

## I

The revolution began as a surprising success: as the old authorities retreated rather than fighting back, the post-war world seemed replete with new opportunities. Between 1914 and 1918, the constraints of military or quasi-military discipline had been severe, especially for ordinary soldiers, whether of proletarian or rural origin. Total war had demanded tight state control of labour and its products, of people's use of time and articulation of opinion. Constant appeals to patriotic feelings had been accompanied by a system of coercion. From 1916 that system had increasingly been challenged through attempts to withdraw from military duty and popular protests on the home front. By autumn 1918, mass desertion and other forms of shirking amounted to a covert military strike.<sup>14</sup> But the end of military discipline only came through Germany's defeat and open protest among soldiers against efforts on the part of some officers to send them into a terminal battle. This rupture allowed for manifold instances of subjective liberation, in which previously suppressed emotions burst forth and views that had been banned could be stated out loud. Those Germans who did not belong to the nationalist upper and middle classes were finally able to come together spontaneously and in a celebratory mood.

The provisional government, dominated by the reformist Majority Social Democratic Party, admonished Germans to

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Deist, 'Verdeckter Militärstreik im Jahre 1918?', in Wolfram Wette (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich, 1992); Benjamin Ziemann, 'The German Army in Autumn 2018: A Hidden Strike?', repr. in Benjamin Ziemann, *Violence and the German Soldier in the First World War: Killing, Dying, Surviving*, trans. Andrew Evans (London, 2017).

keep working hard for the collective good and in the interest of an orderly transition. But these moralistic calls were widely ignored in favour of joyful celebration. In the Berlin suburb of Spandau, one ammunition factory became a site of pleasure of a kind more often associated with France under the Popular Front. To the dismay of their foremen, workers would spend hours on end playing cards or joining in impromptu dances when they were not attending gatherings led by firebrands such as the Spartacist leader Karl Liebknecht.<sup>15</sup> Peasants in rural Bavaria, although politicized in a very different manner, acted according to a similar logic. They refused to hand over the products of their labour to the official authorities, as they were still legally obliged to do given that wartime rationing remained in place. Instead, they sold them on the black market, or ostentatiously squandered them on lavish weddings and village festivities.<sup>16</sup>

The commercial activities of Bavarian peasants, like the practice among Spandau workers of selling the products of state-funded relief work on the streets of Berlin, point to a further aspect of revolution: that subjective liberation entailed the pursuit of self-interest in often robust ways. This was hardly a new phenomenon, but thanks to the crumbling of state authority it could now be undertaken with near-complete openness and in fluid configurations. Urban space took on a different appearance as unregulated trade mushroomed on the streets of east central Berlin and budding entrepreneurs opened ever more all-night dance halls.<sup>17</sup> To the extent that post-war attitudes were vaguely social, they were prone to exploitation. In Bavaria black marketeers sent their henchmen to buy up food at low prices by dressing in military uniform and telling tales of domestic hardship. In the aftermath of the war, men

<sup>15</sup> International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Archiv des Zentralrats der Sozialistischen Republik (hereafter IISH, AZDSR), B 5, 43: 'Bericht über die Zustände in den Spandauer Betrieben', early 1919. On France, see Antoine Prost, 'The Strikes of 1936: The Occupation of Factories and the Decline of Deference', repr. in Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. Jay Winter with Helen McPhail (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich (hereafter BHStA), MInn, 66450: District Office Schrobenhausen to Bavarian Minister of the Interior, 17 Feb. 1919. See Benjamin Ziemann, *Front und Heimat: ländliche Kriegserfahrungen im südlichen Bayern, 1914–1923* (Essen, 1997), 329–33, 347.

<sup>17</sup> 'Der Berliner Sicherheitsdienst', *Vorwärts: Berliner Volksblatt. Zentralorgan der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands*, 22 Dec. 1918.



could appear weakened but also threatening. When police officers and bureaucrats tried to enforce the regulations, they were ignored or encountered violent resistance. Sometimes spontaneous mobs intimidated them into releasing the black-market traders they had just arrested.<sup>18</sup>

Such interactions were about more than exploiting commercial opportunities and satisfying pent-up consumer demand. They marked a symbolic end to wartime scarcity and coercion. And they constituted attempts to surmount Wilhelmine class society, which had constrained the personal status of working men. Some who looted shops or forced their owners to lower prices were after suits and cigars alongside more basic goods.<sup>19</sup> In several cases, members of workers' and soldiers' councils commandeered official cars to drive around for their own leisure purposes.<sup>20</sup> The implicit aim was again to create an impression of respectability or even to enjoy moments of luxury, thus challenging bourgeois privilege. In a similar vein, Bavarian peasants turned against the authority of the defunct monarchical state by demanding more pastureland or by shooting game on the hunting grounds of their abdicated king.<sup>21</sup> Factory machinists in the Ruhr area wanted an 'existence akin to that of a worker or civil servant' and enough money to 'enable us to live respectably'.<sup>22</sup> When, during the revolution, all sorts of groups from forest workers to waiters

<sup>18</sup> BHStA, MInn, 66450: Circular by the Bavarian Minister of the Interior, 6 Feb. 1919. In the Ruhr area, some men claimed to be members of workers' and soldiers' councils in order to 'requisition' food: see Hans-Ulrich Knies, 'Arbeiterbewegung und Revolution in Wuppertal: Entwicklung und Tätigkeit der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte in Elberfeld und Barmen', in Reinhard Rürup (ed.), *Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte im rheinisch-westfälischen Industriegebiet: Studien zur Geschichte der Revolution, 1918–1919* (Wuppertal, 1975), 115–16.

<sup>19</sup> Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Münster (hereafter LANRW), B 120, 4, 6523: Governor of the Minden District to Prussian Minister of the Interior, 6 Sept. 1919; Julian Aulke, *Räume der Revolution: kulturelle Verräumlichung in Politisierungsprozessen während der Revolution, 1918–1920* (Stuttgart, 2015), 384.

<sup>20</sup> IISH, AZDSR, B 5, 43: 'Bericht über die Zustände in den Spandauer Betrieben', early 1919; BHStA, Arbeiter- und Soldatenrat, 36: Municipal Administration of Neustadt an der Saale to Executive Council of Bavaria, 3 Jan. 1919.

<sup>21</sup> BHStA, Arbeiter- und Soldatenrat, 32: 'Bericht über Tätigkeit des Arbeiter- und Bauernrates im Bezirk Garmisch', n.d.

<sup>22</sup> LANRW, B 406, 14388: 'Versamlungsbericht über die vom Zweigverein deutscher Fördermaschinen Herne einberufene öffentliche Versammlung am 22.6.1919'.

demanded higher wages, they were laying claim to a more secure and dignified life.

The robust pursuit of self-interest that permeated the months after the war was closely linked to the exertion of symbolic and often physical power. Working men were now in a position to rebel against representatives of the old, powerful institutions and to invade their professional or personal space. In the course of strikes in the Ruhr area, miners demanded the resignation of particularly unpopular managers, arresting them or looting their houses and wrecking the furniture.<sup>23</sup> In rural Westphalia, former soldiers entered the prince of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein's estate demanding that he continue to provide the financial support he had only just decided to terminate. During the heated exchange some apples and a pair of suede gloves were stolen, and when the estate managers attempted to divert the locals to the regular authorities for future payments, they were threatened. Some of the intruders declared that they no longer recognized civil servants but only the workers' and soldiers' councils, and announced that they were going to cut wood in the forest or even storm the prince's castle. They also gave their own, socially distinctive perspective on Germany's defeat in claiming that, by being on the losing side, they had actually won the war.<sup>24</sup>

Revolution thus fragmented into myriad acts of masculine rebellion and confrontation. It might mean meeting inside a church near Erfurt and smoking cigarettes, wearing caps and waving red flags, or removing pictures of the Hohenzollern monarchs and Field Marshal von Hindenburg from elementary schoolrooms in Bochum.<sup>25</sup> Some rebels used force against diehard representatives of the old regime. Among the various interventions in the educational system by members of the workers' and soldiers' councils reported by the government of

<sup>23</sup> Erhard Lucas, *Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Frankfurt, 1976), 176; LANRW, B 406, 14464: President of the Bochum Police to Governor of the Arnsberg District, 11 Apr. 1919.

