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ERNST TOLLER:
FROM *EINHEITSFRONT* TO *VOLKSFRONT*.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOLLER'S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY
(1919-1939)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development of the political outlook of the German author and revolutionary politician, Ernst Toller. It begins by looking at Toller's early years and explains how his experience as a front-line soldier during the First World war transformed his views, causing him to reject the conservative-nationalist ethos he had grown up with and to become, in his own description, a revolutionary pacifist. It then looks at his involvement in the revolutionary events which took place in Bavaria at the end of the First World War, the so-called *Räterepublik*, examines how they affected his understanding of social and political reality and traces their artistic reflection in the plays he wrote in the following period.

A recurrent theme in Toller's political thinking throughout the years of the Weimar Republic was the idea of an *Einheitsfront*, a defence block of workers' organisations, which he advocated as the only means of halting the rise of National Socialism. Unfortunately, Toller's appeals to the main workers' parties to form such a block went unheard, yet they are significant all the same in that they reveal the acute political insight of a man whom many of his contemporaries dismissed as a hopeless utopian. Interestingly, and a point often missed in studies of his politics, Toller abandoned the *Einheitsfront* after he went into exile in 1933 and came to favour instead the creation of a *Volksfront* a broad, cross-party anti-fascist coalition which the Soviet Union vigorously promoted all through the 1930s until the signing of the Stalin-Hitler Pact in 1940. Toller's support for this idea, in part a corollary of his support for the Soviet Union itself, had a profound impact on his political outlook in exile, and caused him to close his eyes to the repression suffered by the opponents of the Stalin regime both inside and outside Russia, and, most significantly, led him to ignore the nascent socialist revolution which flourished in Spain after the defeat of Franco's *coup d'état* in 1936. This study examines in some detail, therefore, Toller's involvement in the *Volksfront*, redefines his attitude towards Communist

Russia and shows how his efforts to suppress his revolutionary beliefs and to become instead a mere anti-fascist affected his creative spirit during his years of exile.

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DEDICATION

TO ALLISON GLEN (1940-1998).

IN FOND REMEMBRANCE.

INTRODUCTION

At the pinnacle of his career, which lay during the stormy years of the Weimar Republic, Ernst Toller was, without doubt, one of the most popular and acclaimed dramatists working in the German theatre. His literary reputation — his enemies might have said his notoriety — was established in 1919 with his first play, the Expressionist *Stationendrama*, *Die Wandlung*,[1] and peaked in 1928 with *Hoppla, wir leben!*, a satirical review of Weimar society.[2] Even *Feuer aus den Kesseln!*,[3] a work which deals with the background to the November Revolution of 1918, though not well-received in its own day, has since come to be regarded as something of a landmark in German theatre history, being widely seen as a forerunner of the documentary realist drama which emerged in the 1960s.[4] Throughout the whole of the Weimar period, and for some time afterwards too, Toller's name was far more widely known than, for instance, Brecht's, not just in Germany but internationally, with his plays, many of them written during a five-year prison sentence imposed for his part in the Bavaria Soviet Republic, translated into more than 28 languages and performed around the world.[5] It is all the more remarkable then that today Toller is virtually unknown — at any rate, far less well known than Brecht — with his plays seldom if ever to be seen in the German theatre and regarded in some quarters as having, at best, only historical interest.

Toller's decline into obscurity was a protracted process and began long before his suicide, which occurred in May 1939, in New York.[6] During his long, sometimes bitter years of exile, he produced little or nothing of lasting artistic value, nothing at least which could stand serious comparison with the likes of *Die Wandlung* or *Masse Mensch*. The only significant work produced during this period was his autobiography, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, but even this was almost complete before he was forced to leave Germany.[7] Exile was, of course, an immensely difficult experience for all those who fled Hitler, and posed special problems for creative writers like Toller, tearing them out of

the soil which had nourished their talent and depriving them of the ear of the audience which spoke their language. Yet the difficulties Toller encountered in adjusting to life in exile do not entirely account for the marked decline in his creativity during these years. What this study proposes is that this decline, the lack of vigour and conviction in his later work, was linked to certain trends in the development of his political outlook. Specifically, that it was linked to his loss of faith in the ideas of revolutionary socialism.

It should be noted here that critical opinion is divided on the question as to whether or not Toller really did turn his back on the ideas of socialism during his exile period. John Spalek is one who believes that he did, arguing in a seminal article that, towards the end of his life, Toller became, in fact, a supporter of liberal democracy, a system he had firmly rejected in the past.[8] By the end of the 1930s, Spalek claims, Toller came to see democracy as the 'best of all political systems' and the United States itself as the 'land of freedom and democracy'.[9] Toller, Spalek adds, 'disavowed the rather superficial criticism of the US made in 1929' and in the years before his death became as 'critical of Communism and its methods as he was of National Socialism'.[10] Richard Dove, by contrast, has argued that Toller's apparent renunciation of socialism has to be viewed against the wider political background.[11] The fact that he spoke little of revolutionary socialism after 1933, Dove maintains, was a consequence of his attempt to win over to the *Volksfront*, the anti-fascist cause Toller supported throughout his exile, a mainly middle-class audience to whom the ideology and language of socialism was not only unfamiliar but repellent.[12] In reality, Dove claims, Toller's prescriptive ideas about society changed very little in exile for he continued to believe that the 'ideals of political democracy could [...] only flourish in conditions of social democracy', in other words, in some kind of socialist society.[13]

While there is clearly something to be said for the arguments advanced by Spalek

and Dove, neither interpretation, it will be argued here, provides an entirely satisfactory description of Toller's political stance at that time. For instance, Spalek's claim that Toller eventually became as critical of Communism as he was of National Socialism is simply an assertion with no proof to support it and will be shown to be the opposite of the truth. More importantly, when Spalek writes that Toller renounced socialism in favour of democracy he is guilty of employing some rather loose terminology. Strictly speaking, the word democracy refers only to the political superstructure of a given state, the form of its government, and says nothing at all about the nature of the property relations within it; the word socialism, on the other hand, says nothing about the form of government but describes a quite specific set of property relations. Spalek is wrong, therefore, to set up a contrast between democracy and socialism. What he really meant to say, of course, was not that Toller became a supporter of democracy when he abandoned revolutionary socialism but of capitalism.[14] This too, however, will be shown to be false. What brought about the apparent change in Toller's thinking was, as Dove points out, his support for the *Volksfront* (in English, the Popular or Peoples' Front) the name given to the foreign policy pursued by Moscow from about 1935 until the signing of the Stalin-Hitler Pact in 1939.[15] Yet Dove too is wrong when he implies that Toller's support for this idea had no real impact on his political outlook. Like a number of other critics, he fails to distinguish properly between the *Volksfront* and the *Einheitsfront*, the anti-fascist strategy Toller advocated before Hitler's *Machtergreifung*, and sees the *Volksfront* as merely an extension of the *Einheitsfront* towards the middle of the political spectrum so that it should embrace not just workers' organisations but all those opposed to fascism.[16] This, however, is a serious mistake, for, as will be shown below, there were some very real differences between these two concepts. It was the dichotomy between them, for instance, which lay at the heart of the bitter and bloody struggle which

tore apart the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War.[17] When Toller abandoned the *Einheitsfront* to become a supporter of the *Volksfront*, then, it was not quite the seamless transformation it is sometimes made out to be. On the contrary, it had an enormous impact on his political outlook. It was his support for the *Volksfront* which caused him to turn a blind eye to developments inside the Soviet Union during the 1930s, to the Show Trials and purges, for instance, which claimed the lives of many millions of people, among them some of Toller's own former friends and acquaintances.[18] It was this too which led him to ignore not just the revolution which took place in Spain in the aftermath of Franco's failed coup, but to the attempt — the successful attempt — by the Stalinists and their socialist and liberal fellow-travellers to crush this revolution in the name of the defence of democracy.[19] This study, then, will look closely at the differences between the *Volksfront* and the *Einheitsfront*, will show how Toller's ideas changed as he sought to help build the *Volksfront*, and look at the way in which *Volksfront* ideology was reflected in his dramatic work, as well as how his allegiance to it helped stifle and corrode his creative imagination in the years prior to his death.

Literature Review

During his lifetime and throughout the long years of the Cold War, Toller's literary and political reputation — at times almost impossible to disentangle — suffered badly at the hands of so-called Marxist (in reality Stalinist) critics and historians in the countries of the former Eastern Block.[20] To these people, Toller was, at best, a petty-bourgeois idealist who had little or no understanding of the class struggle, at worst, a reactionary traitor of the working-class movement.[21] In general, they refused to allow the words revolutionary or even socialist to be used in connection with Toller, either as a writer or a politician, arguing that this was impossible since his artistic works failed,

as they put it, to reflect the decisive role played by the vanguard party in the struggle of the working class for economic, social and political liberation. Hans Marnette, for instance, writes:

> Die gesamte Inhalt-Form-Problematik der untersuchten Dramen hat ihre Grundlage in der Tatsache, daß Toller sich einerseits der Arbeiterklasse näherte und die Rolle der Arbeiterbewegung und der Volksmassen für die gesellschaftliche Entwicklung bis zu einem gewissen Grade verstand, daß er aber auf der anderen Seite nicht vermochte, die Bedeutung der marxistisch-leninistischen Partei und des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus zu erkennen.[22]

On the face of it, this *sounds* like an extremely imposing charge, but what it boils down to in plain English is that Toller, unlike some, did not see his task as that of glorifying in his plays the policies and activities of the German Communist Party — whatever these happened to be at any given moment. Yet despite the ferocity of much of the criticism they levelled at Toller, the Stalinists could never entirely disown him, being forced on occasion to concede that this was a man who, for all his perceived faults, was deeply and genuinely committed to the struggle of the oppressed for liberation. Marnette again, for instance, while anxious to point out that it would be going too far to describe Toller as a 'sozialistischen Schriftsteller', argues that it was wrong, as Reso had done, to call him a 'Verräter an der Partei', writing:

> Ernst Toller entwickelte sich unter dem Einfluß der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution und des Aufschwunges der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung vom Expressionisten zum kritischen Realisten, dessen beste Werke Elemente der proletarisch-revolutionären Literatur aufweisen oder, wie *Feuer aus den Kesseln!*, ihr zugehören.[23]

Interestingly, Marnette is prepared to give the Communist seal of approval to *Feuer aus den Kesseln!*, which he calls Toller's 'bestes Bühnenwerk',[24] but is highly critical of his final play, *Pastor Hall*, writing that it reveals 'in welchem hohen Maße Toller die

Verbindung zu den revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung verloren hatte'.[25] It is manifestly true that, in *Pastor Hall*, Toller was little concerned with the problems of the revolutionary struggle. Yet, paradoxically, of all of Toller's plays, this was the one which came closest to reflecting the position the Communist Party held *at that time*. For this was the period of the *Volksfront* during which the Communists themselves had abandoned any idea of socialist revolution and laboured instead to build an anti-fascist alliance with the western democracies. Subsequently, Stalin dropped the *Volksfront* in favour of a pact with Hitler, and it is this, of course, embarrassment at their own party's less than heroic past, which explains why the Stalinists were unable to come to a proper appraisal of the development of Toller's ideology during his exile period. At the time of the *Volksfront*, as will be shown, Toller's views were in all essentials identical with those held by the Communists; yet here is how Martin Reso defines them:

> Man kann feststellen, daß Toller in der Emigrationszeit eine tiefe Wandlung durchgemacht hat, die allerdings in ihren wesentlichen Zügen schon vorher zu erkennen gewesen war. War er während der zwanziger Jahre Sozialist aus Überzeugung gewesen, so hatte er im Verlauf der Jahre mehr und mehr die parteiliche Basis verlassen und eine ethisch-humanitäre angenommen. Sein Ziel war bis an sein Lebensende der Sozialismus, nur hatte er eine sehr unklare Vorstellung von dem, was er sein sollte. Der Sozialismus war für Toller ein Ideal, dem er nachstrebte, ohne es charakterisieren zu können, für das er litt und kämpfte.[26]

Admittedly, it was not just the Communist side which interpreted Toller to suit their own ideological purposes; Willibrand's clear aim in his early study is to place Toller's legacy firmly within the framework of the western literary tradition.[27] In order to do this successfully, however, he has to engage in some quite blatantly obvious wilful misreading of Toller's social and political message and to rewrite some crucial aspects of German history. Declaring that 'Karl Marx was never quite the man for Toller',[28] Willibrand's main aim, as Dove points out, was to demonstrate that Toller was never a

Communist, never believed, that is, in the materialist interpretation of history, the Marxist notion which posits that, ultimately, it is conditions which determine consciousness, and not, as the idealists would have it, the other way around. It is true, of course, that Toller never was a materialist. But what about Willibrand's claim that it was profound religious faith which formed the core of Toller's belief system?:

> A few bits of antireligious prose and verse written under the influence of Marxist doctrine are completely overshadowed by writings that have definite spiritual and religious tendencies. Marx demanded dialectical materialism, but Toller always remained subject to the influence of the "opium of the people". The religious element makes Toller's last play [*Pastor Hall* J.F.] more optimistic than any he ever wrote after *Die Wandlung*. His final message seems to be that the courage born of unwavering religious faith alone triumphs over human iniquity and frailty.[29]

In *Pastor Hall*, Willibrand believes, 'the expression of religious sympathies is clear and unmistakeable',[30] a remarkable claim which, if true, would imply that everything Toller said or wrote on the subject of the role of religion was intended to mislead. Not content with this, Willibrand then goes on to make the following remarks, remarks which betray his own deep-rooted ideological prejudices:

> By 1939 the author [Toller J.F.] had realized that orthodox Christianity was by no means ready to betray itself in the interests of the German totalitarian state. He had seen all the forces once opposed to National Socialism go the way of cowed submission and of state co-ordination — except the leaders of Catholicism and orthodox Protestantism. These also publicly opposed the antireligious, anti-humanitarian aspects of National Socialism, and they persevered in the brave fight of which Pastor Hall becomes a symbol. Marxists beat an unheroic retreat and ended up in the Labor Front, while right-wing Christian leaders were ready for the utmost resistance.[31]

Willibrand's rather cheap remarks about Communists beating a hasty retreat before Hitler and ending up in Ley's *Arbeitsfront* — he could have said that many ended up in concentration camps or on the executioner's block — are outdone only by his

preposterous claims about the German Protestant Church and its heroic resistance to Nazism. As the chapter on *Pastor Hall* will show, apart from one two isolated cases, the Protestant Church did not resist the Nazi state, in fact it accommodated itself quite nicely to the country's new masters.[32]

Thankfully, research on Toller moved on considerably from the kind of dogmatic and ideologically coloured interpretations offered by Reso, Marnette and Willibrand. Yet even John Spalek, as indicated above, was not entirely objective in delineating Toller's political stance in his much-quoted study. Like Willibrand, he too was eager to point out that Toller was never a Communist — which strictly speaking is true, in that he was never a member of the party — and to highlight instead his ethical socialism and his commitment to democracy.[33] Unfortunately, Spalek does not address the question of Toller's attitude towards the Soviet Union or his fellow-traveller activities during the 1930s. The same is true of Michael Ossar, another American critic, who defines Toller's socialism as being primarily if not exclusively anarchist in character, and sees him too as a man who, to the end of his life, remained committed to timeless, transcendental ethical principles:

> [...] in his political plays Toller confronts all the problems that have troubled leftists since Marx. In doing so, he decides in nearly every case in favor of solutions which assert the sanctity of the individual over all collectivist demands on him and which, taken together, add up to more than simply 'unorthodox Marxism' or 'humanism'; they form a consistent and detailed, non-trivial anarchistic philosophy in the tradition of Kropotkin.[34]

Ossar adds that Toller was, of course, fully aware that such a philosophy 'would never be realised in the Europe of the 1930s', but that this did not in any sense 'invalidate his ideals'.[35] Toller's main political goal, he explains, had been to show not only that the Jesuit dictum 'the end justifies the means', was unacceptable, but *why* it was

unacceptable.[36] What he showed, Ossar argues, was that 'the means transform the ends and thus render *post hoc* distinctions between ends useless'.[37] Even the rise of Hitler did not force Toller to abandon this view, though it did cause him to give up hope that his vision of a new society could ever be achieved 'without compromises and means which, although they of course did not approach those of his adversaries in cruelty, were nonetheless odious to him'. 'Who can summon the courage of the Woman (in *Masse Mensch*)', Ossar asks, 'and forswear violence in the face of Hitler? This question Toller could not answer'.[38] What Ossar is not willing to admit, however, is that Toller could not and did not remain committed to the absolute ethic of non-violence during his exile, he saw that pacifism had no answer to the questions posed Nazism, abandoned it and, in doing so, tacitly admitted that it is not possible to equate violence with violence under all circumstance, that in some cases, therefore, morally 'good' ends demand the application of 'base', i.e. violent means. Yet Ossar can still write:

> But this descent from the rarefied spheres of theory to the dirty business of Europe in the nineteen-thirties was not on that account marked by the embrace of compromise. For Toller recognised that if the optimistic idealism of *Die Wandlung* was anachronistic, the ruthless pragmatism of the Nameless One was odious and demeaning, and ultimately just as ineffectual.[39]

It is Ossar's own commitment to anarchism which blinds him to the falsity of this statement.