<sup>24</sup> LANRW, B 120, 4, 5844, vol. 1: Governor of the Arnsberg District to Governor of the Münster Province, 16 Jan. 1919. Similarly threatening behaviour in rural Pomerania is noted in Helge Matthiesen, *Greifswald in Vorpommern: konservatives Milieu im Kaiserreich, in Demokratie und Diktatur, 1900–1990* (Düsseldorf, 2000), 105.

<sup>25</sup> IISH, AZDSR, B 35, 49: Governor of the Erfurt District to Prussian Minister for Science, the Arts and Education, 19 Jan. 1919; B 24, 5: Citizen Committee Bochum to Reich Council of Citizens, 7 June 1919.

the district of Münster in February 1919 were attempts to halt corporal punishment in schools. Radical workers tried to interrogate a female teacher after she had beaten a child; she refused to engage with them and took flight to escape arrest. They also punched and kicked another who persisted in using this time-honoured pedagogical technique.<sup>26</sup> For their part, Bavarian peasants stood up against the interventions of the state, which had massively increased during the war and were still being applied. In one case a peasant refused outright to hand over his grain, pronouncing himself willing to defend his independence with his mighty fist: 'Sooner or later, I'll strike a police officer dead, even if I have to go to prison. The peasants are not going to let civil servants take them for fools any more, and who cares if everything goes to hell?'<sup>27</sup>

What are we to make of such clashes? Taken together, they attest to a variety of emotions ranging from pent-up resentment to joyful liberation, from unabashed egoism to solidarity with the weak. They also indicate the importance of physical action, including demonstrations, dancing and driving cars, and intimidating and sometimes assaulting people in authority. These altercations reflect the urge to speak out after years of coercion, to give voice to strongly held views and even to threaten a civil servant, police officer or estate administrator to his face. Although women, too, continued to participate in food protests, as they had done during the war, the unrest among these men was replete with masculine self-assertion. They were striving not just to regain but to extend control over their lives: while Bavarian peasants were defending their family farms against government requisitioning and entering royal hunting grounds, industrial workers were struggling to secure an adequate standard of living and invading schoolrooms and the private homes of their managers. In the historiography of German masculinities the focus has been on middle-class norms and military models,<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> LANRW, B 35, 38: Governor of the Münster District, 'Eingriffe der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte in das Schulwesen', 27 Feb. 1919. A similar intervention in a Berlin school is described in Axel Weipert, *Die Zweite Revolution: Rätebewegung in Berlin, 1919–1920* (Berlin, 2015), 266.

<sup>27</sup> BHSStA, MInn, 66450: 'Niederschrift über die am 15. Februar 1919 im Raport-Saale der Polizeidirektion abgehaltenen Besprechung über Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung des Schleichhandels'.

<sup>28</sup> Ute Frevert, *Men of Honour: A Social and Cultural History of the Duel*, trans. Anthony Williams (Cambridge, 1995); Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern*

(cont. on p. 171)

but peasants and workers had largely been excluded from the former and coerced into, rather than attracted by, the latter. After the war, they were aiming for a popular, civilian form of masculinity that allowed them to be fully fledged autonomous subjects. And for this, small-scale symbolic confrontations mattered a great deal. Manifestations of this endeavour were highly localized and individual as well as collective; it was simultaneously a forward- and a backward-looking venture.

Male revolutionaries wished to see society fundamentally transformed to become more respectful of working men's identities. In this objective, they were harking back to the Wilhelmine era, to traditions of peasant rebelliousness in Bavaria (where the revolution made more inroads into rural society than elsewhere) and proletarian unrest across Germany's industrial regions and cities.<sup>29</sup> Wherever the voices of workers from the years around 1900 are recorded (rather than those of Social Democratic functionaries or bourgeois observers), they speak of inequality as a violation of their dignity. They relate stories of humiliating treatment at the hands of industrialists and foremen, schoolteachers and bureaucrats, police officers and army sergeants.<sup>30</sup> The war had only exacerbated their desire to assert and to liberate themselves. As soldiers they had had to endure the arrogance and privilege of bourgeois officers, and had been exposed to often senseless drilling, close surveillance and degrading punishments.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, many now resorted to individual acts of shirking or refusal, having

(n. 28 cont.)

*Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, trans. Andrew Boreham with Daniel Brückenhaus (Oxford, 2004); Thomas Kühne (ed.), *Männergeschichte, Geschlechtergeschichte: Männlichkeit im Wandel der Moderne* (Frankfurt, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> See, among others, Ian Farr, 'Populism in the Countryside: The Peasant Leagues in Bavaria in the 1890s', in Richard J. Evans (ed.), *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London, 1978); Richard J. Evans, '“Red Wednesday” in Hamburg: Social Democrats, Police and Lumpenproletariat in the Suffrage Disturbances of 17 January 1906', *Social History*, iv (1979).

<sup>30</sup> See *Kneipengespräche im Kaiserreich: Stimmungsberichte der Hamburger Politischen Polizei, 1892–1914*, ed. Richard J. Evans (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1989), 48, 55, 128–9, 138, 155, 209, 254, 393–5; Adolf Levenstein, *Die Arbeiterfrage: mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der sozialpsychologischen Seite des modernen Großbetriebes und der psychophysischen Einwirkungen auf die Arbeiter* (Munich, 1912), 19–22, 29, 56, 58, 72–3, 113, 133–8, 143–5, 149.

<sup>31</sup> *German Soldiers in the Great War: Letters and Eyewitness Accounts*, ed. Bernd Ulrich and Benjamin Ziemann, trans. Christine Brocks (Barnsley, 2010), 101–30, 167–70, 182–3.

been powerless to challenge the system of military discipline head-on during the war.<sup>32</sup>

After the end of the conflict and the crumbling of the German empire, these experiences were not forgotten. The mayor of Lagow in Brandenburg was thus accused not only of having resisted the requisitioning of his coal during wartime, but also of having violated working men's dignity. In 1912 he had chased citizens out of an assembly hall, and, as an officer somewhere 'in the East' in 1915–16, had brutalized soldiers. He had to be relieved of his duties, local workers argued, because 'in this day and age' the population was 'absolutely not prepared to put up with such treatment even for a single moment'.<sup>33</sup>

However, these humiliations did not simply cease during the revolution, and by no means all representatives of the old regime retreated in fear. The uneasy coexistence between workers' and soldiers' councils and the extant bureaucracy, which had been maintained in order to secure an orderly transition from wartime to post-war society, led to conflicts over honour and respect. One lawyer in Landsberg an der Warthe, also in Brandenburg, publicly claimed that the local workers' council was purposely delaying demobilization and hence bore responsibility for the continuing high rates of venereal disease. When he started to trade punches rather than withdraw his accusation, the council felt compelled to restore the masculine honour of its members by arresting him for a period of an hour and a half.<sup>34</sup> Other workers' councils merely complained about the arrogance of senior civil servants who had told them to get a job instead of asking for an allowance, to sign official letters with the phrase 'your most obedient servant' (*ergebenst*) and to refrain from 'discussions of cultural history' during a meeting.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Ziemann, 'Resistance to War in Germany, 1914–1918: The Traces of the German *Schwejkade*', *Český Časopis Historický*, cxiv (2016).