One of the most interesting and influential studies of Toller's politics as reflected in his dramas is by Rosemarie Altenhofer. Like Spalek and others, she too is anxious to prove that Toller's brand of socialism was humane and idealistic in nature and had nothing in common with the Marxist materialist socialism advocated by the Communists. However, Altenhofer's attempt to locate Toller within the moderate tradition of western socialism leads her to some quite radical, and frankly unconvincing interpretations of his

own stated beliefs. For instance, on the very basic question of why he became involved in the struggle of the working class for socialism, she writes:

> Sein idealistischer Sozialismus ist am Menschen selbst orientiert, nicht an einer Klasse. *So kämpft er zwar auf seiten der Proletarier, weil sie am stärksten unter sozialer Ausbeutung und Not zu leiden haben*, er erstrebt aber letzten Endes nicht die Diktatur des Proletariats nicht die Herrschaft einer Klasse, sondern die Gleichstellung aller Klassen, d.h. ihrer Abschaffung durch die Überwindung der sozialen Unterschiede und des Hasses zwischen ihnen. Tollers gelegentliche Forderung der Diktatur des Proletariats ist mehr von dem Wunsch des sozialen Gleichberechtigung der Arbeiter diktiert als von dem marxistischen Gedanken des Machtaustausches. (my emphasis) [40]

Toller himself, however, rejected the idea that he was involved in the revolutionary struggle merely out of sympathy for the workers' plight. This would be dangerous, he argued, for it would lead one to idealise the workers, to become blind to their faults. It was important, he stressed, to see working people as they were, not as an army of saints, but as the 'Träger einer neuen großen Idee'. For that reason, and for that reason alone it was necessary to take part in their struggle for liberation.[41]

A more differentiated view of Toller's political development is provided by Malcolm Pittock, a sober and acute critic whose study is either neglected or subject itself to some harsh criticism, mainly because, we would suggest, it highlights some of the weaknesses, artistic and ideological, in Toller's plays.[42] Yet while not an uncritical admirer of Toller, Pittock does see merit in him. Indeed, he argues, that, though not a great writer like Brecht, he 'kept alive issues that Brecht tried to close both in his dramatic theory and practice', adding:

> Brecht's plays no longer challenge in the way Toller's still obstinately do. Partly, it is because Toller, unlike Brecht, did not see man as a product of social conditions and therefore infinitely changeable. The best thing that socialism could do was to give the old Adam a chance, as he puts it. Brecht never faces the problem that Toller examines in *Hinkemann*. For Toller, unlike Brecht, knew that some problems would be insoluble in any

> form of society whatsoever.[43]

Pittock also argues that another of Toller's great merits was that in his very own person he undermined the 'old sterile disputes over the relation between literature and commitment', and proved in practice that it is possible to be both honest in one's art and to be passionate about some political cause.[44] Describing his socialism as being based on an 'intense humanism', Pittock sees Toller the politically committed artist as a model for later writers such as Günter Grass and Heinrich Böll.[45]

In his study of Toller's work during the Weimar Republic, Andreas Lixl rejects the argument put forward by some that Toller was a man who fell 'zwischen den Stühlen', in other words, as someone who was plagued by inner uncertainty as to the strength of his commitment to the struggle for a better society.[46] Lixl, who sees Toller as a sober and brilliant analyst of the political situation facing Germany during the twenties and thirties, writes that one of his greatest achievements, one of the greatest achievement of Toller's literature, was that he grasped the tragedy of the 'inneren Aushöhlung der Demokratie durch ihre feindlichen deutschnationalen Hegemonievorstellungen' and that he used the theater as a 'Forum eines Sozialistischen Tribunals', putting it in the service of 'dem Geist einer neuen Gerechtigkeit':[47]

> Seine Dramatik und Publizistik erachtete Ernst Toller in erster Linie als Mittel, um die Erinnerung an die revolutionären Utopien einer demokratischen Entwicklung Deutschlands nicht abreißen zu lassen.[48]

Dieter Distl shares Lixl's appreciation of Toller's political insight but criticises him for having decided not to belong to any political party after he was released from prison, saying that this was an 'entscheidenden politischen Fehler':

> Er hatte sich mit diesem Entschluß jeder politischen Platform beraubt, die es ihm erlaubt hätte, sich deutlicher akzentuieren, Meinungen beeinflussen,

> letztlich auch die erforderliche Macht ausüben zu können. Seiner Betätigung im Vorfeld der Politik fehlte die entsprechende Durchschlagskraft auf eine bestimmte Massenorganisation. Er fand im vorpolitischen Raum auch nicht die Resonanz, die seine klaren Analysen und seine treffsicheren Prognosen verdient hätten.[49]

Unfortunately, Distl himself makes a mistake, an interpretive one, when in discussing Toller's activities in exile, he fails to grasp the real nature of the politics of the *Volksfront*, and fails to understand the precise impact it had on Toller's politics. When speaking about Spain, for instance, he writes of how Toller must have experienced the defeat of the Republic as 'erneute Erfahrung einer verratenen Revolution', but does not mention the role played by the advocates of the *Volkfront*, the Stalinists and their myriad supporters, in ensuring that defeat.[50]

As already explained, Dove too fails to perceive the precise nature of the shift in Toller's politics in exile, yet, despite this, his study is one of the most interesting and perceptive of recent years. While accepting that Toller's brand of revolutionary socialism *did* have roots in the anarchist tradition, in particular that advocated by Gustav Landauer, it is only in his first play, *Die Wandlung*, Dove argues, that the political position of both men fully coincides.[51] The most abiding influence on Toller, he maintains, was that of Kurt Eisner, in particular his belief that it was possible to create a synthesis out of Kant's ethical idealism and revolutionary socialism, to argue, in other words, that Kant's ethical ideals 'would be realised only in the economic organisation of Socialism'.[52] Dove also rejects the notion that, late in life, Toller became pessimistic about the prospects of creating a new society. While it is true that in the years 1922-24 he went through a phase of deep pessimism, a pessimism reflected in *Hinkemann*, he managed to overcome this and emerged with a new political attitude, an attitude of 'commitment without illusions'. Toller came to see revolution in a 'longer perspective', Dove writes 'its success depending on the cultivation of a socialist consciousness through education and

upbringing'.[53] Subsequently too, he abandoned his commitment to absolute pacifism, being obliged to concede that this was 'incompatible with revolutionary action'.[54] Dove is correct to argue that Toller did come to see the limitations of pacifism in the 1930s, yet he is wrong to suggest that it was because he felt it was incompatible with revolutionary action. By the mid to late thirties, the period under discussion, Toller had, in effect, abandoned the revolutionary struggle and had become simply an anti-fascist. He renounced pacifism, then, because he could see it was not compatible with his demand that the democracies — i.e. the imperialist powers — should band together to resist Hitler, with force if necessary.

One other significant strand in Dove's thesis concerns the question of whether or not there was a conflict between the views Toller expressed as a politician and those he expressed in his artistic work. Countering an argument advanced by Thomas Bütow, Dove contends there was not:

> It is a critical common-place that all Toller's work has autobiographical significance. While his work is a reflection of experience, however, it is above all a reflection of *political* experience, and the conclusion he drew from it; that is, it also articulates his political commitment and philosophy. Thomas Bütow seeks to emphasis the conflict in Toller's personality between 'Dichter' and 'Politiker' — I shall argue that he was able to reconcile these tendencies, interpreting his plays as a reflection, not a contradiction, of his political philosophy.[55]

Bütow, whose study is certainly one of the most comprehensive and well-documented and probably one of the most perceptive and sensitive, maintains that a deep political and artistic crisis afflicted Toller after his participation in the *Räterepublik*.[56] Prior to his involvement in Munich, Bütow argues, Toller had been a 'Gesinnungsethiker', in other words, like Friedrich, the hero of *Die Wandlung*, he believed that the world could be changed, not by violent revolution, but by 'immateriellen Mitteln', that persuasion and the power of example of the Expressionist 'Neuer Mensch' alone could transform the

outlook of the masses.[57] The impact of the events in Bavaria, however, brought about the collapse of Toller's 'Wunschwelt':

> Alltagswirklichkeit und die "andere", vermeintlich "wahre" Realität treten erbarmungslos auseinander, die Kluft zwischen Gesinnungs- und Verantwortungsethiker, zwischen "Künstler" und "Politiker" tut sich auf.[58]

Toller, then, Bütow maintains, tried to bridge the gulf between ideal and reality not by abandoning his 'Wunschvorstellung' but by dividing his own self into artist and politician, with Toller the artist continuing to play the 'gesinnungsethische dichterische Rolle' while Toller the politician played the 'vernunftethische'.[59] However, this 'Realitätskrise', as Bütow defines it, led to the utter pessimism of the '*Hinkemann* -Weltbildes':

> In der Absolutheit, in der er die Unmöglichkeit verkündet, das Leiden auf Erden zu beenden, ist auch Hinkemann eine Spiegelung von Tollers dichterischem Ich. Der Politiker Toller weigert sich aber, die Resignation zu vollziehen, die ihm der Dichter Toller mit seinem pessimistischen *Hinkemann*-Weltbild aufnötigen will.[60]

This conflict, the key to the understanding of Toller's dramatic work, Bütow believes, is resolved only in *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* in which the 'vernunftethische' position is 'stärker ausgebaut als je zuvor oder danach in Tollers Werk'.[61] Thereafter, however, a regression sets in with the main characters in the two exile plays, *Nie wieder Friede* und *Pastor Hall*, return to the 'gesinnungsethische' position of *Die Wandlung*, to the view, that is, that before social change can come about, mankind has to go through an inner one. Bütow's thesis, though it clearly has much to commend it, is too schematic to be able to account satisfactorily for the development of Toller's views in exile, and does not take sufficient account of the experience he had accumulated in the intervening years, in particular, of course, the experience of the rise of fascism.

A more recent study of Toller's work which shares some of Bütow's premises is

that by Sigurd Rothstein.[62] He too points to the fact that *Die Wandlung* was the only one of Toller's dramas to be written before his involvement in the *Räterepublik*, in events, that is, which left a deep and abiding imprint on Toller's political outlook:

> Das erste Drama endet mit dem Wandlungsakt des Protagonisten und des Volkes mit dem jubelnd optimistisch vorgetragenen Programm der Menschheitserneuerung, die auf der Bühne zur Ausrufung der Revolution führt. Alle anderen Dramen entstehen nach der für Toller enttäuschend verlaufenen realen deutschen Revolution. Sie lassen sich als die relativierende — und z.T. auch negierende Stellungnahme zu der im ersten Drama verkündeten Vision von der Neugeburt der Welt lesen.[63]

The outcome of the November Revolution, Rothstein argues, was for Toller a 'Desillusionierungserfahrung tiefgreifender Art'[64] and whereas in his first drama the hero, Friedrich, 'seine Umwelt gleichsam bezwingen [kann]', the two central figures of *Hinkemann* and *Hoppla, wir leben!*, are 'zwei ohnmächtige [...] Opfer ihrer Gegenwart'.[65] In his richly documented study, Carel ter Haar also stresses the disillusion and pessimism which characterise Toller and his work after the failure of the revolution, arguing too that his central themes were the existential ones of the nature of man's existence, the problems of 'Leere', 'Einsamkeit und Ohnmacht', problems which, prior to 1918, he had believed could be solved by social transformation, 'durch die Hinwendung zum Mitmenschen', but which, he came to realise, had no real solution:

> Die Darstellung dieses Erkenntnisprozesses bildet demnach die Hauptthematik in Tollers Werk, dessen Intention eigentlich der Bewältigung der durch das Wegfallen der Illusionen entstandenen Einsamkeit und Leere, die Toller als eine ewig-menschliche Problematik betrachtete, gelten sollte.[66]

Toller's principal concerns, ter Haar believes, were of a more or less religious nature and he addresses himself, therefore, not to Toller's politics but to his Jewish identity.

Dorothea Klein, in what is another important and influential study, traces the

development of Toller's political ideology during the Weimar period and how this is reflected in the form of his dramatic work.[67] Toller, she points out, never understood his art as 'Selbstzweck', never sought to retreat into an Ivory Tower, to evade, that is, the social and political problems of his time, but to contribute in his own fashion towards changing social and political reality.[68] Unlike Bütow, she characterises Toller's stance as that of the 'Verantwortungsethiker', writing that with the concept 'Verantwortung' was meant 'Verantwortung für das Humane in jedem einzelnen und in der Gemeinschaft', this being how Toller conceived the task not only of the writer but also of the politician 'ja letztlich "die menschliche Sendung" überhaupt'.[69] Within this 'Verantwortung' framework, however, Klein detects a remarkable change in Toller's politics and his art:

> Tollers Dichtung und politisches Handeln, die von der Absicht bestimmt sind, Verantwortung auch in anderen wachzurufen, zielen zunächst unmittelbar auf die Veränderung des individuellen Bewußtseins und darauf aufbauend auf einen umfassenden sozialen Umbruch. Später orientieren sie sich dagegen in ungleich stärkerem Maß an den tatsächlichen Gegebenheiten der Umwelt und beschränken sich hauptsächlich darauf, in begrenztem und konkretem Radius zur schrittweisen Verwirklichung einer freiheitlichen sozialistischen Gesellschaft beizutragen. In den Kategorien von Max Webers ausgedrückt, [...] ist Toller seiner Grundhaltung nach durchweg Verantwortungsethiker, nimmt aber zunächst fraglos eine absolute Kongruenz von Gesinnungs- und Verantwortungsethiker an. Dann erwächst in ihm das Bewußtsein ihrer teilweisen Unvereinbarkeit. Er erkennt, daß sich gesinnungsethische Prinzipien in den gegenwärtigen Verhältnissen nicht durchsetzen lassen und nähert sich einer realeren, rein verantwortungsethischen politischen Haltung an.[70]

Klein's interpretation seems entirely sound, but it is a pity it does not go on to deal with his development during the thirties.

One of the most recent studies of Toller's work, by Cordula Grunow-Erdmann, also limits itself to those plays he produced during the Weimar period.[71] Despite some excellent analyses of individual works, however, Grunow-Erdmann, like Willibrand many years ago, is rather too keen to absolve Toller of any suspicion that he might have had

anything in common ideologically with the Communists. Like other dramatists, she argues, Toller saw in the working class 'das Ideal einer neuen Gesellschaft'; unlike them, however, his plays, drawing on the traditions of bourgeois culture, aimed at the 'Vermittlung humaner Werte', values which could only be realised in a socialist society, but socialist society for him being 'gleichbedeutend mit einer wahren demokratischen Gesellschaft'.[72] She continues:

> Die radikale Position der KPD lehnt er grundsätzlich ab. Eine Diktatur des Proletariats entspricht nicht — auch nicht als Übergangsstadium — seinen Vorstellungen eines gemeinschaftlichen Zusammenlebens, vielmehr sieht er in ihr eine Unterdrückung mit umgekehrtem Vorzeichen.[73]

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it fails to account for the fact that, on more than one occasion, Toller expressed deep admiration for the Soviet Union and believed that it was his duty as a revolutionary socialist to defend what he himself called the motherland of the revolution in the face of imperialist and fascist aggression. A similar mistake is made by Wolfgang Rothe in his otherwise excellent study in the Rowohlt *Bildmonographien* series.[74] Praising, quite justifiably, Toller's keen insight into the emerging fascist danger and his attempt to warn the workers' movement of this, Rothe writes:

> Angesichts des realpolitischen Versagens der SPD und der Stalinisierung der KPD handelte der ethische Typus Toller historisch richtig, als er sich keiner der beiden großen Linksparteien zur Verfügung stellte. Seine Unbedingtheit hinderte ihn jedenfalls nicht, die deutsche Wirklichkeit in ihrer ganzen Gefahr zu erkennen, ermöglichte ihm vielleicht erst, das Ausmaß kommenden Unheils zu begreifen. Die Voraussagen von *Reichskanzler Hitler* [Toller's article of that name] über eine Nazi-Schreckensherrschaft gingen in ihrer diagnostischen Schärfe weit über die Befürchtungen der "Realpolitiker" hinaus. Toller war der Realist, nicht jene.[75]

Once more, this is an excellent but limited interpretation which does not address Toller's

close relationship with the Communists later on in exile.

Finally, mention has to be made of the most recent study of Toller and his creative works by Cecil Davies.[76] Davies's work, one of the best documented to date, is concerned primarily with the stage productions of Toller's dramatic works, but does have some interesting things to say about his political development, paying particular attention to his pacifism. A pacifist himself, Davies recognises the immense difficulties Toller faced in finding an answer to the problem of how to deal with Hitler, and writes that his 'deep-rooted pacifism and his conviction that Nazism must be destroyed by war if necessary, were impossible to reconcile' and that this contradiction was the major source of weakness in *Nie wieder Friede* and crops up again, though in a different form, in *Pastor Hall*.[77] Despite this, however, Davies is highly complementary about Toller's work and writes, probably correctly, that he expressed 'more comprehensively than any of his contemporaries in drama, the rifts and conflicts of the period', that his plays, far from being the work of an amateur, as some have argued, 'establish him as arguably *the* representative German dramatist of the two decades 1919-1939'.[78]

In the light of the above, it is clearly necessary to try to define more precisely the development of Toller's political views in exile. This study seeks to do that by contrasting Toller's views on the questions of democracy, socialism, fascism and capitalism both before and after his move into exile and in particular, as explained above, after he became involved with the *Volksfront* movement. It traces his views from his early youth, through his time as a soldier in the First World War and then looks at his role in the *Münchner Räterepublik* and how this was reflected in his first play, *Die Wandlung*. Toller's prison plays, *Masse Mensch*, *Die Maschinenstürmer*, and *Hinkemann* are then examined, not in terms of their artistic form, but rather their political message, followed by a section which deals with his analysis of National Socialism, both in his prose

writings and *Der entfesselte Wotan*, and which then looks at his concept of the *Einheitsfront*, comparing this with the anti-fascist strategy advanced by Leon Trotsky. *Hoppla, wir leben!* and *Feuer aus den Kesseln* are then examined with a view to defining Toller's socialism at a crucial phase in his life, while the final part of the study looks at his exile period, in particular his view of the Spanish Civil War, and the two plays he wrote during the 1930s, the comedy, *Nie wieder Friede!*, and *Pastor Hall*.

1. *Die Wandlung. Das Ringen eines Menschen* (Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1919). Reprinted in Ernst Toller, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek, 5 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1978), II. *Gesammelte Werke* is referred to hereafter as *GW*, followed by volume and page numbers where necessary.

2. *Hoppla, wir leben! Ein Vorspiel und fünf Akte* (Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1927). Reprinted in *GW*, III.

3. *Feuer aus den Kesseln! Historisches Schauspiel* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1930). Reprinted in *GW*, III.

4. Care has to be taken in the use of the term documentary realism (*Dokumentartheater*) so that a distinction is maintained between, on the one hand, works such as Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* and Heinar Kipphardt's *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer*, and on the other, works like Rolf Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter*. In the former, substantial sections of the documentary material are incorporated into the text, in many cases quoted verbatim, while in the latter, the material forms merely the factual basis for the play, the author preserving for himself a greater degree of artistic autonomy in framing character, plot etc.. For a discussion of this, see Brian Barton, *Das Dokumentartheater* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987).

5. Full details of editions and productions in John M. Spalek, *Ernst Toller and his Critics. A Bibliography* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1968).

6. Toller hanged himself in the bathroom of his hotel room in the Mayflower Hotel in New York on 22 May 1939. He was only 45. On the background to the suicide see Kurt Pinthus, 'Life and Death of Ernst Toller', *Books Abroad*, 14, no. 1 (1940), pp. 3-8.

7. *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978). First published in Amsterdam by Querido in 1933. Reprinted in *GW*, IV.

8. John M. Spalek, 'Ernst Toller: The Need for a New Estimate', *German Quarterly*, 39 (1966) 4, pp. 581-98.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 590.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 590.

11. Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism in the Work of Ernst Toller* (New York, Frankfurt am Main, Berne: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 427-53.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 435.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 436.

14. In an account of Toller's activities in exile, his various lecture tours and his aid programme for Spain, Spalek writes:

> Dies Darstellung von Tollers Tätigkeit im Exil betont die Kontinuität seiner grundlegenden Überzeugungen und politischen Verbindungen während der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre. Nachdem er unter Zwang

seinen Wohnsitz wechseln mußte und in den angelsächsischen Ländern (Großbritannien und den USA) lebte, läßt sich jedoch eine bemerkenswerte Änderung in seiner Haltung und in seinem politischen Vokabular feststellen.

Vor 1933 bezeichnete sich Toller durchweg als Sozialist. Er brandmarkte häufig Imperialismus und Kapitalismus als die Kräfte, die für einen großen Teil des menschlichen Elends und der Ungerechtigkeit dieser Welt die Verantwortung trugen, und der Sozialismus (so wie er ihn definierte) schien ihm der geeigneteste Weg, die sozialen Ungerechtigkeit seiner Zeit zu beseitigen. Sein langer Aufenthalt in Großbritannien und den USA nach 1933 ermöglichte ihm eine detaillierte Kenntnis der britischen und amerikanischen Regierungssysteme und veranlaßte ihn (besonders nach den Säuberungsprozessen in Rußland), sich mit der Idee der Demokratie zu identifizieren, in der er jetzt die Sicherung und Verkörperung der Freiheit, sozialen Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens sah.