<sup>33</sup> IISH, AZDSR, B 12, I, 115: 'Protokoll über die am 5.1.1919, nachmittags 2 Uhr nach dem Bismarckschen Hotel in Lagow einberufene öffentliche Versammlung'.

<sup>34</sup> IISH, AZDSR, B 1: Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Landsberg an der Warthe to Central Council of the German Socialist Republic, 25 Feb. 1919.

<sup>35</sup> IISH, AZDSR, B 22, IV: Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Stolp to Central Council of the German Socialist Republic, 15 Mar. 1919; B 11: Workers' Council of Insterburg to Central Council of the German Socialist Republic, 26 Mar. 1919; B 11: Central Workers' Council of the Armament Factories to Secretary to the Treasury, Mr Schiffer, 31 Jan. 1919.

The restrained nature of these complaints indicates that the use of physical violence by revolutionaries remained, on the whole, sporadic and limited.<sup>36</sup> These men were heirs to the kind of working-class unrest that had taken place during the Wilhelmine era, which had occasionally entailed throwing stones or bottles at the police or beating up scabs, but not arson or lynching.<sup>37</sup> The experience of war had triggered their determination to bring an end to Germany's old regime, but no great appetite to kill or maim, let alone to start a civil war, which would have run counter to their quest for a civilian masculinity. Notwithstanding the Spartacist uprisings, the armed defence of several socialist republics and radical mass strikes, the level of violence during the German Revolution of 1918–19 remained far below that in contemporary Russia.<sup>38</sup> Local workers' and soldiers' councils often fittingly turned to the Central Council of the German Socialist Republic (*Zentralrat der Deutschen Sozialistischen Republik*) in Berlin rather than take the law into their own hands. However, the Central Council was overburdened by pressure to resolve myriad local conflicts and to ensure that 'the most tsarist absolutism' no longer had any place in German society.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, it was dominated by Majority Social Democrats and therefore firmly committed to a legalistic course of action. Thus, although it was widely hoped that it would intervene forcefully in these cases, as a rule it did little more than write a letter to a civil servant or mayor admonishing him to show greater respect.

The desire to liberate ordinary men's subjectivities from oppression and indignity thus resulted in contradictory visions. There was a widespread urge to exploit any local power vacuum, at times even to dispense with state authority altogether: anti-statism has rightly been identified as the common denominator

<sup>36</sup> See Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York, 2009), ch. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Evans, "Red Wednesday" in Hamburg; Thomas Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik: zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin, 1900 bis 1914* (Bonn, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Compare Peter Holquist, 'Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905–1921', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, iv, 3 (2003).

<sup>39</sup> This was the accusation levelled at the owner of the Red Cross Sanatoria in a Brandenburg town: IISH, AZDSR, B 20: Council of the Red Cross Sanatoria and Vocational Schools in Hohenlychen to Central Council of the German Socialist Republic, 1 May 1919.

among political attitudes following the war.<sup>40</sup> Then again, the new institutions, transitional though they were, were expected to cater for a variety of popular needs. They were supposed to intervene in the interest of ordinary people, in stark contrast to the authorities of imperial Germany. This generic expectation, however, could take different guises, from safeguarding the honour of a local workers' council to compensating theatre actors for their loss of honorariums or supporting struggling architects by commissioning public buildings.<sup>41</sup> Alongside such collective demands, manifold individual needs were brought to the attention of the new institutions and their representatives. Both the right-wing Social Democrat Gustav Noske, as chair of the workers' and soldiers' council in Kiel and subsequently a member of the government in Berlin, and the radical writer Ernst Toller, as a leader of the first Bavarian Council Republic (Bayerische Räterepublik), recounted how they were besieged day after day by citizens urging them to consider their individual complaints, demands and suggestions.<sup>42</sup>

These findings go against a long historiographical tradition of viewing local conflicts and interactions as lying outside revolutionary politics proper. In an essay first published in 1978, Wolfgang J. Mommsen pointed out the significance of a broad 'social protest movement' in post-war Germany, but neatly distinguished it from the 'political revolution' and dismissed it as 'naïve' and 'amorphous' rather than trying to decipher its cultural logic. In a similar vein, a recent review article contends that the workers' and soldiers' councils, through their 'sometimes dissonant, undisciplined demeanour', undermined their own claim to authority.<sup>43</sup> To highlight subjectivities can make more sense of working men's behaviour during the revolution than would shoehorning it into overly neat categories. It also allows

<sup>40</sup> Richard Bessel, 'State and Society in the Aftermath of the First World War', in W. R. Lee and Eve Rosenhaft (eds.), *The State and Social Change in Germany, 1880–1980* (New York, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> BHStA, Arbeiter- und Soldatenrat, 24: 'Forderungen des Bezirksverbandes München der Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger', n.d.; 'Denkschrift über den Notstand der Privatarchitekten', Mar. 1919.

<sup>42</sup> Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp: zur Geschichte der Deutschen Revolution* (Berlin, 1920), 28, 64; Ernst Toller, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, 22nd edn (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2016), 91.

<sup>43</sup> Mommsen, 'German Revolution', 37, 39; Volker Stalman, 'Die Wiederentdeckung der Revolution von 1918–19: Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, lxiv (2016), 541.

it to be placed in the long-term context of working-class (and, to a lesser degree, peasant) unrest in Wilhelmine Germany as well as in the short-term context of a sudden end to wartime coercion and a widespread hope for institutional support. More generally, the revolutionary interactions that have been discussed above reflect a broad quest for dignity, self-assertion and pleasure.<sup>44</sup> That this quest was so diverse and resulted in such high and even contradictory expectations says something about the complexity of German society in this period, and its propensity for discord and resentment, as well as the abrupt shifts it underwent.

Male subjectivities were intertwined with conflicting social identities. Bavarian peasants defended their farms and fields against government requisition, but also against urban workers who were helping themselves to potatoes and other foodstuffs. Conversely, middle-class Germans were often glad to see the back of wartime authoritarianism and welcomed the new opportunities to pursue their own personal interests. However, they soon felt alienated by the forceful efforts to invert social hierarchies on the ground or even to bring in far-reaching change. The frequent displays of working-class masculinity proved particularly shocking to bourgeois cultural sensibilities and understandings of democracy. Gertrud Bäumer, a prominent liberal feminist, argued against granting powers to the councils because, as bodies representing male producers, they competed with the suffrage rights that female consumers had finally secured after the end of the war.<sup>45</sup>

Male subjectivities were thus at the centre of proletarian assertiveness in this period; but did they also constitute a basis for socialism, and if so, which version of it? Establishing working men's political beliefs with any precision is difficult since they are accessible to the historian overwhelmingly through reports by the outgoing or incoming authorities and the occasional collective petition rather than through private documents. This said, the yearning for a new kind of society in which, as the members of a soldiers' council in a small Bavarian town put it, 'every shoemaker

<sup>44</sup> This was not merely a German phenomenon, as persuasively demonstrated in S. A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008), ch. 2. On 'dignity issues', see also S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge, 1983), 41, 56–7, 94, 137.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Canning, 'Das Geschlecht der Revolution', 108–9.



or tailor has the same right as the mayor' appears time and again in the sources.<sup>46</sup> This amounted to a popular socialism that blended material, political and emotional elements. More articulate accounts of it tended to stress a strong ethical obligation, often couched in religious terms, that conflicted with the widespread pursuit of self-interest. The revolution, an army private named Grimhagen asserted, called on the people to 'topple the idol of egoism in our hearts' in favour of 'brotherly love'.<sup>47</sup> Male subjectivities were too central to working men's political beliefs for the left to ignore, and too contradictory to fit easily into any socialist framework.

## II

The quest to restore, revive or otherwise strengthen male subjectivities was a major driver behind the protests, strikes and local uprisings in 1918–19. It facilitated some unlikely alliances: between peasants and socialists in parts of rural Bavaria, and between middle-class intellectuals and radical workers in cities like Munich, Berlin and Bremen. However, it also made these alliances short-lived and ultimately lacking commitment, and the task of any revolutionary leader daunting. Desiring to be liberated from wartime constraints or to pursue one's own individual or group interest did not, for most contemporaries, necessitate pushing for a socialist rather than a merely democratic transformation. Socialism of any kind was endorsed where it was seen to foster one's own needs and wishes and rejected where that was not the case. Or it was simply ignored. During the Spartacist uprising and its brutal crushing in Berlin in January 1919, the liberal theologian Ernst Troeltsch observed how big-city life was continuing, even though urbanites were having to run the gauntlet of exchanges of bullets to reach cinemas, theatres or dance halls.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> BHStA, Stellvertretendes Generalkommando I. Bayerisches Armee-Korps, 555: District Office Mindelheim to District Command Mindelheim, 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>47</sup> *Die rote Parole: Wahlzeitung für den freien Soldaten*, 26 Jan. 1919 (copy in IISH, AZDSR, B 54).

<sup>48</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Spektator-Briefe: Aufsätze über die deutsche Revolution und die Weltpolitik, 1918–1922*, ed. H. Baron (Aalen, 1966), 30. See also Aulke, *Räume der Revolution*, 115.

It was thus unclear from the outset whether revolution implied support for socialism. Moreover, what socialism meant in the first place was highly controversial owing to the division of the German left into three major currents. Wilhelmine Social Democrats had extensively debated revolution. The party had been kept together by officially maintaining it as a prospect for the future, as advocated by Karl Kautsky, rather than abandoning it along the lines of Eduard Bernstein's revisionism. Yet the prospect of a revolution actually materializing had steadily receded; socialism appeared a logical conclusion of German society's development as conceived in Marxist terms, not an abrupt transformation effected by flesh-and-blood revolutionaries.<sup>49</sup>

Social democratic organizations were bound together by a powerful alternative culture outside mainstream society and politics. But tensions within the Social Democratic Party had been flaring up since the turn of the century as its strong emphasis on organizational discipline was rejected by a growing opposition that longed for liberation from oppression through mass strikes or anti-militarist action. This opposition increased when the majority of the party opted to support the war and to strive to become a legitimate part of a renewed German nation. Dissidents such as Kurt Eisner, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were imprisoned for their convictions. By April 1917 the conflict had resulted in an open split and the founding of the Independent Social Democratic Party.<sup>50</sup> The new party was united by little more than its opposition to the war, which led both Bernstein and Kautsky to join it. It was itself divided into a more moderate and a radical, 'Spartacist' wing, which went on to found the Communist Party of Germany in January 1919. Struggling to define themselves and to set a course of action in drastically changed circumstances, all three currents, Majority

<sup>49</sup> Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution: protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart, 1989), 249–79. It would be difficult to identify a 'revolutionary generation' in early twentieth-century Germany. Compare R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1985); Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); Wolfgang Kruse, *Krieg und nationale Integration: eine Neuinterpretation des sozialdemokratischen Burgfriedensschlusses, 1914–1915* (Essen, 1993).

Social Democrats, Independent Social Democrats and Communists, endeavoured to fit revolutionary subjectivities into a model that suited their respective political needs.

Communists rose up in Berlin and other German cities to prevent the elections to the constitutional assembly, scheduled for 19 January 1919, from establishing parliamentary democracy. They were in denial about the lack of solid popular support for such a course of action, as was reflected in their pronouncements on revolutionary subjectivity. Karl Liebknecht's speeches stressed, in the first instance, his own vanguard role. Together with his small band of disciples, he had opposed the war and consequently suffered persecution, a principled stance that now led him to see himself as the natural prophet of revolution rather than its leader. His revolutionary subject was the international proletariat as a whole, which had to use its masculine strength to liberate itself from its capitalist chains: 'The whole of humanity has been thrown into the red-hot crucible of world war. The proletariat has the hammer in its hand to shape a new world out of it'. Real will, energy or ability lay outside Liebknecht's conceptual remit in so far as he considered revolutions 'in essence great and elementary social crises, whose outbreak and unfolding are independent of what individuals desire'.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the defeat of the Spartacist uprising in Berlin prompted him to acknowledge just how powerful was the 'flood of counter-revolutionary sludge', but not to rethink his notion of revolutionary subjectivity. The 'proletariat' continued to possess the capacity to learn from painful experience, express disgust at the treachery of the moderate Social Democrats in government and seize power on a future occasion. It was free from the possibility of fatal error since the revolution could only be a historical necessity, regardless of contingent events: 'The German working class's walk to Golgotha is not yet over — but the day of salvation is at hand'.<sup>52</sup>

More of a Marxist theoretician than Liebknecht, his close collaborator Rosa Luxemburg firmly believed in the

<sup>51</sup> Karl Liebknecht, 'Was will der Spartakusbund?', Speech in the Hasenheide Park, Berlin, 23 Dec. 1918, repr. in *Karl Liebknecht zum antimilitaristischen Kampf* (Dortmund, 1977), 83, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Liebknecht, 'Trotz alledem', *Rote Fahne*, 15 Jan. 1919, repr. in *Karl Liebknecht zum antimilitaristischen Kampf*, 96, 100. See Helmut Trotnow, *Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919): A Political Biography* (Hamden, Conn., 1984), 177–203.

spontaneity of 'the masses'. But she found their scope to be limited and their political education incomplete, hence arguing that revolution would take time to bear fruit. However, in January 1919 she rapidly adapted her view under the impact of the uprising in Berlin. Now she expected subjective factors to prevail over objective limitations: 'decisive deeds', 'clear situations' and 'drastic measures' appeared necessary to speed up the requisite learning process. The masses might contain 'wobbly elements', but these could be won over provided that the revolutionary bodies showed determination. Luxemburg deplored the fact that such leadership was sorely lacking during the uprising, directing her fire at the Independent Social Democrats, who preferred negotiation to action. But she and Liebknecht had themselves hardly acted as determined revolutionary leaders, a fact that was somewhat obscured by their murder at the hands of right-wing paramilitaries on 15 January.<sup>53</sup>

Other Communists vacillated between hope and scepticism regarding the revolutionary subjectivity of proletarian men. The newspaper of the party organization in Bremen, for instance, expected a great deal from German workers, whose mission they saw as to bridge the gap between Russian and global revolution. But, unfortunately, these workers remained ignorant of what Bolshevism was and therefore allowed themselves to be used as the 'tools' of imperialism.<sup>54</sup> The revolution so far had been a mere 'peace movement' aimed against all violent conflict including 'revolutionary struggle' because militarism had 'systematically worn down the will of proletarians to independent action'.<sup>55</sup> The hope was that, because of its unconcealed class divisions, Bremen, a major port, would be in the vanguard. But whereas capitalist structures had created the conditions for revolutionary subjectivity locally, they limited the impact it could have nationally. Shortly after the Bremen Council Republic was

<sup>53</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, 'Was machen die Führer', 7 Jan. 1919, and 'Das Versagen der Führer', 11 Jan. 1919, both in Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*, 7 vols. (Berlin, 1970–2017), iv, 518, 526. See J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London, 1966), 737–86. See also Jones, *Founding Weimar*, ch. 16, who persuasively brings out the interplay between crowds, rumours and radical rhetoric during the uprising.