John M. Spalek, 'Ernst Tollers Vortragstätigkeit und seine Hilfsaktionen im Exil', *Exil und innere Emigration II. Internationale Tagung in St. Louis*, edited by Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Egon Schwarz (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1973), 85-100 (pp. 98-99).

This passage reveals the fundamental flaw in Spalek's approach. He does not understand the historical context in which the change in Toller's attitude towards the democracies took place, does not fully grasp, that is, the extent to which it reflected *Volksfront* ideology. He believes, therefore, that Toller really had abandoned his socialism once and for all and had become a 'democrat'. But what is a democrat? Is it not possible to be a democrat and a socialist? Not according to Spalek, who seems to see democracy and socialism as antithetical. Moreover, when he claims that Britain and America were attractive to Toller because they embodied the values of freedom, social justice and peace he is guilty of forgetting exactly what kind of class-ridden and divided societies these were during the 1930s. It is significant too that Spalek skates over the question of Toller's attitude towards the Soviet purges.

15. For a detailed history of the rise and development of the *Volksfront* see David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition. Socialists, Liberals and the Quest for Unity, 1884-1939* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

16. Two others who make the same mistake as Dove are Robert Bruce Elsasser, 'Ernst Toller and German Society: The Role of the Individual as Critic 1914-1939', (unpublished dissertation, Rutgers University, 1973), pp. 330-31, and Dieter Distl, *Ernst Toller: Eine politische Biographie* (Schrobenhausen: Benedikt Bickel, 1993), pp. 211-12. Toller himself, however, was well aware that there was a difference between the two, as is clear from the following appeal for the creation of a *Volksfront* published in the Communist journal *Der Gegenangriff* in 1935:

> Die Einheitsfront gegen Hitler kommt um einige Jahre zu spät. Wäre ihre Notwendigkeit rechtzeitig erkannt worden, hätten die Barbaren, die heute Deutschland regieren, nicht zur Macht kommen können. Heute wartet der Einheitsfront, *die eine Volksfront sein muß*, eine schwere Aufgabe: Deutschland und das deutsche Volk zu befreien. Der Kampf dieser Front muß mit vorbehaltloser Ehrlichkeit aller daran beteiligten Kräfte geführt

werden. Die verschiedenen Parteien, Organisationen und Persönlichkeiten, die sich hier zusammenfinden, haben sich auf ein Zweckprogramm zu einigen. Der Ruf nach der Volksfront genügt nicht. Man muß wissen, wie der deutsche Volksstaat nach dem Sturz Hitlers aussehen soll. Die Menschenrechte dieses deutschen Volksstaates müssen verkündet werden und das Programm diesseits und jenseits der Grenze bilden. Männer aus den verschiedenen Lagern haben erkannt, was not tut. Die Stimme dieser Volksfront muß in Deutschland und im Ausland gehört werden. Konzentrieren wir unsere Arbeit! Verlieren wir keine Zeit!

'Verlieren wir keine Zeit', *Der Gegenangriff*, 3, no. 9 (1935).

17. For the best eye-witness account of the conflict within the Republican camp, see George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938).

18. Toller, it is claimed, confessed to his closest friends that the Moscow Show Trials had been the biggest disappointment of his life but he never spoke out publicly against them. See Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), p. 264.

19. See Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, chapters 10 and 11.

20. For an interesting discussion of how Toller and his works were viewed in the former East Germany see Stephen Lamb, 'Hero or Villain? Notes on the Reception of Ernst Toller in the GDR', *Germanic Review*, 61 (1986), 375-86.

21. Martin Reso, for instance, describing Toller's role during the *Räterepublik*, is prepared to allow that his 'treachery' was unintentional and sprang from the best of motives, yet is adamant that is was treachery nonetheless. Moreover, he seems to suggest that Toller's actions were at least partly responsible for the White Terror which swept Munich following the collapse of the *Räterepublik* in May 1919:

> Seine verhängnisvolle Rolle während der Räterepublik, die zur politischen Kapitulation führt, zeigt deutlich die politische Unerfahrenheit und Verschwommenheit seiner Ansichten [...] Durch seine Handlung in dieser Zeit hat er sein subjektive-ehrliches Wollen ins Gegenteil verkehrt und objektiv die Revolution verraten. Der weiße Terror, der in den Maitagen des Jahres 1919 über München hereinbrach, kostete Tausenden von Unschuldigen das Leben.

Martin Reso. 'Die Novemberrevolution und Ernst Toller', in *Weimarer Beiträge*, 5 (1959), 387-409 (p. 393).

22. Hans Marnette, 'Untersuchung zum Inhalt-Form-Problem in Ernst Tollers Dramen', (unpublished dissertation, Potsdam, 1963), p. 387. Discussing *Masse Mensch*, Martin Reso writes in a similar vein:

> Bei der Betrachtung und Beurteilung des Werkes fällt auf, daß Toller im ganzen Stück, obwohl er es in der revolutionären Situation, die der Schaffung der Räterepublik vorausging, nicht einmal die Frage der Partei berührt. Das ist bei der ihm eigenen Unklarheit verständlich. Das

> Verkennen der Klasse als revolutionärer Kraft und der Partei als Vortrupp der Massen mußte zu der von ihm aufgeworfenen Fragestellung führen. Hätte Toller die Problematik seines Stückes richtig erfaßt, so müßte er es anders konzipiert und vor allem die Partei in ihrer Funktion gezeichnet haben— nämlich als bewußte, kühne, aktive, standhafte Avantgarde, die die "Masse der Werktätigen und Ausgebeuteten" mitreißt und organisiert und sie "auf den Weg des neuen wirtschaftlichen Aufbaus" führt.

'Der gesellschaftliche-ethische Protest', p. 398. The quote Reso uses is from Lenin.

23. Hans Marnette, 'Untersuchung zum Inhalt-Form-Problem', p. 388.

24. *Feuer aus den Kesseln* [...] stellt den Höhepunkt seines gesamten dramatischen Schaffens dar und ist ein fester Bestandteil der proletarisch-revolutionären Literatur. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

25. Toller ist nicht in der Lage, ein gültiges Bild des Widerstandkampfes gegen den deutschen Faschismus zu gestalten. Die ideologische und künstlerische Rückentwicklung Tollers in seinem letzten Drama beruht letztlich auf seiner Isolierung von der Arbeiterklasse während seiner lezten Lebensjahre. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

26. Martin Reso, 'Der gesellschaftlich-ethische Protest', p. 33.

27. William Anthony Willibrand, *Ernst Toller and his Ideology* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, 1945).

28. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

32. See chapter 12.

33. Spalek writes:

> Despite occasional [!] statements in which he is very critical of capitalism and Western culture in general — found mostly in his early works — he never was a Communist [...] Toller's socialism was an ethical creed [...] The political portrait which emerged from his own account and those of others shows him as a man who, despite his participation in the revolution and his sharp criticism of the *status quo*, subscribes to the traditional values of the Western humanistic tradition.

John M. Spalek, 'Ernst Toller: The Need for a New Estimate', pp. 589-91.

34. Michael Ossar, *Anarchism in the Dramas of Ernst Toller. The Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York, 1980), p. 156.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

36. Michael Ossar, 'Anarchism and Socialism in Ernst Toller's *Masse-Mensch*', *Germanic Review*, 51 (1976), 192-208 (p. 193).

37. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

38. *Anarchism in the Dramas of Ernst Toller*, p. 20.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

40. Rosemarie Altenhofer, 'Ernst Tollers politische Dramatik' (unpublished dissertation, Washington University, 1976), p. 17. William MacFarlane Park takes much the same view of Toller's politics as Altenhofer, and also tries to rob his views of their revolutionary edge and subsume them within the tradition of western Social Democracy

> There can be little doubt that Toller's early objections to the existing social order arose from the flaws inherent in the decaying Second Empire and the embryo Weimar Republic. When he had the opportunity to examine more thoroughly the workings of more mature democracies — with all their faults — in Britain and the United States, and witness concurrently the rising oppression and injustice of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, he may have realized that his own particular form of socialism followed the western pattern.

'Ernst Toller: The European Exile Years 1933-1936' (unpublished dissertation, University of Colorado, 1976), p. 87.

41. E. Toller, 'Arbeiten', *GW*, I, 135-49 (p.142).

42. Malcolm Pittock, *Ernst Toller* (Boston: Twanye, 1979).

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-87.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

46. Andreas Lixl, *Ernst Toller und die Weimarer Republik 1918-1933* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1986), p. 17.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

49. Dieter Distl, *Ernst Toller. Eine politische Biographie* (Schrobenhausen: Benedikt Bickel, 1993), pp. 180-81.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

56. Thomas Bütow, *Der Konflikt zwischen Revolution und Pazifismus im Werk Ernst Tollers* (Hamburg: Lüdke, 1975), p. 16.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 399-400.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

62. Sigurd Rothstein, *Der Traum von der Gemeinschaft. Kontinuität und Innovation in Ernst Tollers Dramen* (Frankfurt am Main, Berne, New York and Paris: Peter Lang, 1987).

63. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

66. Carel ter Haar, *Appell oder Resignation?* (Munich: tuduv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1977), pp. 5-6.

67. Dorothea Klein, 'Der Wandel der dramaturgischen Darstellungsform im Werk Ernst Tollers (1919-1930)', (unpublished dissertation, University of Bochum, 1968)

68. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

71. Cordula Grunow-Erdmann, *Die Dramen Ernst Tollers im Kontext ihrer Zeit* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1994).

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

74. Wolfgang Rothe, *Ernst Toller in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983)

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

76. Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996).

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 445-46.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 446-49

CHAPTER 1

TOLLER'S EARLY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

When Toller first came to prominence in Germany it was not as a literary figure but as a revolutionary politician. At the end of the First World War, aged only 25 and with virtually no previous political experience, he played a leading role in the *Münchner Räterepublik*, an abortive attempt to create a regime in Bavaria similar to that which Lenin's Bolsheviks had recently established in Russia.[1] The *Räte* experiment, however, was doomed from the beginning, for, while genuine in their desire to create a more just society, Toller and his comrades had no clear idea of how to achieve their goal, suffered from internal divisions, and, crucially, ran too far ahead of public opinion in the rest of Germany. When the decisive moment came, they found themselves cruelly isolated. On May 1 1919, troops sent by the central government in Berlin, so-called White Troops, entered Munich and unleashed a bloodbath which, according to some estimates, claimed the lives of around 1000 people, among them prominent figures of the *Räte* government such as Toller's friend and mentor, the anarchist poet, Gustav Landauer, and the leader of the Bavarian Communists, Eugen Leviné.[2] Toller managed to escape the same fate only by going into hiding once it was clear the situation had become untenable, thereafter spending 6 weeks on the run, during which time he was the most wanted man in Germany, carrying a reward on his head of 10,000 Reichsmarks.[3] When eventually captured, his whereabouts having been betrayed to the authorities, he was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to 5 years in prison, a comparatively lenient term which Toller owed in large part to testimony given on his behalf by, among others, Thomas Mann and Max Weber.[4] Weber, who first met Toller at an anti-war gathering of artists and intellectuals in September 1917,[5] told the court of his young friend's absolute moral integrity but also of his political naivety and immaturity, explaining that he had become involved in the events in Bavaria out of a misplaced sense of idealism; Toller, Weber explained, was a man whom 'Gott in seinem Zorne zum Politiker auserwählte'.[6] It is perfectly true, as Weber suggests, that, initially at least, Toller was something of a holy-

innocent in matters political. Yet he learned quickly from experience and emerged from the *Räte* experiment not only with his pacifist convictions intact but with a new-found faith in revolutionary socialism, a faith which grew firmer with time and which stayed with him almost until the end of his life.

To those who had known Toller prior to his involvement in the *Räterepublik*, the news that he was considered by the government a dangerous subversive, a revolutionary socialist, a Bolshevik even, must have come as a shock. Until about then, his political outlook had been rather conservative in nature, typical, in fact, of the outlook of the social class to which he belonged. Born in 1893 in Samotschin, a small town in Posen, then a Prussian province, now part of present-day Poland, Toller was middle class in origin, his father being a reasonably prosperous and successful small-businessman, owning a *Kolonialwarenladen* and some farming land in the family's home town.[7] Toller was by no means part of the privileged social elite, but he never knew real poverty or adversity in his childhood and throughout the early part of his life enjoyed all the advantages his father's money could buy. He was, for instance, provided with a first-class education, being taught at times by private tutors before he left home to attend the Gymnasium in Bromberg, the local state capital. Later on, just before the outbreak of the First World War, he went to France where he studied — or, as his autobiography, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, reveals, pretended to study — at the University of Grenoble among some of the gilded youth of Europe.[8] In *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, published in 1933, just after he had been forced into exile, Toller is frank about his family background and makes no attempt to pretend that in childhood and youth he had ever known the sort of hardship and deprivation endured by the working class, the class whose interests he came to champion.[9] He recalls, for instance, how he used to look down on the boys who attended the local *Volksschule*, those, that is, whose parents could not

afford to send them to the *Knabenschule* which he attended. Even in primary school, he and his friends would inspect their classmates' packed-lunches and taunt those too poor to afford a decent filling. Poor people too, Toller learned at a tender age, were dirty and had fleas. Moreover, the fact that they were poor, was part of the natural order of things; it was, in his mother words, 'weil der liebe Gott es so will'. (*EJID*, p. 14) Interestingly, it was only many years later, when he was a student in France, that Toller began seriously to question this proposition:

> Ich bin ein junger Mensch aus bürgerlichem Haus. Daß ich in Frankreich lebe, daß ich studiere, daß ich reise, daß ich versorgt werde, scheint mir "selbstverständlich". Über den Begriff der Freiheit habe ich nie nachgedacht, es sei denn bei philosophischer Lektüre. Daß mein Freund Stanislaus seit seinem vierzehnten Jahr als Tagelöhner arbeitet und von seinem schmalen Lohn die Eltern miternähren muß, war mir recht und billig, ebenso wie mein Recht, das Leben zu "genießen". (*EJID*, p. 34)

Now, however, all this seemed problematic. He was no longer content to believe that the distribution of wealth was God-given and unalterable, and for the first time in his life began to have doubts about a social order in which 'die einen sinnlos Geld verspielen, und die anderen Not leiden'. (*EJID*, p. 35) He recognised that there was a great injustice in a system which gave so much money to his own family but which denied it completely to Stanislaus's family. Yet, recognition of the existence of social inequality did not lead Toller to draw any radical conclusions; he understood only too well that it was money, his parents' money, which both 'bedingt und begrenzt' his own external freedom, and deep inside he did really not want this situation to change :

> Ich beginne, an der Notwendigkeit einer Ordnung zu zweifeln, in der die einen sinnlos Geld verspielen, und die anderen Not leiden. Aber ich liebe das Geld. Ihm habe ich zu danken, daß ich an diesem strahlenden Morgen den von blühenden Glyzinien und Mimosen überhangenen Weg wandern, daß ich auf irgend einem Stein ausruhen kann und hören, wie die Wellen des mittelländischen Meeres gegen die steinige Küste in sanftem Rhythmus schlagen. Ja, ich liebe das Geld mit schlechtem Gewissen. (*EJID*, p. 35)

Oppressed by feelings of guilt about his privileged position, Toller could no longer find any real enjoyment in such pleasures.[10] 'Der Tag ist mir verleidet', he writes, 'die Welt ist mir verleidet, die Werte, die ich gestern für ewig und unverrückbar hielt, sind fragwürdig geworden, ich selbst bin mir fragwürdig'. (*EJID*, p. 35)

Toller, at this stage, was in the throes of a profound identity crisis, full of doubt and uncertainty about both the nature of the society he lived in and his own place within it. Yet this was a crisis not only of social identity but one of ethnic identity too, for Toller was a Jew and from his early childhood felt keenly that he was regarded by some as an outsider, that he was not a fully-integrated member of the German community. In Samotschin, a German town since the middle of the eighteenth century, the Jewish community comprised a small, ever decreasing minority, only around 4% out of a total German population of some 3000.[11] On the surface at least, relations between Germans and German Jews were good, and while there was the occasional name-calling, there was little overt discrimination or anti-Semitic feeling. One good indication of this was the fact that Toller's father was appointed to sit on the local town council, while on a more mundane level, Jews were actually allowed to celebrate the Kaiser's birthday along with the 'Reserveoffizieren, dem Kriegerverein und der Schützengilde', to share a table with these illustrious people, to drink beer with them and toast His Majesty's health. (*EJID*, p. 12) Moreover, when it came to the surrounding Polish population, German and Jew, Toller wrote, 'bildeten [...] eine Front'. (*EJID*, p. 11) 'Samotschin', he explained 'war eine deutsche Stadt. Darauf waren Protestanten und Juden gleich stolz. Sie sprachen mit merklicher Verachtung von jenen Städten der Provinz Posen, in denen die Polen und Katholiken, die man in einen Topf warf, den Ton angeben'. (*EJID*, p. 11) According to Toller, the Germans regarded themselves as the 'Ureinwohner', 'die wahren Herren des Landes' and were almost continually at loggerheads with the Poles, fighting a bitter

struggle with them over every square inch of soil. (*EJID*, p. 11) Any German who sold out to a Pole, Toller explained, was regarded by his compatriots as a traitor. Even the German children spoke of their Polish neighbours contemptuously as 'Polacken' and were taught that these were the 'Nachkommen Kains, der den Abel erschlug und von Gott dafür gezeichnet wurde'. (*EJID*, p. 11) Yet, despite the apparent harmony of outlook and interests between German and Jew, despite the fact that the Jews saw themselves as native Germans and pioneers of German culture, there always existed an invisible but impenetrable barrier of suspicion and hostility, something which invoked in Toller a deep sense of alienation and rejection.

One of his earliest memories is of a young friend being told by her nursemaid not to play with him because he was a Jew, while from Stanislaus he learned, to his horror, that it was the Jews 'die unseren Heiland ans Kreuz geschlagen [haben]':

> Ich laufe in die Scheune, verkrieche mich im Stroh und leide bitterlich. Ich kenne den Heiland, er hängt bei Stanislaus in der Stube, aus den Augen rinnen rote Tränen, das Herz trägt er offen auf der Brust, und es blutet, 'Lasset die Kindlein zu mir kommen', steht darunter. Wenn ich bei Stanislaus bin und niemand aufpaßt, gehe ich zum Heiland und bete.
> — Bitte, lieber Heiland, verzeih mir, daß die Juden dich totgeschlagen haben.
> Abends im Bett frage ich Mutter:
> — Warum sind wir Juden?
> — Schlaf Kind, und frage nicht so töricht.
> Ich schlafe nicht. Ich möchte kein Jude sein. Ich möchte nicht, daß die Kinder hinter mir herlaufen und 'Jude' rufen. (*EJID*, p. 17)

Desperate to be accepted as a 'real' German, Toller sought to erase all traces of his Jewish heritage while at the same time developing an ever closer sense of identity with the Fatherland. When, for instance, he discovered that a certain Herr Grun, a local businessman, had sold his land to a Pole, Toller, still only a schoolboy, wrote a letter to the *Ostdeutsche Rundschau*, one of Bromberg's newspapers, to express indignation at this outrage:

> Ich stelle Gruns mangelden Patriotismus bloß, ich fordere das Einschreiten der preußischen Behörde, welche Zeiten, schreibe ich, Moral und Sitte verfallen, die Deutschen sind nicht mehr auf der Wacht, was soll aus dem Vaterland werden. (*EJID*, p. 24)

The First World War provided him with a perfect opportunity to display the depth of his devotion to the national cause.