<sup>54</sup> 'Für Rußland — für den Bolschewismus', *Der Kommunist*, 28 Nov. 1918.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*; 'Rußland und wir', *Der Kommunist*, 1 Dec. 1918; 'Das politische Denken der Feldgrauen', *Der Kommunist*, 14 Jan. 1919.

founded, German banks refused to grant the city any further loans, and the only counter-measure, a mass nationwide strike, seemed an unrealistic prospect. Bremen, its Communists were forced to admit, remained an 'island within Germany', which was 'at risk of being swallowed up'. After a mere four weeks, the counter-revolution, 'with the machine gun, with the whip of hunger, with a huge apparatus of propaganda and oppression', crushed the Council Republic and turned the subjectivity that had underpinned it into victimhood.<sup>56</sup>

In Communist eyes, revolutionary subjectivity was thus necessary but in short supply; to the extent that it existed, it was rolled back by the powerful systems of capitalism and authoritarianism. For Majority Social Democrats, by contrast, revolutionary subjectivity threatened to be boundless and needed to be contained. They had been largely satisfied with the parliamentarization and democratization achieved by October 1918, and were correspondingly caught off guard when the sailors' revolt in Wilhelmshaven and Kiel instigated a wholesale revolutionary movement. The Majority Social Democratic reaction was to adapt an older ideal of the self-governing subject to the changed political situation. On 9 November 1918, the party newspaper, *Vorwärts*, admonished the German people to allow itself 'only the luxury of a *very short* period of euphoria' before proceeding to demonstrate that they were worthy of their newly acquired power.<sup>57</sup> The requirement to hold back on the fulfilment of personal desires came with a far-reaching promise: a life without the kind of external discipline imposed by the authorities of imperial Germany and the military apparatus during the war years. Now, Majority Social Democrats argued, free human beings would obey moral commands issued by themselves. As one member of a railway workers' committee in Frankfurt succinctly put it, 'We should be *free workers in a free state*, and for that we need to take on equal obligations alongside equal rights'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> 'Das Kapital erdrosselt die Räte-Republik Bremen', *Der Kommunist*, 21 Jan. 1919; 'Mahnung zur Besonnenheit', *Der Kommunist*, 23 Jan. 1919; 'Wo sind die Arbeiterräte?', *Der Kommunist*, 25 Feb. 1919. On communism in 1918–19, see Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton, 1997), 83–99.

<sup>57</sup> 'Die rote Fahne über Berlin', *Vorwärts*, 9 Nov. 1918, special edn.

<sup>58</sup> IISH, AZDSR, B 12, II, 54: 'Sitzungsbericht der Konferenz der Arbeiterausschußmitglieder und Vertrauensleute des Eisenbahndirektionsbezirks

(cont. on p. 181)

This notion of controlled, morally governed selfhood drew on neo-Kantian ideas, which had become central to social democratic thought since the late nineteenth century. Objective constraints, impossible to transcend through voluntarist action, could become bearable if subjects turned them into self-imposed restrictions.<sup>59</sup> This principle reflected the experience of providing working-class men with the organizational space to become confident, educated and rhetorically skilled citizens.<sup>60</sup> Important features of the post-war months vindicated the belief that this approach could be broadened across large parts of German society. Apprentices previously subject to paternalistic discipline, bank clerks and the staff of the Berlin fast-food chain Aschinger were now able to organize, demand recognition and articulate their collective interests.<sup>61</sup> Education and training could, it was hoped, be restructured in such a way as to eliminate the barriers of Wilhelmine class society and make any position open to ability and motivation. ‘The old system’, argued one member of a soldiers’ council, had ‘been especially culpable in denying opportunities for development to the talents and ambitions (*strebende Fähigkeiten*) of the lower strata and had thus failed to raise the potential present in the German people to anywhere near the limit of its capacity’.<sup>62</sup> According to this view it was high time for a new ‘system’, and the revolution had created the conditions for building it.

(n. 58 cont.)

Frankfurt (Main)’, 11 Feb. 1919. See also ‘Weltkrieg — Weltenwende’, *Bremer Bürger-Zeitung*, 9 Nov. 1918.

<sup>59</sup> Carl Lindow, ‘Revolution verpflichtet!’, *Vorwärts*, 22 Dec. 1918. On neo-Kantianism, see Nicholas Stargardt, *The German Idea of Militarism: Radical and Socialist Critics, 1866–1914* (Cambridge, 1994), 92–3.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Welskopp, *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit: die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz* (Bonn, 2000), esp. pt 2, chs. 5–6; pt 3, ch. 3. See also the apt formulation in Lidtke, *Alternative Culture*, 16, that ‘even the most modest responsibility could be a personal breakthrough for a worker whose life had accustomed him to accept as inevitable whatever fate befell him’.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Lehrlingsversammlungen!’, *Bremer Bürger-Zeitung*, 25 Nov. 1918; ‘Das Bankgewerbe und seine Angestellten’, *Vorwärts*, 13 Dec. 1918, morning edn; ‘Lohnbewegung bei Aschinger’, *Vorwärts*, 18 Dec. 1918, evening edn. For another unlikely example of self-organization and citizenship rhetoric, see Nadine Rossol, ‘“Incapable of Securing Order?” The Prussian Police and the German Revolution, 1918–1919’, in Weinhauer, McElligott and Heinsohn (eds.), *Germany*, 67–73.

<sup>62</sup> Zentralrat der Ostfront, *Soldatenrat* (Dec. 1918), 13 (copy in IISH, AZDSR, B 36, II, 168). See also Fritz Gansberg, ‘Die Einheitsschule und der Volksstaat’, *Bremer Volksblatt*, 11 Feb. 1919.

There are good reasons to extend the recent scholarly reappraisal of moderate Social Democracy to its notion of subjectivity. This notion was about containing personal idiosyncrasies and emotional impulses, but of one's own moral volition rather than by way of external constraints. It entailed liberating working-class people's hitherto under-exploited potential. The phrase 'talents and ambitions' and the often cited 'stern self-discipline' had strong masculine connotations: women were expected to play a complementary role drawing on their 'motherly love'.<sup>63</sup> But Majority Social Democrats were clearly in favour of the new right of women to vote, and urged them to hone their skills of discussion at all-female political gatherings.<sup>64</sup> This said, they struggled with the subjective dynamics unfolding during the revolution, seeing well-meaning and enthusiastic council members as over-emotional. Having risen abruptly from the anonymity of working-class life or military service to positions of power, such activists were unaccustomed to exercising political responsibility, and by mismanaging local finances, they threatened to 'place a moral burden on the revolution'. Leading party members who were now entering ministries and government agencies, by contrast, had decades of organizational and parliamentary experience behind them, and were very much of the view that patient work and gradual improvements were the way forward. But it dawned on them that their authority was now being challenged: 'This revolution is also a revolution within the labour movement itself', observed the editor-in-chief of *Vorwärts*, 'where it is creating new contradictions'.<sup>65</sup> At a time of strikes and uprisings, the appeals to individual responsibility by the Majority Social Democrats grew more and more urgent, and their critique of the radical left's behaviour became increasingly exasperated. The entire vision of a gradualist revolution was under threat.

While Majority Social Democrats struggled to contain revolutionary subjectivity, Independent Social Democrats

<sup>63</sup> Berta Lask, 'Anruf an die Frauen', *Vorwärts*, 28 Nov. 1918.

<sup>64</sup> 'Groß-Berlin: die Frauen und die Wahlen zum Nationalrat', *Vorwärts*, 18 Dec. 1918, evening edn. See Canning, 'Das Geschlecht der Revolution', 110–12.