Toller was still in France when news came of the murder in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalists of the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Ferdinand. Initially, he writes, public opinion among the French people seemed to be against war. At a mass meeting organised by the Socialist Party he found himself 'eingekeilt zwischen französischen Arbeitern und Arbeiterinnen' whose 'gutmütige Gesichter' and 'klare einfache Züge [...] straff und hart werden, wenn der Redner den Krieg verflucht'. (*EJID*, pp. 35-36) 'Nein', he writes, 'diese Menschen wollen den Krieg nicht. Ihr Schrei "Vive la paix!" ist eine Kampfansage gegen den Krieg'. (*EJID*, p. 36) This mood changed, however, after the murder of Jean Jaurés, the leader of the Socialist Party, which robbed the anti-war movement of its most eloquent and vociferous spokesman. War became unavoidable and Toller decided it was time to return home. As he waited in a station café on what would be the last train to cross the Franco-German border, he heard a French soldier announce to the customers that Germany has just declared war on France:

> Im Café ist es sehr still, der Sergeant geht wieder an seinen Tisch und setzt sich schwer auf seinen Stuhl. Das Schweigen ist wie eine Finsternis, die Licht und Menschen aufsaugt. Der Sergeant springt auf, singt die 'Marseillaise', und jetzt singen sie alle mit. Ich sitze fremd an meinem Tisch, die Kehle ist mir zugeschnürt, nie war mir so bang um Deutschland wie in dieser Sekunde. (*EJID*, p. 37)

Again, Toller writes with great candour about how he felt at that moment and does not seek to conceal the fact that, like millions of other Germans, he too was fully behind the

national war effort. When his train crossed the German border at Lindau, he records, he was seized by an overwhelming, quasi-mystical feeling of love for his country, with the Bavarian *Landswehrmänner* who stood guard at the railway stations seeming to him to signal 'das Vaterland, die Heimat'. (*EJID*, p. 38) 'Wenn ihre Vollbärte wedeln', he writes, 'hören wir die deutschen Wälder rauschen'. (*EJID*, p. 38) Such was his state of intoxication that the German beech trees seemed to him the finest in the world and even an old man's Adam's apple 'liebenswert':

> Ja, wir leben in einem Rausch des Gefühls. Die Worte Deutschland, Vaterland, Krieg haben magische Kraft, wenn wir sie aussprechen, verflüchtigen sie nicht, sie schweben in der Luft, kreisen um sich selbst, entzünden sich und uns. (*EJID*, p. 41)

His critical faculties overwhelmed, Toller was even willing to accept the Imperial Government's claim that Germany was the aggrieved party in this conflict even though French claims of a German attack on France were still ringing in his ears:

> Jetzt lese ich in den deutschen Zeitungen, daß Deutschland angegriffen worden sei, und ich glaube es. Französiche Flieger, sagte der Reichskanzler, haben Bomben auf bayerisches Land geworfen, Deutschland wurde überfallen, ich glaube es. (*EJID*, p. 38)

He volunteered for military service immediately upon his return to Germany and when finally accepted — the Doctor at his medical inspection apparently having been on the verge of declaring him unfit for service — proclaimed that he was proud to be a soldier and to have been accepted into the ranks of the 'Vaterlandsverteidiger'. (*EJID*, p. 40)

At this stage, Toller was, in political terms, almost completely ignorant. Like most Germans, he had no understanding of the real causes of the war, knew nothing of the economic and imperialist rivalry which had given birth to it, and viewed events from the standpoint of the nationalist-conservative ethos he had grown up with. Moreover, like

Friedrich, the hero of *Die Wandlung*, he hoped and believed that the unresolved problems of his Jewish identity, his feeling of exclusion and alienation from German society, could be overcome by war. And, initially, he was convinced he had every reason to believe this to be the case. When the Kaiser proclaimed 'ich kenne keine Parteien mehr, ich kenne nur Deutsche' (*EJID*, p. 39) it seemed to Toller as if war really had begun to break down the barriers of religion, race and class:

> Der Kaiser kennt keine Parteien mehr, hier steht es schwarz auf weiß, das Land kennt keine Rassen mehr, alle sprechen eine Sprache, alle verteidigen eine Mutter, Deutschland. (*EJID*, p. 39)

Taking the Kaiser's words at face value, Toller went off to the front happily singing 'Die Wacht am Rhein' and 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' firmly convinced of the rightness of the German cause.

This image of Toller as a fervent nationalist and supporter of an imperialist war is difficult to reconcile with that of Toller the Expressionist *O-Mensch* poet and militant pacifist-socialist of the Weimar era. At this early stage of the conflict, however, his sole concern was the defence of the Fatherland and he was, or appeared to be, little moved by the immense amount of human suffering he witnessed. In *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* he records one of his earliest experiences after volunteering for the front, the bombardment of a French position near *Pont à Mousson*:

> Am zweiten Fernrohr steht der Leutnant.
> — Sehen Sie die Franzosen?, fragt der Leutnant.
> — Ja.
> — Wollen ihnen Zunder geben, Granate zweiundzwanzighundert, ruft der Leutnant hinüber zum Telephonisten.
> — Granate zweiundzwanzighundert, wiederholt der Telephonist.
> Ich starre durchs Scherenfernrohr. Eine rote Fieberwelle überspült mein Hirn, Erregung befällt mich wie vorm Spieltisch, wie auf der Jagd, mein Herz trommelt, die Hände zucken. In der Luft hohles Gurgeln, drüben steigt eine braune Staubsäule auf.
> Die Franzosen stieben auseinander, nicht alle, etliche liegen am Boden,

> Tote, Verletzte.
> — Volltreffer! ruft der Leutnant.
> — Hurra! schreit der Telephonist.
> — Hurra! schrei ich. (*EJID*, p. 44)

His enthusiasm for battle was such that he even requested a transfer to the Infantry from the Artillery so as to be able to see 'den Feind, gegen den ich kämpfe'. (*EJID*, p. 47) Yet Toller's commitment to the war, his naive faith in the myth and mystique of nationhood, was gradually undermined by experience at the front. He came to realise that war had not after all brought about the kind of transformation in social values and outlook he had hoped for. Quite the opposite. As the war dragged on and the material provision of the front-line troops started to deteriorate, class differences between officers and ordinary soldiers manifested themselves in all sorts of ways.

The officers, for instance, were better fed than the men they commanded, something which caused a great deal of 'böses Blut', as did the fact that the officers had a cinema built for themselves behind the lines and an expensive concrete bunker at the front while the soldiers were forced to live in miserable dug-outs which did not even keep the rain out far less enemy fire. (*EJID*, p. 49) Moreover, while the front-line officers generally treated the men quite fairly, the reserve-officers seized every opportunity to harass the soldiers, as if, Toller writes, 'sie sich und uns beweisen [müßten], wie mächtige Herrn sie geworden sind'. (*EJID*, p. 49) He cites as an example the following incident:

> Franz bekam von zu Hause einen dünnhäutigen Regenmantel, ein junger Reserveoffizier hielt ihn an, was er sich einbilde, die Soldaten hätten sich an Regen und Dreck zu gewöhnen, zum Spaß sei der Krieg nicht da, wenn der gemeine Mann heute einen Regenmantel trage, werde er morgen das Recht nehmen, sich Offiziersmützen aufzusetzen.
> — Sterben können die Offiziere wie wir, sagt Franz, aber leben können sie nicht mit uns. (*EJID*, pp. 49-50)

With no end to the war in sight, the ordinary soldiers grew tired of such treatment, and gradually there was an increase in the number of cases of, if not mutiny, then at least insubordination. 'Latrinengerüchte schwirren von Mund zu Mund', Toller writes, 'dort sollen Soldaten gemeutert, dort sich mit den Franzosen verbrüdert haben. Einem General hätten sie die Kaffeebrühe vor die Füße gegossen, einen Offizier im Graben erschossen'. (*EJID*, p. 49) An even better indication of the growing mood of restlessness and discontent came on the occasion of a visit by the Kaiser himself to the front. The soldiers chosen to line up for inspection, even though hand-picked, were ordered to hand in their live munition 'bevor sie vor des Kaisers Angesicht treten'. (*EJID*, p. 49) Toller does not seem to have been involved in any act of rebellion, but he did begin to ask himself some serious questions about the war and his own involvement in it. When, for instance, he read an article which described the French as a degenerate race, the English as cowardly 'Krämerseelen' and the Russians as 'Schweine', he sent a strongly-worded article of protest to the periodical concerned, the nationalist-patriotic *Kunstwart*,[12] saying that the article had been loathsome and had revealed more about Germany than it did about the enemy. (*EJID*, p. 50) At long last, Toller was beginning to rediscover his sense of humanity and common decency long buried beneath the chaos and tumult of combat.

The moment in which he finally turned his back on the hollow and rotten values at the heart of German nationalism came while he was digging a trench and unearthed the rotting corpse of a French soldier and was suddenly struck by the recognition that this was not a dead Frenchman or German, but simply 'Ein-toter-Mensch':

> Und plötzlich, als teile sich die Finsternis vom Licht, das Wort vom Sinn, erfasse ich die einfache Wahrheit Mensch, die ich vergessen hatte, die vergraben und verschüttet lag, die Gemeinsamkeit, das Eine und Einende [...] Alle diese Toten sind Menschen, alle diese Toten haben geatmet wie ich, alle diese Toten hatten einen Vater, eine Mutter, Frauen, die sie liebten, ein Stück Land, in dem sie wurzelten, Gesichter, die von ihren Freuden und ihren Leiden sagten, Augen, die das Licht sahen und den

> Himmel. In dieser Stunde weiß ich, daß ich blind war, weil ich mich geblendet hatte, in dieser Stunde weiß ich endlich, daß alle diese Toten, Franzosen und Deutsche, Brüder waren, und daß ich ihr Bruder bin. (*EJID*, p. 52)

Whether or not the transformation, the *Wandlung*, in Toller's ideas was as sudden and dramatic as described here, is difficult to say. But that his ideas did change, of that there can be no doubt. Turning his back on the values of the social class to which he belonged, he now embarked upon the road which was to lead him towards the workers' movement and his participation in the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Yet it must not be imagined that Toller became a revolutionary socialist overnight. At this stage, his political views were nebulous and confused. He was opposed to the war and the system which had given birth to it, but had formed as yet no clear idea of how this system could be overthrown or what could replace it. Until 1919, until at least the outbreak of the revolution in Munich, his political views did not develop much beyond a naive, idealistic, pacifism, a belief that war could be ended if only those involved could be made to see the error of their ways. Once more, he writes about all this with great honesty in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*.

Following the dramatic transformation in his attitude towards war, he applied to be transferred to the air-force, not, he explains, 'aus Tapferkeit, nicht einmal aus Lust am Abenteuer, ich will aus der Masse ausbrechen, aus dem Massenleben, aus dem Massensterben'. (*EJID*, p. 54) However, before his transfer could go ahead he suffered what he describes as 'Magen und Herz versagen', but what seems to have been a physical and mental breakdown, ending up in a military hospital in Strassbourg run by Franciscan monks where after some 4 weeks' treatment he was finally declared *kriegsuntauglich*. Thereafter, in an attempt to forget the war, he went to Munich to study at the university, attending lectures on a wide variety of subjects from literature to law, hoping to find some answer to the questions now plaguing him, and some sense in the suffering he had

witnessed in the previous 13 months:

> Immer ist mein Ohr gespannt, Paragraphen und Pandekten, Formen und Stile müssen ein Geheimnis bergen, ein Gesetz, einen Sinn. Das Besondere reizt meinen Hunger nach Wissen, das Allgemeine, das ich suche, bleibt mir verborgen. (*EJID*, p. 54)

It was during this period that he made the acquaintance of some of Germany's foremost men of letters, among them Thomas Mann, Franz Wedekind, Max Halbe and Karl Heneckell, spending evenings with them in a Munich *Gasthaus* where he heard Wedekind sing 'im harten Stakkato seine herrlichen diabolischen Balladen' (*EJID*, p. 55) and once even dared to read his poems to Mann, who was kind enough to offer some friendly criticism. Quite by chance too he met Rainer Maria Rilke in a book-shop, but this encounter with a poet he revered perhaps more than any other served only to remind Toller of what it was he was trying to escape from:

> "Ich habe seit Jahren keine Verse mehr geschrieben", sagt Rilke leise, "der Krieg hat mich stumm gemacht."
>
> Der Krieg? Das Wort verschattet meine Augen, seit Wochen habe ich keine Zeitung mehr gelesen, ich will nichts wissen vom Krieg, nichts hören. (*EJID*, p. 55)

Despite his best efforts, despite immersing himself in art, in music, in literature, where he hoped he could stifle 'die Klage des Menschen, der hilflos zwischen den Gräbern verging', (*EJID*, p. 55) Toller was simply unable to forget the war:

> Vier Wochen, sechs Wochen geht es, plötzlich hat er mich wieder überfallen, ich begegne ihm überall, vor dem Altar des Mathias Grünewald sehe ich durch das Bild den Hexenkessel im Priesterwald, die zerschossenen, zerfetzten Kameraden. Krüppel begegnen mir auf meinen Wegen, schwarzverschleierte, vergrämte Frauen. Ach, die Flucht, die war vergeblich. (*EJID*, p. 56)

His restless, questioning spirit did not allow him to turn his back on reality, it demanded

he confront it in all its starkness and that he find answers to the burning questions posed by war.

Still seeking answers to these questions, Toller attended a so-called *Kulturtagung*, an anti-war gathering of writers, artists and intellectuals organised by the publisher Eugen Diederichs and held in Lauenstein Castle in Thüringen:[13]

> In diesen Zeiten, deren Sinn viele Menschen nicht mehr zu fassen vermögen, sollen die Berufenen über Sinn und Aufgabe der Zeit miteinander sprechen [...] Alle sind sie aus ihren Arbeitsstuben aufgescheucht worden, alle zweifeln sie an den Werten von gestern und heute. (*EJID*, p. 57)

Toller hoped that the participants, people like Max Weber, Richard Dehmel, Walter von Molo, Ferdinand Tönnies, would be able to point a way out of the chaos, the 'Wirren der Zeit', in which not just Germany but the whole of Europe found itself, and that they would provide inspiration to young people in particular, to those, that is, from whom war demanded the greatest sacrifice. (*EJID*, p. 57) But his hopes were dashed when he discovered that these men were not the 'Rebellen' or 'Aufrührer' he had expected, not 'biblische[n] Propheten, die eine verwirrte Welt mit mächtigem Wort richten und verdammen, die bereit wären, den Zorn der Könige und Tyrannen furchtlos zu ertragen'. (*EJID*, p. 57) In fact, they were hopelessly confused, limited in outlook, lacking vision, men with no real grasp of reality and no idea of how to bring the war to an end. Some of them, Toller writes, 'flüchten sich in das Gespinst lebensferner Staatsromantik', while others placed their faith in religion, believing that the time had come to found 'eine deutsche Kirche', outlining concrete plans for a temple 'der auf dem höchsten Berge Deutschlands, allen sichtbar, die Gläubigen sammeln soll'. (*EJID*, p. 57) Max Maurenbrecher saw war as 'eine Schickung des deutschen Gottes', and the curse of the time in the 'demokratischen Individualismus des gottlosen Westeuropas'; the only way

out of the crisis he believed was for Germany to lead the way in creating a new state in Europe, a state which, 'das irdische Gesicht des Absoluten versinnbildlichen [solle]'. (*EJID*, p. 57) Weber too was a disappointment to Toller. It is true, he hated 'alle Staatsromantik' and attacked Maurenbrecher and all those German professors 'die vor lauter Gespinsten die Wirklichkeit nicht sehen'. (*EJID*, p. 57) However, Weber was and remained to the end of his life a conservative nationalist.[14] A strong supporter of his country's war effort, seeing this as a defensive war, a war for national survival,[15] he opposed territorial expansion in the East, but argued that, out of military necessity, Germany should occupy Namur and Liège for 20 years and Luxembourg permanently.[16] He expressed dissatisfaction — and it was this which caused many of the young people at Berg Lauenstein to turn against him — not with the war itself but with the way it was being conducted, believing that the mess Germany was now in was the fault of her being ruled by an outdated and inefficient form of government. He argued that the German state, 'ein Obrigkeitsstaat', a state in which the people had no influence at all on 'die staatliche Willensbildung', was in urgent need of reform. It was necessary, he maintained, to get rid of the unfair and biased 'preußische Klassenwahlrecht', a system which guaranteed the domination of propertied interests, to shatter the power of the civil service, make government accountable to parliament and in general to democratise all state institutions. (*EJID*, p. 57) In private conversations with Toller, he explained that 'das Hauptübel' was to be seen in the person of Kaiser Wilhelm II himself and he declared that once the war was over he would seek to expose the role played by this 'dilitierenden Fatzken' before the whole German people. He would insult the Kaiser, he said, until he was provoked into bringing a court case against him,[17] thus forcing the 'verantwortlichen Staatsmänner' Bülow, Bethmann-Hollweg, Tirpitz to testify under oath. (*EJID*, p. 58) Weber's solution, however, fell far short of what Toller wanted to hear,

for his grievances were too great to be laid at the door of any one individual, even one as important as the Kaiser:

> Bei diesen tapferen Worten wird den Jungen klar, was sie von ihm scheidet. Sie wollen mehr als den Kaiser treffen, anderes als nur das Wahlrecht reformieren, ein neues Fundament wollen sie bauen, sie glauben, daß die Umwandlung äußerer Ordnung auch den Menschen wandle. (*EJID*, p. 58)

Having travelled to this gathering in a mood of confident expectation, Toller ended up feeling nothing but frustration. 'Draußen an den Schlachtfeldern Europas', he writes, 'trommelt der Krieg', (*EJID*, p. 58) but here there were no decisions taken, nothing but endless discussion, endless talk, endless waiting:

> Warum sprechen diese Männer nicht das erlösende Wort, sind sie stumm und taub und blind, weil sie nie im Schützengräben gelegen, nie die verzweifelten Schreie der Sterbenden, nie die Klage zerschossener Wälder gehört, nie die trostlosen Augen verjagter Bauern gesehen haben? (*EJID*, p. 58)

In his impatience and frustration, Toller finally overcame his misgivings about expressing his views in front of people who, he felt, were more experienced, knowledgeable and intelligent than himself, and called on them to lead the way out of the confusion. 'Die Tage brennen und die Nächte', he proclaimed, 'wir können nicht länger warten'. (*EJID*, p. 58) Unfortunately, there was no-one there who could show them the way, the way which led 'in die Welt des Friedens und der Brüderlichkeit'. (*EJID*, p. 58)

'Die Tagung in Lauenstein', he writes, 'hat mich tief enttäuscht. Große Worte wurden gesprochen, nichts geschah'. (*EJID*, p. 59) Yet his participation in this event was not a complete waste of time. Richard Dehmel had encouraged Toller in his literary work after he had heard him recite one of his poems. 'Kümmern Sie sich nicht um uns Alte', Dehmel had told him, 'gehen Sie Ihren Weg, auch wenn die Welt Sie verfolgt und

befehdet'. (*EJID*, p. 58) he continued:

> Sie haben mir da ein Gedicht gesagt, das mit der Zeile schließt "Ich starb, Gebar mich/starb/Gebar mich, Ich war mir Mutter". Das ist entscheidend. An einem Punkt des Lebens muß man sich von allem lösen, auch von der Mutter, man muß sich selbst Mutter werden. (*EJID*, p. 58)

Dehmel's words, if the account of them given here is to be believed, turned out to be prophetic. Finding himself at a crossroads in his life, Toller did decide to go his own way, was, to use his own phrase, reborn, and followed where his conscience led, irrespective of the personal cost.

As a student in Heidelberg, where he had gone after the disappointment of Lauenstein, he joined a student-based anti-war group, the *Kulturpolitischer Bund der Jugend in Deutschland*,[18] a decisive step which saw him move from being a merely passive to an active opponent of the war.[19] The young people involved in the group were like him in that they knew that the promised '"große Zeit" eine elende Zeit ist', they 'klagen den Krieg an und seine sinnlosen Opfer' and had only one desire, 'im Wust der Lüge die Wahrheit zu erkennen'. (*EJID*, p. 60) Yet, as at Lauenstein, Toller's hopes were quickly disappointed for most of his new comrades turned out to be naive idealists who had little or no inclination to pass from words to deeds. 'Sie schrecken zurück vor der Tat', Toller writes, 'die an ihre Worte sich binden müßte':

> Wenn sie mit heißem Kopf und erregtem Gefühl stundenlang diskutiert haben, gehen sie nach Haus, in die schlecht geheizten, häßlich moblierten Zimmer und glauben beruhigt, es sei etwas geschehen. (*EJID*, p. 60)

Listening to their endless discussions he was reminded of Lauenstein, 'an den Wortschwall, an die Tatenlosigkeit, an die Feigheit'. (*EJID*, p. 60) Finally, he could bear this no longer and told his comrades that there was no point in continuing to play the role of accuser. 'Heute gibt es nur einen Weg', he maintained, 'wir müssen Rebellen werden',

(*EJID*, p. 60) a plea which provoked the following reaction:

> Im Zimmer ist es still. Die Ängstlichen nehmen ihre Mäntel und gehen davon, die anderen binden sich zu einem Kampfbund. (*EJID*, p. 60)

Toller's *Kampfbund* — a grandiose name for such an insignificant organisation — never succeeded in attracting more than a handful of followers and made no impact whatsoever on the course of events in Germany.[20] Yet it would be unfair to belittle the activities of those involved by dismissing the venture as a piece of youthful folly. Even at this late stage in the war, November 1917, it still took a great deal of courage, moral and physical, to come out openly in favour of peace. By doing so, Toller and his friends made themselves the object of hatred of all those who wanted to fight to the bitter end. The *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*, for instance, founded in 1917 expressly to oppose any compromise peace settlement,[21] attacked Toller's *Bund* in the press, describing the members as 'Verräter am vaterländischen Gedanken' and 'pazifistische Verbrecher'. (*EJID*, p. 60) Toller relates too that as the group's public spokesman, he received numerous 'Schimpf- und Drohbriefe', citing one from an anonymous 'deutsche Mutter' who wished that he and his comrades should be thrown into a 'Granattrichter [...] und von englischen Geschossen zerrissen werden' and another from a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 who wrote that '[er] möchte, daß die schwarzen französischen Soldaten uns das Fell bei lebendigem Leibe schinden und als Trophäen nach Afrika, dort wo es am dunkelsten ist, mitnehmen'. (*EJID*, p. 61) Right-wing newspapers, Toller writes, 'rufen die Behörden gegen uns auf' while in the universities so-called 'Demokratische Professoren' described the members of the 'Bund' as 'würdelose Pazifisten'. (*EJID*, p. 61) In other words, the concentrated venom of official public opinion was directed against this tiny movement, determined that it should be crushed before it provided a focus for the steadily growing discontent. Only a few weeks after the

Bund had been founded, in December 1917, the authorities, under pressure from the *Oberste Heeresleitung,* decided to clamp down on its activities, expelling from Germany the Austrian and Swiss nationals involved and calling up for military service all the male members, even those who, like Toller, had been declared *dienstuntauglich*.[22] Toller himself escaped conscription, for the moment at least, only by virtue of the fact that he was in hospital, the victim of a bad bout of 'flu.[23] Informed by a fellow student that the *Bund* had been dissolved, he left immediately for Berlin, making his way to the *Reichstag* where he brought the affair to the attention of the opposition parties.[24] This had no effect, however, and his group in Heidelberg remained banned as did the others which had been formed at a number of other universities.[25]

Toller and his friends, then, failed in their efforts to create a mass anti-war movement in Germany, but, as indicated above, this is not, or should not be the sole criterion for determining the significance of the organisation. It would be overstating the case to draw a direct comparison between the *Kulturpolitischer Bund* and the *Weiße Rose*, the anti-Nazi protest movement which developed in Munich towards the end of the Second World War — after all, none of Toller's group had to pay for their beliefs with their lives.[26] Yet the members of Toller's *Bund* were among the most courageous of their generation, were motivated by many of the same ideas as those involved in the *Weiße Rose* and showed much the same mixture of determination and naive idealism. No-one would dismiss Hans and Sophie Scholl and their companions as foolish idealists, even though they had just as little success in their endeavours as did their forerunners some 25 years earlier. Is it just, then, to dismiss the *Kulturpolitischer Bund* as little more than a joke?

As far as Toller was concerned, the Heidelberg episode marked a significant stage in the development of his political outlook. Up until then, he had been simply an

opponent of war, had recognised in it 'das Verhängnis Europas, die Pest der Menschheit, die Schande unseres Jahrhunderts' but had given as yet little thought as to its causes, had not seriously addressed the important question of 'wer den Krieg verschuldet hat'. (*EJID*, p. 63) Now he began to understand that war was not simply the result of man's evil nature, but that its roots lay in the social and economic contradictions of capitalist society. 'Die Frage der Kriegsschuld', he wrote in *Eine Jugend*, 'ist nicht nur eine Frage der Kriegsschuldigen, die Herrschenden sind verstrickt in das feinmaschige Netz der Interessen, Ehrbegriffe, Moralwerte der Gesellschaft':

> Sie suchen Macht und Ruhm und Freiheit ihres Volkes in der Ohnmacht, im Elend, in der Unterdrückung anderer Völker. Aber kein Volk ist wahrhaft frei ohne die Freiheit seiner Nachbarn. Die Politiker belügen sich selbst und belügen die Bürger, sie nennen ihre Interessen Ideale, für diese Ideale, für Gold, für Land, für Erz, für Öl, für lauter tote Dinge sterben, hungern, verzweifeln die Menschen. Überall. (*EJID*, p. 63)

'Die Frage der Kriegsschuld', he concluded, 'verblaßt vor der Schuld des Kapitalismus'. (*EJID*, p. 63) Whether or not Toller was as clear on this question in 1917 as he was in 1933 when he published his autobiography is difficult to say. However, it does seem clear that he was once more moving along the line of thought interrupted by the outbreak of war in August 1914. In the Bund's *Leitsätzen*, written mainly by Toller and published on 4 November 1917, it is stated that the organisation fights for 'friedliche Lösung der Widersprüche des Völkerlebens', for the 'Abschaffung der Armut' and 'setzt sich für eine Wirtschaftsform ein, die eine sinnvolle Erzeugung und gerechte Verteilung der materiellen Güter bewirkt'.[27] In *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* Toller explained why this point had been taken up in the Bund's programme:

> Denn, sagen wir uns, ist keiner mehr arm, wird die Gier aufhören, fremdes Geld zu raffen, fremdes Land, fremde Völker zu knechten und fremde Staaten zu unterjochen, nur die Armen sind verführbar, leidet keiner Hunger, wird niemand dem anderen das Brot neiden, Krieg und

> Armut sind verhängnisvoll verkoppelt. (*EJID*, p. 60)

It was not enough, he now realised, simply to denounce war and to campaign against it, it was also necessary to campaign against the conditions which gave rise to it, in other words, against poverty and social injustice. But as he freely admitted, neither he nor any of his comrades in the Bund knew 'wie die Armut abzuschaffen ist, keiner wie die Widersprüche des Völkerelends friedlich gelöst werden sollen, nur daß es geschehen muß, wissen wir alle'. (*EJID*, p. 60) Toller was clearly moving towards some sort of socialist position but, as he himself admits, before he could link his fate with that of the working class he had first of all to overcome a number of deeply ingrained prejudices. 'Die Arbeiterbewegung und ihre Ziele' he writes, 'waren mir fremd bisher, auf der Schule hatte man uns gelehrt, daß die Sozialisten den Staat zerstören, daß ihre Führer Schurken seien, die sich bereichern wollen'. (*EJID*, pp. 63-64) He would overcome these prejudices after meeting Kurt Eisner, the man who would soon find himself catapulted to the head of the revolutionary movement in Bavaria.

Before considering Toller's role in the *Räterepublik* and the events which lead to it, it is necessary, at this point, to take a brief look at the ideas of a man whose influence on his, Toller's, political thinking was perhaps greater than Eisner's, the anarchist poet and philosopher, Gustav Landauer.[28] Toller seems to have first become acquainted with Landauer's views at about the time of the Burg Lauenstein conference,[29] it being then that he read the latter's most important and famous theoretical work, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*.[30] As the title suggests, Landauer's *Aufruf* is first and foremost an attempt to define his own ethical vision of socialism. A large part of it, however, consists of a fierce polemic against Marxism, against, that is, the German Social Democratic Party and the Trades Unions affiliated to it. In Landauer's eyes Marxism was 'die Pest unserer Zeit und der Fluch der sozialistischen Bewegung', (*Aufruf*, p. 42) the leaders of this

movement time-serving bureaucrats and the rank-and-file workers themselves nothing but Philistines. (*Aufruf*, p. 43) Indeed, it was this, 'die Philisterhaftigkeit des Proletariers', Landauer claimed, which explained why Marxism had so much appeal to them, Marxism to him being an 'ins System gebrachte Philistersinn'. (*Aufruf*, p. 54) Much of Landauer's bile was, of course, simple rhetorical excess, part and parcel of everyday political discussion and debate, yet there can be no doubt about the depth of his hostility towards organised labour.[31] The question is: why was a man who described himself as a socialist, someone who so clearly sympathised with the oppressed masses so hostile towards what was, after all, the party that they themselves had built?

To a large extent, Landauer's hostility was a reflection of his hostility towards capitalist society. Like many intellectuals and artists, he too was repelled by modern industrialism, the ugliness and soullessness of factory civilisation. He felt keenly that, under this system, the autonomous individual was being slowly crushed, degraded and dehumanised, reduced to the level of the machines many of them were forced to operate.[32] Marxists too, of course, were appalled by the brutality of capitalism, but they also believed that there was a positive, progressive side to its development. Marx, Engels and their followers argued that, by increasing the productive capacity and efficiency of the economy, by multiplying the output of goods to an unparalleled degree, by creating, in other words, a world of plenty, capitalism was laying the material foundations for a socialist society. Not only that, but in its very development, by expanding industry, capitalism was also creating its own grave-digger in the shape of the industrial proletariat.[33] Sooner or later, when capitalism had collapsed under the weight of its inherent contradictions — the tendency towards overproduction, the conflict between private ownership and socialised production — the working-class would lead a revolution, a revolution which would replace capitalism by the socialist society already growing

within the capitalist womb.[34] Landauer, however, could not accept this analysis, could not accept that there was anything remotely positive or progressive about capitalism. On the contrary, he regarded its growth as inimical to the establishment of socialism. Unlike Marx, Landauer was opposed not merely to capitalist property relations, that is, to the private ownership of the means of production, but, as indicated above, to industrialism and the whole of modern urban society. Where Marx and his disciples believed that the forces of industrialism, once rationalised and placed at the disposal of society as a whole, would be potentially liberating, Landauer saw them as enslaving and de-humanising, and maintained they would remain so even in a socialist society. (*Aufruf*, pp. 48-52)[35]

Landauer's hostility towards Marx, however, was not based solely upon his distaste for industrialism and the latter's alleged enthusiasm for it: he also rejected what he felt was the determinist strain in Marx's writings, the notion that capitalism was automatically preparing the ground for socialism. Landauer felt that this view left little or no room for human creativity, made the masses believe they need do nothing to achieve their desired end except assume the role of passive spectator.[36] Marx's materialist interpretation of history posited that socialism was only possible once the social and economic conditions for it had matured: Landauer, an ethical idealist, maintained that the advent of socialism was not dependent on any social or economic factors but could be realised under all circumstances; socialism, he imagined, could come about if enough people were prepared to work to achieve it, here and now, 'man müsse ihn nur wollen'.[37] Though not an unqualified admirer of Nietzsche, Landauer was convinced of the truth of the notion that man was, in essence, a creature of volition, that he had the ability to transform both himself and his circumstances through an act of will.[38] Landauer's voluntarism, the converse of Marxist determinism, caused him to take an extremely critical and jaundiced view of the whole organised labour movement. In his

eyes, all of the activities of the SPD and the Trades Unions, their attempts to improve the position of the workers by bargaining with employers, voting in parliamentary elections and so on, were not just futile, but damaging to the workers' cause. Whereas the socialist leaders believed they had a right and a duty to make use of every available weapon in the struggle for political power, Landauer saw this as an act of betrayal and described the SPD not as a revolutionary but a reformist party, one, that is, whose aim was to improve the workers' lot within the framework of the bourgeois state, not to overthrow it. In so doing, Landauer argued, the SPD, the Marxists, were at once increasing the power and resilience of the reactionary capitalist state and weakening the initiative and creativity of those individuals and groups who wanted to create a new type of society. (*Aufruf*, p. 34)

In a sense, Landauer's criticisms of the SPD were justified. Despite maintaining a formal allegiance to revolutionary Marxism, the party had, in fact, become reconciled to capitalism, had identified its own interests, the interests of the working-class, with those of the bourgeois state, to such a degree, in fact, that in August 1914 it abandoned any pretence of internationalism and lent its support to the government in an imperialist war.[39] Yet Landauer's view of these developments was extremely narrow, and one-sided. With his eyes focused firmly on developments in Germany, he completely overlooked the growth of working-class militancy in other countries, particularly in Russia, where in 1905 the industrial proletariat had spearheaded the revolutionary onslaught against Tsarism, that seemingly indestructible pillar of European reaction. Yet the events in Russia, events which electrified the workers' movement internationally and acted as a dress rehearsal for October 1917, are not even mentioned in Landauer's *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*. Instead, he came to the pessimistic conclusion that the working-class was lost to the struggle for socialism. Deceived into thinking that their fate was linked

to the success or failure of the capitalist system, the workers, he believed, were not only unable but unwilling to reach revolutionary conclusions. The working-class, Landauer claimed, was not 'eine revolutionäre Klasse' but simply 'ein Haufen armer Schlucker [...], die im Kapitalismus leben und sterben müssen' and who could not appreciate the need for rebellion and renewal. (*Aufruf*, p. 77)

Repelled by industrialism, bitterly opposed to Marxism and with no faith in the working-class, Landauer came to describe himself as anarcho-socialist and to advocate a political philosophy which aimed at the creation of a stateless society, a *Gemeinschaft* made up of craftsmen and peasants living and working in the countryside in small, self-sufficient settlements — *Siedlungen* — organised on the basis of producer and consumer co-operatives. Drawing on his own intensive studies and on Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*,[40] a classic account of co-operation in human and animal history, Landauer pointed out that the forces of communitarianism had been powerful in the Middle Ages but had been in retreat from about 1500 when they had begun to give way before the rise of the authoritarian, centralised state.[41] Landauer, in other words, saw the rise of the bourgeois state as merely the culmination of a trend, a counter-revolution, which had been in progress for around 600 years. The task, as he saw it, was to reverse that trend, to revive the communal, co-operative spirit of the Middle Ages and create a society, a *Gemeinschaft,* which would allow the individual to express his or her own humanity free from the corrupting, debasing influence of industrialism and urbanism. Contrasting his vision of socialism with the *Kapitalsozialismus* advocated by the Marxists, Landauer wrote:

> So steht's nun in ganzer Schärfe einander entgegen.
> Hie Marxismus — hie Sozialismus
> Marxismus — die Geistlosigkeit, die papierne Blüte am geliebten Dornstrauch des Kapitalismus.
> Sozialismus — das Neue, das sich gegen die Verwesung, die Kultur, die

> sich gegen die Vereinigung von Ungeist, Not und Gewalt, gegen den modernen Staat und den modernen Kapitalismus erhebt. (*Aufruf*, p. 42)

But precisely how was this new, socialist *Gemeinschaft* to arise and what relationship would it have with existing capitalist society? Would it require the overthrow of the bourgeois state or could it exist quite happily alongside it? Landauer's answer to these questions exposes the utopianism, naivety, almost simple-mindedness of his vision of socialism. His analysis of the nature of the state and his proposals for dealing with it are, again, heavily influenced by his readings of Nietzsche. Like all social and political institutions, he thought, the state could only exist so long as it enjoyed the voluntary co-operation of the individual. However, if the individual, making use of his own free will, decided that he no longer wished to give his voluntary support to the state, the state would simply cease to exist.[42] In Landauer's opinion, then, the authoritarian state was not something imposed on society, an external force which demanded the individual's acquiesence, but a condition, a relationship between human beings, a type of behaviour, it was merely the name for that which man allows.[43] The power of the tyrant, Landauer declared, derives not from some external source, but from the voluntary servitude of men themselves.[44] This being so, it followed that men could be free if they so desired; as with socialism, so also with freedom and the abolition of the state: it was only necessary to desire them. Landauer argued, therefore, that the power of the state would be destroyed, not by violence, to which he was absolutely opposed, but by people deciding to constitute themselves apart from the state, by, for instance, setting up the sort of land-based, communitarian, self-help settlements he favoured.[45] Instead of an all-out frontal assault, the capitalist state could be obviated simply by building an alternative social order behind its back.[46]