<sup>65</sup> Dr M. Hofrichter, 'Die Finanzen der A. und S. Räte: die Gefahr des schlechten Rufes', *Vorwärts*, 11 Dec. 1918, morning edn; 'An die Mitglieder der ASR: offener Brief von Friedrich Stampfer', *Vorwärts*, 22 Nov. 1918.

accorded it great weight, trying to steer a socialist middle course between Majority Social Democrats and Communists. In their eyes, the success of the revolution was heavily dependent on personal agency but appeared all the more fragile for it. From the outset they complained either that the German people were devoid of the energy of their Romanic or Slavonic counterparts,<sup>66</sup> or that they possessed such energy but lacked masculine leadership: 'It is chaos because the strong, moulding hand is lacking that would be capable of gaining mastery over the revolutionary material currently in ferment'.<sup>67</sup> Independent Social Democrats doubted whether ordinary Germans had it in them to act as revolutionary subjects. Some expressed optimism that the brutal experience of the war would bring in a fundamental change in social relations, regardless of whether people actually wanted a revolution; others, however, pointed out the inhibitions that hampered the creative capacity of proletarians, which regrettably remained indispensable to any radical break with the past.<sup>68</sup>

Why this uncertainty? Like their moderate counterparts, Independent Social Democrats were influenced by neo-Kantian ideas. But in contrast to them, they promoted radical activism rather than reformist self-containment. The revolutionary they envisioned was enlightened, full of energy, yet free of idiosyncrasy. He had suffered deeply from the war but was emerging from it strengthened and morally untainted: hence his putative capacity to serve the 'stern mistress' of revolution willingly and unconditionally.<sup>69</sup> Time and again, Independent Social Democrats advocated an 'uprising of the workers' spirit' in the shape of strikes or demonstrations, in contrast to a 'movement of brutal violence'.<sup>70</sup> They distinguished their ethical socialism from any individual or group egoism, which they accused of threatening the very existence of human society.<sup>71</sup> However, this pronounced idealism sat oddly with the

<sup>66</sup> 'An die Arbeit!', *Die Freiheit*, 19 Nov. 1918.

<sup>67</sup> 'Unklare Stimmungen', *Die Freiheit*, 29 Nov. 1918.

<sup>68</sup> For optimistic and sceptical assessments, respectively, see [Hans] Unterleitner, 'Die Revolution und das Proletariat', *Neue Zeitung*, 21 Dec. 1918; Rudolf Franke, 'Jugend und Revolution', *Neue Zeitung*, 23 Dec. 1918.

<sup>69</sup> 'Aufgaben!', *Die Freiheit*, 9 Dec. 1918.

<sup>70</sup> 'Gewalt gegen Geist!', *Leipziger Volkszeitung: Organ für die Interessen des gesamten werktätigen Volkes*, 26 Feb. 1919.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*; 'Vom Egoismus zum Sozialismus', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 1 May 1919.



subjective dynamic of Germany's post-war transformation, to which personal emotions and interests were central. Independent Social Democratic discourse reflected this fundamental tension without ever acknowledging it: hence the tendency to resort to romantic notions of sudden self-transformation and enthusiastic sacrifice while simultaneously distancing oneself from a spontaneous style of politics, as exemplified by Karl Liebknecht and his Spartacist followers.<sup>72</sup>

Notwithstanding these occasional calls for a 'strong, moulding hand', the Independent Social Democratic emphasis on self-governing subjects was incompatible with any coherent notion of revolutionary leadership. Instead, great hopes were invested in the workers' councils. The new Bavarian prime minister Kurt Eisner saw them as an elastic type of organization. As far as he was concerned, the councils were capable of accommodating rapid change and of giving each individual the chance to educate himself.<sup>73</sup> The problem, however, was that there was little time for such a process as capitalist structures were being swiftly restored, the waves of strikes quickly ebbed and counter-revolutionary violence was visited upon socialists in Berlin, Bremen and Munich. Hopes for a second, more radical and thoroughgoing revolution soon gave way to gloomy assessments of the lasting damage the war had inflicted on bodies, minds and souls, and of the immobilizing weight of history:

Everywhere man, held back by a thousand conditions, worn down by a thousand inhibitions glowering at him from the past, is blocking his own path . . . We must fight historicism because it keeps us from attaining the soul of contemporary man through the rubble of the centuries, which weighs heavily on every soul.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> 'Revolutionspsychologie', *Neue Zeitung*, 21 Jan. 1919; 'Karl Liebknecht', *Die Freiheit*, 17 Jan. 1919. The romantic strand of the German left is often underrated, but see the clues in Rüdiger Safranski, *Romantik: eine deutsche Affäre* (Munich, 2007), 246–9, 307, 330.

<sup>73</sup> Kurt Eisner, 'Aufgaben der Räte: Rede auf der ersten Sitzung des Münchner Arbeiterrats am 5.12.1918', repr. in Kurt Eisner, *Sozialismus als Aktion: ausgewählte Aufsätze und Reden*, ed. Freya Eisner (Frankfurt, 1975). See Bernhard Grau, *Kurt Eisner, 1867–1919: eine Biographie* (Munich, 2001), 458.

<sup>74</sup> 'Gegen den Historismus!', *Neue Zeitung*, 24 June 1919. On the war's devastating impact on bodies and souls, see Otto Jensen, 'Die Kulturziele des Manifestes', *Die Freiheit*, 1 May 1919. On the inability of Independent Social Democrats to give direction to the revolutionary movements in early 1919, see David W. Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917–1922* (Ithaca, NY, 1975), ch. 7; Sean Dobson, *Authority and*

(cont. on p. 185)

As their discussions of revolutionary subjectivity show, the three major parties of the left all struggled to influence the dynamics of German society in 1918–19. The traction of their respective intellectual discourses remained limited owing to working men's distrust of the educated classes as well as their more short-term priorities.<sup>75</sup> Indefatigable attempts to adapt strands of socialist thought to a rapidly changing situation reflected a long-standing tension between deterministic Marxist beliefs and an emphasis on voluntaristic, ethically inspired action. While the parties were in agreement that political activity could engender self-transformation, they were reluctant to embrace violence, in stark contrast to the Bolsheviks in Russia. The usefulness of 'red terror' was controversial even to the Communists, and they warned their followers not to engage in 'passionate' acts that would be counterproductive.<sup>76</sup> The violence that did take place in 1918–19 was not owned by any camp of the left; instead it drew attention to their own vulnerability. Majority Social Democratic members of the provisional government, while bearing a heavy responsibility, also felt exposed to the threat of physical attack.<sup>77</sup> Independent Social Democrats in Bremen complained that, after their erstwhile comrades had called in troops to crush the Council Republic, they were subjected to humiliating controls: 'What kind of freedom is this? We can do without it. Nowadays lieutenants who are still wet behind the ears can do whatever they like with you'.<sup>78</sup>

By May 1919, the divisions within the German left were running deeper than ever, and what remained of revolutionary subjectivity was under severe pressure. Among Independent Social Democrats a tendency was emerging to declare closure

(n. 74 cont.)

*Upheaval in Leipzig, 1910–1920: The Story of a Relationship* (New York, 2001), 205–11, 238, 257–61, 267–8, 295–6.

<sup>75</sup> In the course of a heated gathering in Berlin in November 1918 one worker exclaimed, 'Intellectuals are rubbish!': Weipert, *Die Zweite Revolution*, 325.

<sup>76</sup> 'Mitgliederversammlung der Kommunistischen Partei, Ortsgruppe Bremen', *Der Kommunist*, 18 Jan. 1919; 'An die Bremer Arbeiterschaft', *Der Kommunist*, 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>77</sup> Walter Mühlhausen, *Friedrich Ebert, 1871–1925: Reichspräsident der Weimarer Republik*, 2nd edn, revised (Bonn, 2007), 158–60; Philipp Scheidemann, *Der Zusammenbruch* (1921; facsimile edn, Berlin, 2015), 228.