Whether or not Landauer's theory of the state was correct — and experience until

now, at least, has shown it to be unrealistic and impractical — is of no real importance. What is important is to note that, even in its own terms, this theory was self-contradictory. The authoritarian state, Landauer argued, existed only because mankind allowed it to exist. It existed because of the stupidity and inertia of the masses, masses who preferred servitude to freedom, dependence to self-reliance, masses who allowed their lives to be manipulated and controlled not just by the state but by their own political party, the SPD, which actually fostered and encouraged them in their passivity and enslavement. (*Aufruf*, pp. 24-62) Yet if the masses were as stupid and inert as Landauer argued, how could they be made to see the need for a new social order and to become part of it? He could only answer this question by a retreat into mysticism. The new order, Landauer claimed, would be born first of all in the soul of the individual. Again, by sheer power of will, each and every individual could transform him or herself, could experience a spiritual rebirth, discover the true humanity, the new world within themselves. (*Aufruf*, p. 145) Landauer admitted, of course, that, initially, only a few exceptional isolated individuals would be capable of such a *Wandlung*. However, their example would inspire the masses, who would then see that the new society, a new *Gemeinschaft* based on cooperation rather than enslavement, was the only way forward:

> Die Lust zum Schaffen der kleinen Gruppen und Gemeinden der Gerechtigkeit, nicht himmlischer Wahn oder symbolische Gestalt, sondern irdische Gesellschaftsfreude und Volksbereitschaft der Individuen wird den Sozialismus, wird den Beginn wirklicher Gesellschaft herbeiführen. Der Geist wird sich direkt betätigen und wird aus lebendigem Fleisch und Blut seine sichtbaren Formen schaffen. (*Aufruf*, p. 37)

In contrast to Marx, who believed that mankind had first of all to liberate itself from the constraints of material necessity before it could liberate itself spiritually, Landauer believed that the spiritual transformation had to precede the economic one: the new communities which he advocated were conceived as the physical manifestation of this new

spirit.[47]

Landauer's anarcho-socialism, 'ein Bestreben, mit Hifle eines Ideals eine neue Wirklichkeit zu schaffen', (*Aufruf*, p. 4) held an enormous appeal for Toller. War had revealed to him and his generation both the destructive capacity of industrial civilisation and the enormous compulsive power of the reactionary Wilhelmine state. It was able to mobilise people and resources on an enormous scale in the defence of what it called the national interest but which was, Toller had learned, simply another name for the social and economic interests of a small minority. In its pacifism, its opposition to the bourgeois state, its commitment to transcendental morality, its appeal to the *Geist*, above all, in its call to mankind to transform itself, Landauer's *Aufruf* harmonised well with Toller's political and philosophical outlook at that time. With no contact with organised labour, no understanding of scientific socialism, no idea of how society could be changed, Toller found Landauer's ideas, ideas couched in a quasi-poetic, messianic, ecstatic language, irresistible. In a letter to Landauer written after he had read the *Aufruf*, Toller expressed his agreement with the ideas he had found there in a style similar to that of his new mentor:

> Was könnte ich Ihnen nun noch sagen? Daß ich glaube, wir müssen vor allen Dingen den Krieg, die Armut und den Staat, bekämpfen, der letzthin nur die Gewalt und nicht das Recht (als Besitz) kennt, und an seine Stelle die Gemeinschaft setzen, wirtschaftlich gebunden durch den friedlichen Tausch von Arbeitsprodukten gegen gleichwertige andere, die Gemeinschaft freier Menschen, die durch den Geist besteht. (*EJID*, p. 62)

Despite the reference to the economic model on which the new community should be based, it is clear from this letter that what impressed Toller most about the *Aufruf* was not Landauer's proposals for a self-help community, but the emphasis on spiritual renewal:

> Nicht Sekte gemeinsamer Schöpferischer träume ich, das Schöpferische hat jeder als Eigenbesitz, das Schöpferische kann sich in seinem reinsten Ausdruck nur in der Arbeit des Einzelnen offenbaren, aber das Gefühl der Gemeinschaft ist beglückend und stärkend. (*EJID*, p. 62.)

Toller subsequently rejected much of Landauer's ideas, in particular the belief that it was possible to reject industrialism and establish a workable society on the basis of small-scale handicraft and small agricultural holdings. It is significant, however, that in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, written at a time in which his commitment to revolutionary socialism was probably at its peak, Toller still seemed to cling to the voluntarist notion that the power of the state could be destroyed and a new, free society created if only the masses could transform themselves spiritually. Referring to the period towards the end of the First World War, Toller wrote:

> Unvernunft und Blindheit beherrschen die Völker und die Völker dulden ihre Herrschaft, weil sie dem Geist, der Vernunft mißtrauen, die das chaotisch Planlose dämmen und ordnen und schöpferisch formen könnten.Weil der Mensch organisch wächst, nennt er seine Golems, Wirtschaft und Staat, organische Gebilde, so beschwichtigt er sein schlechtes Gewissen — denn ist er nicht hilflos vor der unfaßbaren und undämmbaren Allmacht einer Welt, die den Tod als unentrinnbares Schicksal birgt? Tief in ihm bohrt und nagt die Lebensangst, er liebt die Freiheit, aber er fürchtet sich vor ihr, und eher erniedrigt er sich und schmiedet sich selbst die Knechtfesseln, als daß er wagt, frei und verantwortlich zu schaffen und zu atmen. (*EJID*, p. 70)

Landauer's influence on Toller can be seen too in 'Deutsche Revolution', a speech Toller gave in Berlin in 1925 shortly after his release from prison.[48] By that time, of course, he had developed a fairly mature view of socialism. Though by no means a Marxist, he had come to understand that, despite what Landauer said, it was impossible to separate the struggle for socialism from the class struggle, accepted too that without the support and active participation of the organised working class, socialism was not possible. He also saw that the belief, the belief to which he gave artistic expression in

Die Wandlung, that the ruling class could be persuaded to change their ways simply by force of persuasion, was an illusion. Yet still he clung to the idea, central to Landauer's concept of socialism, that the indispensable prerequisite for revolutionary struggle was *Geist*, lack of which, he contended, had contributed to the failure of the November Revolution.[49] As Dove comments, however, Landauer's notion of *Geist* was a slippery and elusive one, one which it is almost impossible to define accurately.[50] In this speech, Toller, declaring that 'Eine Revolution, der der Geist fehlt, gleicht einer Flamme, die jäh auflodert, um ziellos zu verflackern, weil ihr die nährende Kraft mangelt', described *Geist* as follows:

> Geist der Gemeinschaft: das ist zerstörende und schaffende Liebe, gebunden in Freiheit, frei in Gebundenheit. Geist: das ist von Gefühl und Erkenntnis zugleich besessen sein, skeptisches Wissen haben und trotzdem die unbedingte Hingabe, die Kühnheit des Gläubigen, in heller Entschlossenheit Dennoch! sagen, Grenzen sehen, alle und noch die grauesten Wirklichkeit tragen und ertragen können und sich nicht lähmen lassen.[51]

An uncharitable view might say that Toller's definition of *Geist* is so nebulous, diverse and all-encompassing as to be meaningless. Certainly, it must have left his mainly working-class audience baffled. Yet Landauer, when he sought to define *Geist*, was usually just as vague and expansive, describing it variously as 'Verbindung', 'Freiheit', 'Menschenbund' and 'Heiterkeit', as 'Macht', 'Bewegung', 'Erfassung des Ganzen in lebendig Allgemeinem', as 'Verbindung des Getrennten', 'Enthusiasmus', and 'Glut', as 'Tapferkeit' and 'Kampf'. (*Aufruf*, p. 23) He probably came closest to defining *Geist* in negative terms, in a passage lamenting the absence of it in capitalist society:

> Ein verbindender Geist, sage ich, der die Menschen von innen her zum Zusammenarbeiten in den Dingen der Gemeinsamkeit, der Herstellung und Verteilung der gebrauchten Güter triebe, ist nicht da. Ein Geist, der wie ein Lerchenlied aus den Lüften oder ferner, brausender Gesang von unsichtbaren Chören über aller Arbeit und jeder fleißigen Regung

> schwebte, der Geist der Kunst, der Verklärung des irdisch-betriebsamen Tuns, ist nicht da. Ein Geist, der die Gegenstände des Gebrauchs, der die natürlichen Triebe, die Befriedigungen, die Feste mit Notwendigkeit und Freiheit erfüllte, ist nicht da. Ein Geist, der alles Leben in Beziehung zur Ewigkeit setzte, der unsere Sinne heiligte, alles Leibliche himmlisch, jeden Wandel und alles Wandeln zur Freude, zum Schwung, Umschwung und Überschwang machte, ist nicht da. (*Aufruf*, p. 14)

For Landauer, as for Toller in his early period, *Geist*, a creative, unifying, force, was the negation of the authoritarian state, it was a spirit of unity and love, a bond of human solidarity between men and women which would find its fullest expression in the communitarian society he advocated. As already indicated, Toller eventually freed himself from the influence of Landauer's mysticism, and came to see the working class as the only force capable of changing society. However, he never really freed himself from the influence of this idea of *Geist* and devoted a great deal of his time and energy trying to infuse the workers' movement with it, in trying, that is, to make the workers understand that a socialist revolution would not lead to a better society unless they had regenerated themselves spiritually and morally beforehand. This, the idea which dominates both *Die Wandlung* and *Masse Mensch,* was the one which inspired both Toller and Landauer when they became involved in the revolution in Munich. It was the reality of revolution, however, which was to reveal just how utopian and inadequate this idea was.

1. For a good general account of the *Räterepublik* see Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918-1919. The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). On the involvement of Toller, Mühsam, Landauer and other literary personalities see Kurt Kreiler, *Die Schriftstellerrepublik: Zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Politik in der Münchner Räterepublik* (Berlin: Klaus Guhl, 1978).

2. For figures on those killed during the Whites' reign of terror see Richard Grunberger, *Red Rising in Bavaria* (London: Baker, 1973), pp. 139-47.

3. See *Der Fall Toller: Kommentar und Materialien*, edited by Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1979), pp. 63-94.

4. On Toller's trial and his speech to the court see Stefan Großmann 'Der Hochverräter Ernst Toller. Die Geschichte eines Prozesses', in *Prosa, Briefe, Dramen und Gedichte*, with a foreword by Kurt Hiller (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961), pp. 473-89. Also Kurt Kreiler, *Die Schriftstellerrepublik*, pp. 140-54 and 187-98.

5. Weber met Toller at a conference of writers, artists and intellectuals, a so-called *Kulturtagung*, organised by the publisher Eugen Diederichs at his home in Thüringen in September 1917. See below for details.

6. See Frühwald and Spalek, *Der Fall Toller*, pp. 80-81.

7. For Toller's early years see Richard Dove *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), pp. 9-18.

8. *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994). References to this are given in brackets after quotations in the text, abbreviated to *EJID* followed by page number. The first edition was published in Amsterdam by Querido in 1933. Wolfgang Frühwald points out that Toller had conceived of his autobiography as a trilogy, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* being merely the first part and the *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis* the second. In the preface to the British edition of Toller's *Briefe*, *Letters from Prison* (London: The Bodley Head, 1936), the translator, R. Ellis Roberts, mentions that Toller was currently at work on the third part. Unfortunately, he never got round to completing it. See Wolfgang Frühwald, 'Exil als Ausbruchsversuch. Ernst Tollers Autobiographie', in *Die deutsche Exilliteratur*, edited by Manfred Durzak (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), pp. 191-203 (pp. 191-92).

9. *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* must, of course, be used with care, it being an autobiography and not a historical account of the period. This is particularly true of those sections which deal with the *Räterepublik* and Toller's own role in it. However, there is no reason to cast doubt on the honesty of the earlier parts, those dealing with Toller's childhood and youth and his participation in the First World War. Interestingly, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* has come in for some praise from Communist critics. Bodo Uhse, for instance, despite criticising Toller's role during the *Räterepublik*, writes: 'Tollers zauberhafte Kindheits- und Jugenderinnerungen gehören zum Besten, was er geschrieben hat'. Bodo Uhse, 'Vorwort', in *Ernst Toller. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1961), p. v.

10. See Carol Petersen, 'Ernst Toller', in *Expressionismus als Literatur*, edited by Wolfgang Rothe (Bern/Munich: Francke, 1969), pp. 572-84 (pp. 574-75).

11. See Wolfgang Rothe, *Ernst Toller in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983), pp. 19-22.

12. For a discussion of the outlook of the various literary magazines of the period see Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism. German Literature and Society 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

13. For an interesting account of the Burg Lauenstein conference see Marianne Weber, *Max Weber. A Biography*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York, London, Sydney, Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), pp. 595-603.

14. See Wolfgang J. Mommsen *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

15. Not even the loss of members of his own family could dent Weber's enthusiasm for the war. When his brother-in-law, Hermann Schäfer, was killed at Tannenberg, he wrote a letter to his sister Lili, the dead man's widow, in which he described the war as 'great and wonderful beyond all expectation' and saying:

> Not the success but the spirit of the soldiers which we have been able to see here and can see every day in the military hospitals exceeds all expectations, and on the whole, so does the spirit of the population, at least here. I would never have hoped for this, and come what may, this will not be forgotten. To have fallen on these battlefields is worth even a beautiful and rich life. This is what *he* would think.

Quoted in Marianne Weber, *Max Weber* p. 528. Later, in September 1915, when his brother Karl fell, he wrote to his widow, Helene, in the same vein, saying that Karl had died 'a beautiful death in the only place where it is worthy of a human being to be at the moment'. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 558.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 598.

18. The *Bund*, formally constituted in November 1917, arose on the back of a campaign by a group of students, Toller among them, in support of Friedrich Wilhelm Förster, Professor of Philosophy at Heidelberg, who was under attack from conservative-nationalist circles because of his pacifist views, recently expressed in an article published in Switzerland. For Toller's open letter in defence of Förster see Frühwald and Spalek, *Der Fall Toller*, pp. 28-31.

19. The *Bund's* social, political and cultural aims, its *Leitsätze*, drafted in the main by Toller, show heavy traces of the influence on his thinking of Gustav Landauer. See following chapter. 'Leitsätze für einen kulturpolitischen Bund der Jugend in Deutschland', *Dresdner Montagsblatt - früher - Menschen*, no. 26 (16 June 1919), p. 3. Reprinted in *GW*, I, 31-34.

20. Dove, *He was a German*, pp. 33-37.

21. Walter Tormin, *Geschichte der Deutschen Parteien seit 1848* 3rd edn (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1968), pp. 102-03.

22. Dove, *He was a German*, p. 36.

23. *EJID*, p. 62.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

25. Frühwald and Spalek, *Der Fall Toller*, p. 31.

26. See Inge Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose* (Frankfurt: Fischer 1996).

27. 'Leitsätze für einen kulturpolitischen Bund der Jugend in Deutschland', in *GW*, I, 31-34 (p. 32).

28. Gustav Landauer, 1870-1919, was involved in the *Räterepublik* along with Toller and Eisner, but fell victim to the White Reign of Terror unleashed when government troops entered Munich in May 1919. For details of his murder, carried out in the most bestial fashion, see Toller, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, p. 142. For an excellent account of Landauer's life and political philosophy see Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community. The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973).

29. See *EJID*, p. 62.

30. Gustav Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 2nd edn, (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1919).

31. To give a flavour of Landauer's contempt for ordinary workers one may consider the following quotations from the same section of the *Aufruf*:

> Und doch ist wahrer als die Behauptung, daß der Proletarier der geborene Revolutionär sei, jene andere die hier gesagt wird: daß der Proletarier der geborene Philister ist. p. 53.
>
> Es gehört nur eine ganz oberflächliche Überpinselung der Zunge mit Bildung dazu, die jetzt am schnellsten und billigsten in den Polikliniken, die man Parteischulen nennt, vorgenommen wird, um aus einem Durchschnittsproletarier ohne jede Ausnahmequalitäten einen brauchbaren Parteiführer zu machen. p. 54.

It is not difficult to understand why Landauer's ideas found so little resonance among the working class.

32. On this see *Gustav Landauer: Erkenntnis und Befreiung. Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze*, edited by Ruth Link-Salinger (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976).

33. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *Studienausgabe*, edited by Irving Fletscher, 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1966), II, *Geschichte und Politik*.

34. Whether or not Mark and Engels ever really did believe, or at least give the impression they believed, that the collapse of capitalism would be a more or less automatic process is a complex debate which need not detain us here. For a discussion of the question, however, see *Marx's Theory of History. The Contemporary Debate*, Avebury Series in Philosophy edited by Paul Wetherby (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992).

35. See also Gustav Landauer *Der werdende Mensch: Aufsätze über Leben und Schrifttum*, edited by Martin Buber (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1921), pp. 37-45.

36. See, for instance, his article, 'Dühringianer und Marxisten', *Der Sozialist*, 22 October 1892.

37. Der Sozialismus, ihr Marxisten, ist zu allen Zeiten und bei jeder Technik möglich; und ist zu allen Zeiten und bei jeder Technik unmöglich. Er ist zu allen Zeiten, auch bei recht primitiver Technik den rechten Menschen möglich; und er ist zu allen Zeiten, auch bei prachtvoll entwickelter Maschinentechnik, den unrechten Menschen unmöglich. Wir wissen von keiner Entwicklung, die ihn bringen muß; wir wissen von keinerlei solchen Notwendigkeit eines Naturgesetzes. *Aufruf*, pp. 61-62.

38. See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 3rd edn, (New York: Vintage, 1968), pp. 198-207.

39. The debate within the SPD over the question, revolution or reform, was sparked off by the appearance in 1899 of Eduard Bernstein's (1850-1932) *Die Voraussetzung des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, 2nd edn, (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1902). For a discussion of the issues at stake see Helga Grebing, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Ein Überblick* (Munich: dtv, 1970), pp. 108-20.

40. Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (London:Freedom, 1987). First published in 1902.

41. For Landauer's views on this see his work *Die Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten and Loening, 1908).

42. *Ibid*, pp. 86-90

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. See Landauer's article 'Schwache Staatsmänner, Schwacheres Volk', *Der Sozialist*, 6 August 1898, pp. 12-15.

46. *Ibid.*

47. On the form of these new communities see his article 'Die Siedlung' in *Der Sozialist*, 17 July 1909.

48. *Deutsche Revolution. Rede, gehalten vor Berliner Arbeitern am 8. November 1925 im großen Schauspielhaus zu Berlin* (Berlin: E. Laub, 1925). Reprinted in *GW*, I, 159-64.

49. *GW*, I, 162-63.

50. Dove, *He was a German*, p. 38

51. *GW*, I, 162-63.

CHAPTER 2

TOLLER IN MUNICH

DIE WANDLUNG

When Toller arrived in Berlin at the start of 1918, the so-called *Burgfrieden*, the civic truce established at the beginning of the war by the bosses and the workers' leaders, was at last beginning to break down.[1] War-weariness and a general but vague desire for peace had already given rise to disturbances in the fleet and to the odd, isolated strike in industry.[2] This mood hardened following the publication in January of that year of the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which revealed that the German government had exploited the military weakness of Lenin's regime to annex land containing a third of Russia's population and three quarters of her iron and coal reserves.[3] Revulsion at this blatant piece of imperialist expansionism expressed itself in a strike wave which begun in Austria-Hungary, paralysing Vienna and Budapest, before spreading to the industrial regions of North Germany.[4] Despite fears in conservative circles that this movement might herald the beginning of a revolution like that recently seen in Russia, the strike achieved nothing meaningful, in part because it lacked a party which could have taken on the role played by the Bolsheviks. The SPD, of course, would not support the strike for it was opposed to anything which might undermine the war effort. This meant that the burden of providing some sort of leadership fell on the shoulders of Germany's newest political party, the USPD (Unabhängige Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands), formed in April 1917 at a conference in Gotha of a number of SPD dissidents sickened by the party's unflinching support for the war.[5]

Despite its radical sounding socialist rhetoric and loud denunciations of the war, the USPD was not, however, a revolutionary party and did not pose a serious threat to the capitalist system. While it contained within its ranks revolutionary Marxists like Liebknecht and Luxemburg, the future leaders of the German Communist Party (KPD), it also embraced moderates such as Karl Kautsky, soon to be denounced by Lenin as a renegade for opposing the Bolshevik Revolution,[6] and Eduard Bernstein, the man who in the Revisionism debate at the turn of the century had first urged the SPD to abandon

Marxism and become instead a purely reformist party.[7] Luxemburg and Liebknecht viewed the war as the result of economic rivalry between the imperialist powers and not only refused to support Germany in the conflict but argued in favour of a revolutionary war against their own ruling class.[8] The majority of the USPD, however, though opposed to the continued voting of war credits and in favour of an end to the *Burgfrieden*, were not nearly so radical in outlook in their approach. They rejected, for instance, the idea of a revolutionary struggle to end the war and concentrated instead on agitating for a negotiated peace settlement.[9] Differences of opinion on such fundamental questions meant that the USPD was unable to play a leading role in the November Revolution and led ultimately to its disintegration as a political force in 1922.[10] At the start of 1918, however, the fault lines running through the party were not yet clear — not to the broad masses anyway — and it quickly became the natural home of all those who desired an end to the slaughter. Eisner, a member of the SPD since 1898, was one such.

Born in Berlin in 1867, Eisner, like Toller, was the son of a reasonably prosperous Jewish family, his father, Emmanuel, having owned a shop on *Unter den Linden* which supplied the army with military accessories and decorations.[11] After attending the *Askanisches Gymnasium*, an exclusive school populated mainly by the sons of officers and wealthy businessmen, he studied philosophy and *Germanistik* but left university without obtaining a degree. Rejecting his parents appeals to take over the family business, he decided to follow what he felt was his vocation and went into journalism, finding his first job on the night desk of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a post he gave up when he moved to Marburg in 1893 to become political editor of the *Hessische Zeitung*. Marburg was to form a crucial phase in the development of Eisner's political ideas, for it was there that he fell under the influence of the leading neo-Kantian philosopher, Professor Hermann Cohen. Cohen, who saw Kant as the 'wahre und

wirkliche Urheber' of German socialism, maintained that his, Kant's, philosophical idealism was entirely compatible with the objectives of socialism.[12] 'Der Sozialismus', Cohen argued, 'ist im Recht, solange er im Idealismus der Ethik gegründet ist. Und der Idealismus der Ethik hat ihn begründet'.[13] Capitalism reduced the working class to a mere exchange commodity, increased man's domination over man and so stood in direct conflict with Kant's ethical dictum, 'handle so, daß du die Menschheit, sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden anderen, jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchtest'.[14] The whole system of private ownership of the means of production deserved, therefore, to be overthrown. Eisner did not share all of Cohen's philosophical premises but he was attracted by his attempt to create a synthesis out of Kantianism and socialism, to turn socialism into an ethical, moral creed. In an article written in 1903 Eisner sought to develop a theory of socialism which integrated Kant and Marx, in other words, which reconciled Kant's Idealism with Marx's materialist conception of history.[15] Socialism, Eisner maintained, was not only the historically inevitable outcome of the class-struggle, as Marx believed, it was also ethically desirable. Kant's ideals, the ideals of the bourgeois Enlightenment, Eisner believed, could not be realised within the framework of bourgeois society, but only under socialism. When Eisner spoke of socialism, then, he depicted it as some sort of joyous ideal, almost as a new religion, and proclaimed that its arrival would herald the beginning of a new golden age.[16]

In the year he joined the party, Eisner was appointed by Wilhelm Liebknecht to the 10-man editorial board of the party's leading daily journal, *Vorwärts*.[17] Liebknecht hoped that Eisner would be able to help heal the divisions created by the Revisionism debate, the divisions, that is, between those who wanted to maintain the party's revolutionary Marxist traditions and those who believed that the only way forward was

to become a party of reform, to seek to improve the workers' lot by working within capitalism rather than by overthrowing it. Unfortunately, Eisner ended by alienating both sides. His belief in the historical inevitability of socialism made it easy for him to find common ground with the Marxists, at least on the level of theory. However, he did not believe, as many of the old guard did, that because socialism was inevitable there was no need to struggle to achieve it. Eisner was committed to a 'tägliches, tatkräftiges Eingreifen in die Politik', to a 'ganz einheitlich gedachtes System der Aktion [...], das keiner Gegenwartsarbeit aus dem Weg geht, das aber auch kein Mittel verschmäht, weder den Kompromiß noch die Revolution'.[18] Like the revisionists, Eisner could see the importance of the day-to-day struggle for reforms: unlike them, he did not believe that capitalism could be transformed into socialism on a reformist, piecemeal basis, or that one social system would gradually and imperceptibly 'grow into' the other. He was convinced that the bourgeoisie would not give up its system and privileges without a fight and that the workers' movement would only be able to conquer power through revolutionary means.[19] Yet despite the apparent radicalism of Eisner's philosophical outlook, he gave his full backing to the SPD in August 1914 when it voted for the government's war-credits.[20] Like Toller, he too believed that Russia, France and Great Britain were the aggressors and that Germany was simply fighting a war for national defence. When, a few months later, he changed his mind, it was not because he suddenly became committed to the principle of international workers' solidarity but because he happened to read some documents which revealed the role Germany had played in the outbreak of war.[21] Thereafter, however, he became increasingly outspoken in his criticisms of German militarism and of the SPD which he felt had degenerated into little more than a government party. Finally, he could stomach no longer the party's position and in April 1917 took part in the founding conference of the USPD.[22] Recognising the

potential inherent in the aforementioned strike movement, Eisner travelled to Berlin, where his meeting with Toller took place, hoping to persuade the USPD leaders to seize the initiative, organise a general strike and use this to bring pressure on the government to end the war, and achieve a peace settlement without annexations.[23] The leaders, however, worried by the revolutionary implications of such action, announced that, though they were prepared to urge the workers to demonstrate their opposition to the government, they were not willing to lead them in doing so. As far as Eisner was concerned, however, the fact that the USPD supported strike action in principle was good enough and when he returned to Munich he set about organising an anti-war strike, a strike whose main base of support was provided by the city's munitions workers.[24]

Toller, who turned up in Munich a few days later and played a prominent role in the ensuing events, found Eisner's political philosophy deeply attractive. Here was a man who preached a humane form of socialism, a socialism which was both ethical and militant, a pacifist who desired above all an end to the war, but who favoured revolutionary means to do so, a man who did not shirk personal responsibility and who was prepared to risk his life for the cause he believed in. 'Eisner', Toller wrote later, 'war ein Mann von anderem geistigem Format als die Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske, Auer. Deutsche Klassik und romantischer Rationalismus haben ihn geformt und gebildet':

> Eines unterschied ihn von allen anderen republikanischen Ministern, sein Wille zur Tat, sein Todesmut. Er wußte, daß ein Volk, ebenso wie ein Mensch, nur in täglicher Arbeit reift, aber nicht wenn eine Mauer zwischen Leben und Tat gesetzt ist. Und er fürchtete nicht den Tod. Das fühlte das Volk, und darum glaubte es ihm. Talente und Gaben sind vielen gegeben, aber nur dem, der die Furcht vor dem Tod bewußt überwand, folgen die Massen. (*EJID*, p. 85)

Toller's admiration for Eisner, though not complete, did at times lead him to exaggerate both the level of his friend's political insight and, as here, the degree of popular support

his ideas enjoyed. For the claim that Eisner enjoyed the backing of the masses, is, to say the least, something of an overstatement. At the elections to the Bavarian *Diet* in January 1919, the first electoral test of the popularity of the regime Eisner had created, his party, the USPD, received only 2.5% of the vote while the SPD obtained 33%.[25] In January 1918, however, all that still lay in the future, and at this early stage, Eisner enjoyed the support, if not of a majority, at least of a substantial section of the industrial working class. Having lost the enthusiasm they once had for the war, they were becoming more and more amenable to the anti-war message. As Toller explained:

> Im werktätigen Volk wächst die Bewegung gegen die kaiserliche Kriegspolitik, man glaubt nicht den Führern, die die Kriegskredite bewilligen, man glaubt Liebknecht, dem Verfemten, dem Zuchthäusler, der in einer Welt der Verblendung diese Welt verdammte. (*EJID*, p. 64)

On 21 January 1918, at a gathering in the tavern, *Zum Goldnen Anker*, in the Schillerstraße where his anti-war discussion group met, Eisner made a speech in which he called for a strike in the most important industrial centres, the aim being, he explained, to bring down militarism and overthrow the monarchy throughout the whole of Germany.[26] Eisner must have known that this was not a feasible proposition at this stage for even the mass of the workers were not as yet ready to accept such a radical proposition. In any case, the USPD, realising that it was too weak to organise and lead a national strike, had reached an agreement with the SPD that any anti-war demonstrations should be both brief and peaceful so as — and this reveals brilliantly the confusion and timidity of the German revolution — not to affect the war effort.[27] When Eisner renewed his appeal for a strike, then, he stuck to the party line and was careful not to be too radical in his demands, limiting himself to a call for peace without annexations, freedom of the press and assembly, an end to martial law and the release of the political prisoners. In other words, he made no mention of overthrowing the

monarchy, of socialism or even of parliamentary reform.[28]

When the strike in Munich finally did break out, however, on 28 January 1918, it did not need much leadership either from the USPD or any other party. The workers simply followed the example set by their comrades in Berlin, about half a million of whom were on strike, and the tens of thousands of others in Germany's main industrial towns.[29] Toller, involved with the trades union movement for the first time, was naturally enthused by this demonstration of workers' power but had not as yet found a real role for himself:

> Ich gehe in die Streikversammlungen, ich möchte helfen, irgend etwas tun, ich verteile, weil ich glaube, daß diese Verse, aus dem Schrecken des Krieges geboren, ihn treffen und anklagen, Kriegsgedichte unter die Frauen, die Lazarett- und Krüppelszenen aus meinem Drama "Die Wandlung". (*EJID*, p. 64)

Eventually he was entrusted with an important task, being sent to persuade the women workers at a cigarette factory to join the strike. Having done so, he led them off to hear Eisner and the other leaders address a meeting but, after waiting in vain for over an hour, he learned that they had all been arrested the previous night. Looking back at these events in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, Toller wrote:

> Eine Massenbewegung, die an ihre Ziele glaubt, ist durch die Verhaftung der Führer nicht einzudämmen. Der Glaube ist ein entscheidendes Element, erst wenn er angekränkelt, geschwächt, zersetzt ist, können gegnerische Mächte die Einheit der Bewegung sprengen und sie auflösen in ohnmächtige, willensunfähige Haufen [sic]. (*EJID*, p. 65)

Unfortunately, the arrest of the leaders did have a dramatic effect on this strike. Though moderately successful in that it had demonstrated clearly the growing sense of war-weariness, left leaderless, it soon petered out and finally came to an end on 4 February.[30] Under the circumstances, the organisational weakness of the USPD, the unwillingness of

the SPD to break ranks with the government, and the strength of the state apparatus, no blame can be attached to any of those involved for the strike's failure to bring the war to an end. Toller, Eisner and their comrades were, however, faced with the fact that opposition to the war was still largely passive in character; it would take almost another full year of hardship and deprivation before a significant section of the population would take the road of revolution. What they should have learnt, in other words, was that revolutions cannot be conjured up out of thin air, that they are dependent not on the whim of the leaders but on the consciousness of the masses and that this in turn is determined by material conditions. Had this lesson been learnt, the disaster of the *Räterepublik* might have been avoided. As far as Toller himself is concerned, it is important to state that what propelled him into a leading role was not his abilities as a theoretician, nor any real organisational talent but quite simply his quite astonishing oratorical abilities. Following the arrest of Eisner and the other strike leaders, a campaign was organised to secure their release. It was at a meeting held to elect a delegation to speak to the police on this matter that Toller made his very first public speech:

> Die erste Delegation ist gewählt. Der Vorsitzende fragt, wer sich freiwillig für die zweite meldet. Drei haben ihre Namen gerufen, darunter ein Soldat, zwei gehen auf die Bühne, der dritte fehlt, im letzten Augenblick ist der Soldat ängstlich geworden. Da melde ich mich, der Vorsitzende bittet mich, einige Worte zu sprechen, zum ersten Mal rede ich in einer Massenversammlung. Die ersten Sätze stottere ich, verlegen und unbeholfen, dann spreche ich frei und gelöst und weiß selbst nicht, woher die Kraft meiner Rede rührt. (*EJID*, p. 65)

It was not to be until the time of the *Räterepublik* itself, however, that Toller had the opportunity to reveal his talents to the full, for he too was soon arrested, placed in a military prison, then sent on to a mental institution, before being returned to the army.[31]

Naturally, he was disappointed by the failure of the January strikes, yet the experience had been a valuable one in that it had brought him into contact for the first

time with the workers' movement and so helped him overcome his ingrained prejudices. The people he had got to know in Munich were, he wrote, men and women of 'nüchternem Verstand, sozialer Einsicht, großem Lebenswissen, gehärtetem Willen, Sozialisten, die ohne Rücksicht auf Vorteile des Tages der Sache dienten, an die sie glaubten'. (*EJID*, p. 64) It would be wrong to imagine, however, that in these few weeks Toller had been transformed into a fully-fledged revolutionary socialist. He had viewed the January strikes not as a vehicle for social transformation but purely and simply as a means of struggling against the war. As he himself admits, it was only now, in military prison, after reading the works of Marx, Engels, Lassalle, Bakunin, Mehring, Luxemburg and the Webbs, that he began to consider himself not just a pacifist but a socialist too:

> Jetzt erst werde ich Sozialist, der Blick schärft sich für die soziale Struktur der Gesellschaft, für die Bedingtheit des Krieges, für die fürchterliche Lüge des Gesetzes, das allen erlaubt zu verhungern, und wenigen gestattet, sich zu bereichern, für die Beziehungen zwischen Kapital und Arbeit, für die geschichtsbildende Bedeutung der Arbeiterklasse. (*EJID*, p. 69)

As explained above, Toller had long since realised that the misery, injustice and oppression he saw around him was not, as his mother had told him, 'gottgewollt', not the result of some immutable law of nature, but of the way in which society was organised. The works he read now, so he claimed, deepened his understanding of capitalist society, revealed its wastefulness, brutality and irrationality, and made him realise that the peace he desired, that real freedom and human solidarity could not be achieved until this system had given way to socialism. The problem was, however, how was this transformation to be brought about? By revolution? If so, then by what kind? Peaceful or violent? And who would lead it? The working class? These and other questions he addressed in his first play, the Expressionist *Stationendrama, Die Wandlung*, completed during the few months

he spent in prison in Munich's Leonrodstraße.[32]

Like any work of literature or art, *Die Wandlung* can, of course, be enjoyed and understood on its own terms, without, that is, detailed knowledge either of the author's person, the historical circumstances which form the background to the play or the literary tradition to which it belongs. Yet so far as the last of these is concerned, literary tradition, *Die Wandlung* belongs so clearly to the Expressionist literary canon, and forms, moreover, such a prominent part of it, that it would be amiss not to examine a few of the most relevant features of literary Expressionism, its development and form, before proceeding to a discussion of the play itself.[33] Roughly speaking, Expressionism reached its high-water mark in the German theatre between 1917 and 1920, years of immense social and political upheaval. It is tempting to think of it, therefore, as a movement which reflected simply the general anti-war sentiment of the time. Yet while it is true that it did give voice to the despair and bitterness of a generation which, in many cases, experienced at first-hand the horrors of mechanised death, Expressionism had emerged as a recognisable literary trend well before the outbreak of the First World War.[34] From about the end of the 19th century a number of dramatists, people such as Franz Wedekind, Carl Sternheim, Oscar Kokoschka and Ernst Barlach, were writing plays which featured many of the main formal elements which came to characterise Expressionism, Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891) being one of the earliest of the type. The literature created by these writers was a literature of revolt, of social protest. Repelled by the ugliness and soullessness of modern machine civilisation, the factory and the industrial town, antagonistic towards the stultifying values of the bourgeois order, the mind-numbing authoritarianism of Wilhelmine society, the Expressionists sought to express a new vision of humanity, a humanity based on love, compassion and human solidarity, a humanity which rejected the dominant materialist philosophy of the age they

lived in.[35] They sought to awaken in their audiences the desire to live life to the full, more passionately, more intensely, to search for self-fulfilment and reach a new higher state of consciousness and being. To do this, Expressionism felt forced to break free from the constraints — or perceived constraints — of Naturalism and Impressionism and create its own literary style.[36] It rejected the idea that art should have a primarily mimetic function, should strive, that is, to mirror reality, to reproduce as accurately and as faithfully as possible the external world, and endeavoured instead to convey, not reality, but a heightened state of reality, the essence of nature and experience.[37] In a typical Expressionist drama the central character is not a clearly defined, recognisable individual, but a representative symbolic type. Friedrich, for instance, the protagonist of *Die Wandlung,* is a good example, intended to be interpreted not as a living entity, but rather a consciousness, a state of mind, the dramatic expression of Toller's own persona. By doing this, by reducing their characters to the level of abstractions, the Expressionists hoped they could come closer to conveying general truths rather than the detail of a particular situation, the existential predicament of mankind rather than the fate of any one individual. Typically, their protagonists do not have names, but generalised titles such as *Der Soldat*, *Der Bettler*, *Die Schwester*, again, a device employed to rob them of their individual significance and lend representative character to their experience. Another conspicuous feature of expressionist drama — or a certain type of it at least — is the almost complete absence of traditional plot. In the so-called *Stationendrama* — and here again *Die Wandlung* provides a good example — the action does not unfold along linear lines, with each act and each scene arising logically from the preceding act or scene, but by a series of loosely connected *Stationen*, linked together thematically it is true, but with no causal or logical connection between them. The 12 *Stationen* of *Die Wandlung* — a secularised version of Christ's Passion, the stations of the cross — are practically self-

contained entities and show no real dramatic development. They are connected only in that each *Station* symbolises a new stage on the central character's journey towards his spiritual goal, towards a new humanity freed from the corrupting influence and constraints of bourgeois society. Once more, the aim here was not to provide a faithful reflection of individual experience, but to convey a heightened sense of reality, this being revealed by the dramatic evocation of the state of mind of the protagonist himself.