<sup>78</sup> *Verhandlungen der verfassungsgebenden Bremischen Nationalversammlung vom Jahre 1919–20* (Bremen, 1920), 47 (23 Apr. 1919).

on the revolution, to view it through the prism of heroic defeat. Although he had effectively lost his grip on the Munich revolution and had been about to resign, Kurt Eisner was elevated, after his assassination, to the undisputed status of a 'source of strength' infusing the masses with 'revolutionary spirit', a true leader whose sacrifice would deeply trouble German souls and would thus engender new ideas and actions.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the vivid accounts of the violence that counter-revolutionary units had visited upon radical workers served to reinforce moral certainty. Like Eisner, the assassinated men became unequivocally revolutionary subjects after their death, as martyrs whose bodies had been labelled with identity tags in a way previously 'only seen in slaughterhouses'.<sup>80</sup>

Correspondingly, Majority Social Democrats began to dissociate themselves from the revolution by limiting the role of subjects and their emotional, physical and verbal acts in the emerging democratic society. Karl Kautsky had staunchly defended a Marxist perspective on the revolution before 1914 but had concurred with his revisionist opponent Eduard Bernstein in disapproving of unorganized mass movements.<sup>81</sup> Now he argued that the war had revoked the nineteenth-century humanization of working-class people. It had diminished the number of educated and self-disciplined proletarians and generally fostered a brutish mentality. Kautsky also thought that the revolution had suffered from moral degradation: powerful groups were able to secure extraordinary wages to the detriment of the common good, while the radical left practised politics using 'more and more primitive' methods.<sup>82</sup> He advocated a blend of self-disciplined individualism, constitutional safeguards and a functionally differentiated

<sup>79</sup> 'Ein Märtyrer der Revolution: Kurt Eisner geboren den 14. Mai 1867 ermordet den 21. Februar 1919', *Die Freiheit*, 22 Feb. 1919; 'Letztes Geleit', *Neue Zeitung*, 27 Feb. 1919. In the town of Aschaffenburg, revolutionaries were incensed by a local priest's refusal to ring the bells on the day of Eisner's funeral: Carsten Pollnick, *Revolution und Räterepublik: Aschaffenburg und die bayerische Räterepublik, 1918–1919* (Aschaffenburg, 2010), 97–9.

<sup>80</sup> *Die Münchner Tragödie: Entstehung, Verlauf und Zusammenbruch der Räte-Republic München* (Berlin, 1919), 38.

<sup>81</sup> Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen: Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1986), 123.

<sup>82</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Terrorismus und Kommunismus: ein Beitrag zur Naturgeschichte der Revolution* (Berlin, 1919), esp. 102–5; Karl Kautsky, *Das Weiterreiben der Revolution* (Berlin, 1919), 12.

society, not an emphasis on revolutionary subjectivity. His thinking was echoed in a spirited critique of Kurt Eisner's idealism 'from a Majority Social Democratic point of view': 'The life of every human being is an uninterrupted series of compromises with his entire environment'.<sup>83</sup>

### III

In autumn 1919, different voices from across the German left started to look back to the beginnings of the German Revolution and assess its consequences. Their accounts were rather sobering. Not much appeared to have come of working men's quest for equality and solidarity. Miners in the Ruhr area were blaming each other for egoistic behaviour: undercutting wages, piggybacking on the trade union membership of fellow workers or even stealing from them.<sup>84</sup> One miner was forced to admit that the 'revolution in ways of thinking, of ideas' that he had envisioned had been a failure, the 'general strike of a defeated army' rather than a genuine movement against greed.<sup>85</sup> Some hoped that relations between workers would improve once decent wages were paid. But the prospects for this seemed dire, as a miner named Sander stated in no uncertain terms:

Didn't we build the railway so we could ride on it? Yet at best we get to travel third-class, mostly fourth-class, while the fat cats are sitting back on cushions in first or second class. Didn't we build the ships? Yes, but we get to travel in the between-decks or right down below so that when the tub goes down the poor can't get out, as we saw plainly with the *Titanic*, and end up drowning miserably. But the fat cats wine and dined and were saved.<sup>86</sup>

In less plain language than the miners of the Ruhr, socialist authors of various persuasions also looked back on the revolution as a failure. Ernst Däumig claimed that the events had constituted no more than an 'elementary *collapse*' owing to

<sup>83</sup> Adolf Hepner, *Dr. Kurt Eisner: Bayerns erster republikanischer Ministerpräsident. Eine kritische Würdigung des Politikers Eisner vom mehrheitssozialistischen Standpunkt* (Munich, 1919), 13.

<sup>84</sup> LANRW, B 406, 14388: Reports on meetings of miners in the Ruhr area in the summer and autumn of 1919.

<sup>85</sup> LANRW, B 406, 14439: 'Bericht über die vom Werkmeisterverein-Bezirk Eickel-Wanne am 26.10.1919 im Krupp'schen Saalbau in Hordel einberufene Versammlung'.

<sup>86</sup> LANRW, B 406, 14388: 'Bericht über die am 12.11. abgehaltene Belegschaftsversammlung in Mengede'.

the desperate lack of revolutionary tradition and temperament among German proletarians. Because they had opted for a transition along moderate lines, they had earned themselves a 'brand-spanking new Republic with the old capitalist shackles'.<sup>87</sup> Communists clung to the belief that conditions were forcing proletarians ahead independently of their own volition. But they were scarcely more optimistic than Däumig on the subjects that were necessary for any future revolutionary struggle. One author repeated a frequently articulated doubt: 'Will we really get there? People are so preoccupied with their own subjective despondency that they are oblivious to the objective situation, which promises victory'.<sup>88</sup> Majority Social Democrats, by contrast, staunchly defended their moderate version of the events of 1918–19, and felt increasingly free to deny altogether the importance of revolutionary agency. Their newspaper in Bremen declared that 'silly fairy tales notwithstanding' the revolution had 'not been "made"'. Instead, the generals had simply given up, whereupon 'chaos' had ensued. Irrational exuberance about 'the start of world revolution' had distracted from the victory of 'the modern capitalist politics of democracy' over the semi-feudalism of Austria-Hungary, Turkey and indeed Germany.<sup>89</sup>

Majority and Independent Social Democrats concurred in seeing the revolution as a phenomenon of the past, while the Communists hoped for an imminent second round and consequently engaged in several botched uprisings until autumn 1923.<sup>90</sup> For all the persistence of the unrest throughout the early years of the Weimar Republic, the type of broader discursive framework that would have made it revolutionary was lacking. This early narrative closure foreshadowed the classic interpretation of 1918–19 as a stuck, incomplete or failed revolution. Recent scholars have moved away from this view, arguing either that the revolution laid the structural groundwork for some important political compromises of the

<sup>87</sup> Ernst Däumig, 'Eine Station auf dem Passionswege der Revolution', *Die Freiheit*, 11 Nov. 1919, morning edn.

<sup>88</sup> 'Untertöne', *Rote Fahne*, nos. 61–2 (early Oct. 1919).

<sup>89</sup> 'Nach einem Jahr: 1. Die Illusionen', *Bremer Volksblatt*, 4 Nov. 1919.

<sup>90</sup> See Werner T. Angress, *Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921–1923* (Princeton, 1963).

1920s,<sup>91</sup> or that it brought in ‘new forms of male and female subjectivity’.<sup>92</sup>

This article has focused on the second dimension. It has emphasized the importance of subjective liberation for ordinary men, of a space suddenly opened up to unprecedented emotional, physical and verbal acts. However, it has also stressed the problems arising from the complex and controversial nature of subjectivity within a highly differentiated society in the aftermath of total war. Male subjectivities were infused with moral meaning, yet inseparable from the mere pursuit of self-interest. For a short time, radicals were able to exert unprecedented power, only to feel worn down again by the structural weight of authoritarianism and capitalism. With their promise of freedom from external discipline and opportunities for social mobility, Majority Social Democrats offered a moderate perspective on the revolution. But this perspective was stern in its insistence on self-discipline and rather unromantic in its plea for constitutional safeguards and personal restraint. Neither the Majority nor the Independent Social Democrats, nor the Communists, managed to unite or steer male subjectivities. For these reasons, by late spring 1919 radicals and gradualists alike were beginning to speak of an end to the revolution, thus limiting the potential for any subsequent attempt.

As early as January the same year, Rosa Luxemburg had already spoken of *Revolutionchen*, of various ‘little revolutions’ that were local, splintered and confused rather than ‘German’.<sup>93</sup> It is not essential to endorse her argument for creating national coherence and a unified revolutionary subject through the Communist Party to concede her point. The revolution of 1918–19 took place in a country that had long been characterized by its regional diversity and intense localism.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, it was part and parcel of an emerging ‘Weimar’ modernity marked by radical

<sup>91</sup> Fischer, ‘“Very German Revolution?”’

<sup>92</sup> Canning, ‘Gender and the Imaginary of Revolution in Germany’, 125 and *passim*.

<sup>93</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Der erste Parteitag’, in Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*, iv, 514. For a similar diagnosis, see ‘Soll Deutschland leben?’, *Neue Zeitung*, 21 June 1919.

<sup>94</sup> See the classic treatments by James J. Sheehan, ‘What Is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography’, *Journal of Modern History*, liii, 1 (1981); Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990).

contingency.<sup>95</sup> Both regional diversity and radical contingency rendered anything resembling a clear revolutionary project extremely difficult. It is against this backdrop that subjectivity was created or experienced on the ground and that divergent intellectual claims were attached to it. To have high expectations met with profound disappointment; to encounter and foster diversity but crave unity; to be embroiled in complex structures while longing for the simplicity of either-or decisions; to stress one's personal role yet feel exposed to forces outside one's control — these tensions were central to the revolution of 1918–19 and subsequently to Weimar Germany's culture and politics.<sup>96</sup> In that sense, to re-engage with the revolution from novel perspectives can help to illuminate a post-war society marked by the absence of recognizable organization, which has therefore aptly been characterized as a 'topsy-turvy world'.<sup>97</sup>

Finally, perhaps these insights can add to the ongoing debate on how to conceptualize revolutions. While historians of the French Revolution have taken the lead in modifying established accounts and exploring new dimensions, they can always return to the coherence provided by transformative events, shared targets of vilification or sharp political turns.<sup>98</sup> This stress on coherence has clearly influenced the 'historical approach to the comparative study of revolutions' mentioned at the beginning of this article.<sup>99</sup> Baker and Edelstein, both renowned historians of

<sup>95</sup> Föllmer and Graf (eds.), *Die 'Krise' der Weimarer Republik*; Peter Fritzsche, 'Landscape of Danger, Landscape of Design: Crisis and Modernism in Weimar Germany', in Thomas Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann (eds.), *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic* (Columbia, SC, 1994).

<sup>96</sup> See Thomas Mergel, 'High Expectations — Deep Disappointment: Structures of the Public Perception of Politics in the Weimar Republic', in Canning, Barndt and McGuire (eds.), *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects*; Rüdiger Graf, 'Either-Or: The Narrative of "Crisis" in Weimar Germany and in Historiography', *Central European History*, xliii (2010); Moritz Föllmer, 'Which Crisis? Which Modernity? New Perspectives on Weimar Germany', in Jochen Hung, Godela Weiss-Sussex and Geoff Wilkes (eds.), *Beyond Glitter and Doom: The Contingency of the Weimar Republic* (Munich, 2012).

<sup>97</sup> See the title of Martin H. Geyer's outstanding *Verkehrte Welt: Revolution, Inflation und Moderne. München, 1914–1924* (Göttingen, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> See William H. Sewell Jr, 'Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille', repr. in William H. Sewell Jr, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005); Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Patrice Higonnet, 'Terror, Trauma and the "Young Marx" Explanation of Jacobin Politics', *Past and Present*, no. 191 (May 2006).

<sup>99</sup> See n. 2.

eighteenth-century France, offer an alternative to a structural analysis of revolution that they deem unsatisfactory. Their emphasis rests on the creation of scripts and the role they play during revolutionary processes. A script, they argue, 'creates a situation and sets out the manner of its unfolding'. It 'constitutes a frame within which a situation is defined and a narrative projected', which, in turn, 'offers a series of consequent situations, subject positions, and possible moves to be enacted by the agents within that frame'. Depending on the specific situation, it can be 'replayed indefinitely' but also 'changed, adapted or even subverted by the introduction of new events, characters, or actions'.<sup>100</sup> Reading through their co-edited volume we learn how a modern notion of revolution involving collective agency emerged in the 1780s and was rewritten in the course of the nineteenth century. We also grasp that it became increasingly difficult for one script to prevail over others: this was possible in the Russian Revolution owing to common ground between the Bolshevik and popular scripts, but not during the recent Arab uprisings, which, in a way that rather strains Baker and Edelstein's model, remained marked by a collision of 'multiple scripts' to the bitter end.<sup>101</sup>

With regard to Germany in 1918–19, one might doubt whether there ever was such a thing as a revolutionary script. Marxism did not provide one that would have fitted the actual events. As we have seen, Karl Kautsky, as the guardian of this tradition, pronounced himself against revolutionizing society after the war. Radicals begged to differ but shifted uneasily between deterministic beliefs and an emphasis on voluntaristic action. Karl Liebknecht and even Rosa Luxemburg departed from the scripts that the socialist tradition provided, without succeeding in finding a persuasive alternative. The French and Russian revolutions were referred to, but these references hardly amounted to a framework; the German Revolution of 1848–9

<sup>100</sup> Baker and Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution*, 2–3 (editors' intro.). Recent attempts to revive the structural analysis of revolutions include Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009), esp. ch. 2; Bailey Stone, *The Anatomy of Revolution Revisited: A Comparative Analysis of England, France, and Russia* (New York, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> Keith Michael Baker, 'Revolutionizing Revolution', Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Scripting the German Revolution: Marx and 1848', Ian D. Thatcher, 'Scripting the Russian Revolution', and Silvana Toska, 'The Multiple Scripts of the Arab Revolutions', all in Baker and Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution*.



did not offer a model either. Sympathetic observers believed that this revolution, for better or worse, was ‘comparable to none of the previous ones’.<sup>102</sup> A new script proved elusive. In any case, intellectuals were overwhelmingly struggling to keep pace with the revolutionary dynamic rather than anticipating or shaping it, as Baker and Edelstein’s model would suggest.<sup>103</sup> A popular script is equally difficult to identify beyond a widespread rebellion against authority and a quest for economic, political and moral equality. Despite the sudden demise of the German monarchies, enemies had by no means disappeared, but they were too disparate to lend themselves to a clear narrative of struggle. It is this unscripted character that made ‘the’ revolutionary subject so keenly sought after but so evanescent. Revisiting the revolution of 1918–19 thus elucidates not merely the transition from the German empire to the Weimar Republic but also the importance of rupture, rebellion and repression for a history of twentieth-century subjectivities.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Erwin Barth, ‘Die deutsche Revolution’, *Vorwärts*, 18 Jan. 1919.

<sup>103</sup> See David A. Bell, ‘Afterword’, in Baker and Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution*, 350–1, who also cautions that ‘given the huge variety of ways in which “scripts” have functioned (or not) in revolutionary situations, it clearly does not make sense to take the concept too literally’ (p. 348).

<sup>104</sup> This crucial dimension is missed by neat sociological accounts, for instance of a shift around 1900 from a ‘hegemony of the bourgeois subject’ to a dual predominance of the ‘avantgarde subject’ and the ‘clerical employee subject’ lasting until the 1960s: see Andreas Reckwitz, *Das hybride Subjekt: eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne* (Weilerswist, 2006), ch. 3.