At the level of language and grammar too, Expressionism represented a radical break with dramatic tradition.[38] Spurning psychological realism, the mimesis of its immediate theatrical predecessors, Naturalism and Impressionism, it had to find new forms which would help it penetrate to the essence of things. The language in which it did this was a chopped, condensed language, one reduced to the bare essentials, with prepositions, conjunctions, determiners, and other extraneous elements — or what were felt to be extraneous elements — omitted.[39] Pushed to its limit, this linguistic reductionism — *Telegrammstil* — culminated in the Expressionist *Schrei*, the inarticulate scream being conceived as the most effective way, the only way, of conveying the poet's ecstatic vision. Along with this, there was a revival of other anti-naturalist, anti-realist forms and techniques, with verse passages alternating with prose and the monologue finding renewed favour for what was felt to be the immediacy of its impact, its ability to convey directly and quickly the hero's turbulent subconscious world. In short, the Expressionist drama, highly subjective and confessional in tone, was a vehicle for the author's poetic vision of a better, more humane society.

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that this vision was in all instances an overtly political one. Despite its social concerns, despite breaking with both literary and social convention, Expressionism, especially in its earliest phase, was not a revolutionary movement in the political sense.[40] In general, the Expressionist dramas written in the

years before the First World War saw the struggle for renewal as taking place on the individual, spiritual level. At the core of their vision was the new man, 'der neue Mensch', who, after having gone through his own inner transformation, his own *Wandlung*, emerged to live life in a more intense fashion. The anger of the Expressionists might well have been directed against bourgeois society, some of its exponents might even have advocated a socialist future, but, on the whole, the movement believed that man had to free himself spiritually before he could break free from his social, political and economic bonds. Their poetic vision, in other words, was the antithesis of that put forward by the Marxists who believed that any spiritual change in man would come about not before but after the social revolution. The idealism of the Expressionists was, however, dealt a blow by the war, which shattered hopes of a spiritual renewal of mankind. Indeed, some of the Expressionist writers themselves were, like Toller, caught up in the war enthusiasm and went off to the front eager to do their patriotic duty.[41] Others, people such as Franz Pfemfert, editor of *Die Aktion*, one of the most politically committed and radical Expressionist journal of that period,[42] either internalised their opposition or, recognising that their voices would be drowned in the tidal wave of patriotism, bowed to reality and left Germany altogether. Among those who chose this latter course was René Schickele, who in April 1916 moved to Switzerland to continue publication of his periodical, *Die Weißen Blätter*, which with contributions from writers such as Carl Sternheim, Leonhard Frank, Klabund and Heinrich Mann, maintained a consistently pacifist line from the beginning to the end of the war.[43] Yet apart from one or two isolated cases — Johannes Becher, for instance, who supported the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequently became a member of the Communist Party[44] — none of the Expressionist writers, not even Pfemfert, who was friendly with Trotsky, moved far away from the idealist, pacifist-humanist stance they had held prior to the war.[45] Even among

those who adopted a revolutionary socialist position, many favoured a peaceful, democratic revolution, and continued to believe that, somehow or other, society could be transformed, bourgeois society overthrown, not by force but by persuasion, by the power of the expressionist appeal.[46] War, in other words, brought about a politicisation of Expressionism — or rather strengthened the political trend within it — but did not lead to a fundamental change in it basic tenets. Most Expressionists still believed that man had to change himself spiritually before he could change his social circumstances, the belief which lies at the heart of *Die Wandlung* itself.

Subtitled *Das Ringen eines Menschen*, *Die Wandlung* really is, as some previous critics have argued, an Expressionist drama *par excellence*.[47] Drawing heavily on Toller's own experience, it depicts the struggle of the central character, Friedrich, as he journeys towards spiritual renewal and salvation, shows him transformed from a fervent nationalist and supporter of the fatherland as it fights a colonial war, into an equally fervent pacifist, a new man, who brings enlightenment to the masses and eventually leads them in revolution, a peaceful, Expressionist revolution. The play reflected quite accurately and honestly the outlook of virtually an entire generation of German youth — indeed, of European youth — all those, that is, who were sickened by war and its attendant miseries and who desired nothing more than peace and an end to the senseless killing. What it failed to do, however — and here again it reflects accurately the state of Toller's political thinking at the time — is to deal with the causes of war, the underlying social and economic conditions out of which war grew, or to face up to the reality of revolution. Like the majority of Expressionist dramatists, Toller is good at describing the horrors of bourgeois society and can present an utterly harrowing and convincing portrait of war. Where he is less convincing is in saying how to put an end to the system which makes war inevitable, how to attain the society he desires, the society based on humanity

and love.

The play opens with a *Vorspiel* entitled 'Die Totenkaserne', a grotesque, tragi-comic scene set at night in a military graveyard in which two typically Expressionist symbolic figures, 'Der Kriegstod' and 'der Friedenstod', compare notes, as it were, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of their different methods of causing death. 'Der Friedenstod' declares himself almost envious of his deathly companion or rival when he sees the level of organisation and discipline he has brought to his job. For his dead are buried in best military order according to company and rank and at a word of command arise from their graves to march up and down the cemetery, carrying their heads under their arms. In the hands of a less skilled dramatist this macabre scene could easily have degenerated into farce. With his instinctive comic touch, however, Toller manages to preserve intact the full impact of his anti-war message. At the end of the scene, after having witnessed the ghastly dance of the skeletons, 'Friedenstod' breaks into uncontrollable laughter, distressing 'Kriegstod' who is worried that his troops might have made mistakes, might not have given quite the right impression of military efficiency. 'Herr Kamerad', he pleads, 'ich muß schon bitten. Gelächter duldet meine Ehre nicht'. (p. 15) 'Friedenstod' replies, however, that he has seen through his new friend, has discovered what it was that he had found so disturbing and incongruous about his organisation:

Sie spielen sich als Sieger auf
Und sind geschlagen —
Der Krieg hat Sie geschlagen, lieber Herr.
Und Sie gezwungen,
Sein System hier fortzuführen,
Mit Chargen, Rang und Vorurteilen.
Gleichsam Kaserne zu verwalten.
Feldwebel wurden Sie!
Ein Tod, der sich der deutschen Kriegsmaschine unterwirft
Wer hätt' das je gedacht!
Sie sind ertappt mein Lieber!

> Ich rate Ihnen, sei'n Sie auf der Hut. (p. 15)

Toller's message, that the German war machine, German militarism, can defeat even death itself, is a bitter yet powerful one. Yet the play shows that, while militarism may be a powerful force, it is not omnipotent. It can be defeated, can be overthrown, if the people, 'das Volk', can be made aware of their mental slavery, made to see that they have been blinded by hatred, and that the only future for mankind lies in peace and brotherhood, not in war and discord. This is the whole point of Friedrich's *Wandlung*.

As already indicated, in the first half of the play, Friedrich is in thrall to the national ideal, wishes nothing more than the chance to prove the depth of his devotion to the Fatherland. This is because, or mainly because, like Toller himself, Friedrich is a Jew, an outsider, an alien, someone who does not feel himself to be an accepted and integrated part of the larger German community. In the first *Bild* of the first *Station*, set in Friedrich's home at Christmas, he stands at his window gazing across the street at the houses opposite where he can see lights blazing on a Christmas tree, 'Kerzen der Liebe', (p. 17) as he calls them:

> *FRIEDRICH*: Mysterien offenbaren sich. Lichtmeer der Liebe ... Ausgestoßner taumle ich von einem Ufer zum andern. Denen drüben Fremder, den andern fern. Ekler Zwitter. War nicht Hauch des Mitleids in ihrer Stube, da sie bat, kommen Sie zu uns? Ich danke Ihnen, Fräulein — gehorsamer Diener — werde pünktlich da sein. Auf Stichwort künstliches Lächeln. Tragikomisches Figürchen. Approbierter Zuschauer ... nein ... Stehaufclown ... Länger schleppe ich nicht diese Zerrissenheit mit mir umher. Was sind mir die! Daß ihr Blut in mir strömt, was will das bedeuten? Zu denen drüben gehöre ich. Einfacher Mensch, bereit zu beweisen. Fort mit aller Zersplitterung. Nicht mehr länger stolz schützen, die ich verachte. Aufrecht. (p. 17)

The biographical element in Friedrich cannot be mistaken, the sense of estrangement from his own Jewish tradition and the deep desire to belong to the German, Christian one. Like Ahasver, the wandering Jew, 'den ewig Heimatlosen', Friedrich feels himself

rootless, 'heimatlos', whereas the Germans, 'die drüben', the others, have 'eine Heimat, in der sie sich wurzeln' (p. 17):

> Die drüben sind eins mit sich und ihrem Boden ... frei von jener Zerrissenheit, die gleich eiternden Schwären Denken und Fühlen zerfrißt ... Sie können lachen und frohen Herzens Tat tun, Sie haben ihr Land, in dem sie wurzeln ... dem sie sich darbringen können ... (pp. 17-18)

Friedrich not only rejects his Jewish heritage, but turns against his family too, telling his widowed mother that while she had cared for his material comforts she had neglected his spiritual well-being. 'Du hast für mich gesorgt mit Geld', he tells her, 'willst mir meine Wege ebnen, um Geld zu erwerben ... ja, mein wirtschaftliches Fortkommen ist gesichert. Was aber tatest du für meine Seele? Lehrtest mich Haß gegen die Fremden. Warum?'. (p. 19) When his mother replies that 'die Fremden', i.e. the Germans 'uns nur [dulden]. Sie verachten uns'. Friedrich exclaims:

> Das tun sie nicht. Milde und Güte und Liebe wächst bei ihnen, allumfassende Liebe. Siehst du drüben die Lichter? Strahlen gütigen Umarmens. — Mutter nannte ich dich, weil du mich gebarst. Kann ich dich heute noch Mutter heißen, da du meine Seele aussetztest, wie törichte Mütter ihr nacktes Kind? *(Mutter geht schweigend hinaus.)* (p. 19)

Half in sorrow, half in resignation, Friedrich says to himself 'Nun ist etwas entzwei ...

Oder war es nicht schon längst zerbrochen ... Es mußte wohl zerbrechen ... Mutter!'.(p. 19)

At this stage, Friedrich stands torn between two worlds: unwilling to return to the bosom of his own family, he is, or feels he is not accepted by 'die Fremden'. It is just then, however, that 'der Freund', the brother of Friedrich's girl-friend, Gabriele, brings him the kind of news he has been longing for, news that volunteers are required to defend the Fatherland in a colonial war. 'Der Kampf gegen die Wilden hat begonnen', he explains, 'drüben in den Kolonien. Es steht angeschlagen, Freiwillige können sich

melden'(p. 20):

> *FRIEDRICH*: Drüben brauchen sie Freiwillige. Nun kommt Befreiung aus dumpfer quälender Enge. Oh, der Kampf wird uns alle einen ... Die große Zeit wird uns alle zu Großen gebären ... Auferstehen wird der Geist, alle Kleinlichkeit wird er zerstören, alle lächerlichen, künstlichen Schranken niederreißen ... sich wieder offenbaren in seiner unendlichen Schönheit ... Und mir — mir gibt diese Stunde besonderes Geschenk ... Drüben brauchen sie Freiwillige. Die Nachricht bringst du mir am Abend der Liebe, du lieber Freund. Drüben brauchen sie Freiwillige. Warum zagte ich? Ich fühle mich ja so stark! Nun kann ich meine Pflicht tun. Nun kann ich beweisen, daß ich zu ihnen gehöre. (pp. 20-21)

Like Toller when he enlisted in 1914, Friedrich is a naive and immature young man who believes that the unresolved problems of his Jewish identity will be smothered by war. Leaving behind his family and Gabriele, he rushes off to enlist in a state of jubilation bordering on ecstasy, exclaiming, 'Nun kann ich mein Pflicht tun, nun kann ich beweisen, daß ich zu ihnen gehöre.' (p. 21)

The realism — or heightened state of realism — of the first *Bild* gives way to the symbolism of the second, with a scene which anticipates war as Friedrich will experience it, not as his imagination has told him it will be. Set on board a 'Transportzug' carrying soldiers to the front line in some unspecified war, the unreal, dream-like, 'schattenhafte' quality of this *Bild*, is created, among others things, by playing it at the back of the stage in a flickering light, also by having two 'stummen Soldaten', one of whom has a 'Totenschädel', the other the 'Antlitz Friedrichs', both being 'schattenhaft wirklich'. Central to this scene is the notion of these being eternal soldiers, men caught up in the gigantic machinery of war, robbed of humanity and hope, wishing they had never been born:

> *ERSTER SOLDAT*: Wie lange rattert schon der Zug.
> O dieses ewige knirschende Stampfen
> Gepeitschter Maschine.
> *ZWEITER SOLDAT*: Wir irren durch endlose Räume.

> Tage, Wochen, ich weiß es kaum mehr.
> Wollt', ich schlief im Schoß meiner Mutter.
> *DRITTER SOLDAT*: Wollt', das Haus wär zusammengestürzt
> Als der Vater die Frau umarmte. (p. 21)

Representing the workings of Friedrich's subconscious, his innermost fears and anxieties, the *Traumbild,* with its distorted, nightmare vision of war, is followed by a *reales Bild*, one, that is, in which the vision becomes reality as Friedrich is brought face to face with the horrors of conflict. Played at the front of the stage so as to distinguish it from the previous *Traumbild*, this scene too is bleak and foreboding, being set at a desert oasis just after sundown as a group of soldiers, Friedrich among them, attend to a wounded comrade. Once more Toller employs humour to prevent the scene tipping over into bathos, the wounded soldier, for instance, expressing concern about the amputation of his legs will spoil his dream of becoming a dance-teacher. Yet the focus of this *Bild* is not so much the brutality of war, rather how it is viewed by both Friedrich and his soldier comrades and, importantly, the nature of his relationship with the latter. Despite the suffering he has witnessed, Friedrich is still in love with the dream of nationhood, still believes that the war he is waging is a just war. Some of his comrades, however, have a clearer and realistic view of the conflict, understand that what is at stake is not civilisation and culture but the interests of the ruling elite. Toller reveals this in a passage of remarkable intensity and economy of language:

> *ERSTER SOLDAT*: Wofür? Für die Herren. Den Wilden die wahre Religion bringen? Mit Morden und Sengen. Ich bin der Erlöser, juchhe! Laß dir den Schädel zertrümmern, und die Seligkeit erwartet dich.
> *FRIEDRICH*: Es muß sein, es muß sein!
> *ZWEITER SOLDAT*: Was muß sein? Morden und Sengen? Irrenhaus und Siechstätten?
> *FRIEDRICH*: Um des Vaterlandes willen!
> *ERSTER SOLDAT*: Vaterland! Kenne kein Vaterland. Kenne Herren, die prassen und Arbeiter, die sich schinden.
> *FRIEDRICH*: Wie könnt ihr denn leben ohne Vaterland? Wahnsinn würde mich packen in all dem Grauen ... wenn ich nicht die Zähne

zusammenbiß, um des Vaterlandes willen. (pp. 23-24)

The first soldier sees the war from a working-class perspective and rejects the idea of 'Vaterland', the idea that there exists some community of interests between exploiter and exploited, interests which it is necessary to defend in war. What is undermined here, however, is not just Friedrich's illusions about war, but also his belief that he is no longer seen as a Jew, an outsider, but is accepted as a member of the community of 'Vaterlandsverteidiger'. Following the above-quoted remarks about fighting 'um des Vaterlands willen' the following conversation ensues:

> *ZWEITER SOLDAT*: Das sagst du?
> *FRIEDRICH*: Wie du es auch sagen müßtest.
> *ERSTER SOLDAT*: Haha, du als Fremder?
> *FRIEDRICH*: Bin kein Fremder, gehöre zu euch.
> *ZWEITER SOLDAT*: Und wenn du tausendmal in unseren Reihen kämpfst, darum bleibst du doch der Fremde.
> *ERSTER SOLDAT (ohne jede Betonung)*: Fluch hängt an dir, Vaterlandsloser.
> *VERWUNDETER*: Va ... ter ... lands .. lo ... ser ... eins ... zwei, drei ... eins ... zwei, drei ... soll ... ein Walzer sein ...
> *FRIEDRICH*: Wagt mir das Wort wie faule Jauche an den Kopf zu spritzen und ich vergeß' mich. Habe ich es nicht bewiesen in Gefechten und Schlachten auf Patrouillen und Wachen — trieb mich feige Hast zurück? Kroch ich in Höhlen, mich zu verstecken?
> *ZWEITER SOLDAT*: Bleibst doch der Vaterlandslose.
> *FRIEDRICH*: So will ich denn für mein Vaterland kämpfen trotz euch. Denn wer kann's mir scheel entreißen, trag ich's doch in mir.
> *ERSTER SOLDAT (gutmütig)*: Mußt dich schon dran gewöhnen. Wir sind ja schließlich alle ohne Vaterland. Wie die Dirnen. *(Die beiden Soldaten legen sich hin und schlafen.)* (p. 24)

Significantly, there is no real malice in the soldiers' remarks, they are merely stating the truth as they see it. Moreover, to them there is no shame in being 'vaterlandslos' for this is how they view themselves. Friedrich, however, is not yet ready to abandon his faith in the nation, or to link his fate to that of the workers' and at the end of the scene, keen to express the strength of his devotion, volunteers for a suicidal reconnaissance mission.

Toller's sense of humour is in evidence again in the fourth *Bild*, *Zwischen den Drahtverhauen*, another *Traumbild*, this time one in which a group of skeletons perform a macabre dance of death on a dark, wind-swept battlefield. Looking back to the *Vorspiel*, this scene reinforces the central theme of the inhumanity of war, driving home the point that the peoples of the earth should be united in brotherhood, not trying to kill each other, reminding the audience that in death there are no differences of nationality, of race, of class, even of sex:

> *ERSTES SKELETT*: Spiel' weiter nur Komödie, alter Freund,
> Ich klappere mit schlottrigen Gelenken
> Dazu erlesnen Negertanz.
> Nun sind wir nicht mehr Freund und Feind.
> Nun sind wir nicht mehr schwarz und weiß.
> Nun sind wir alle gleich.
> Die bunten Fetzen fraßen Würmer
> Nun sind wir alle gleich.
> Mein Herr ... Wir wollen tanzen? (p. 26)

Like the *zweites Bild*, however, the one set in the 'Transportzug', this *Traumbild* also looks forward and anticipates some of the ideas developed in the following scene. Set in a *Lazarett*, a military hospital to which Friedrich has been taken after having been found in the desert, this *Bild* shows the first stirring of his humanitarian conscience, sees him begin to question the nationalist ethos to which he is committed, and to ask whether or not his desire to belong is worth what is costs in human lives. Nationalism, however, is not Toller's only target here: he also attacks not so much Christianity as organised religion, that is to say, the Church establishment which has put itself at the service of the state, perverted Christ's teachings and now celebrates death, the killing of tens of thousands of the 'enemy', as a triumph of good over evil. Lying on his hospital bed, Friedrich is visited by an officer who awards him a medal in recognition of his bravery:

> *OFFIZIER*: Ich beglückwünsche Sie, junger Freund. Tapfer setzten Sie

> sich ein, achteten nicht hartester Marter. Das Vaterland weiß Ihre Dienste zu schätzen. Es sendet Ihnen durch mich das Kreuz. Fremder waren Sie unserm Volk, nun haben Sie sich Bürgerrechte erworben.
> *FRIEDRICH*: Das Kreuz? Gehöre ich nun zu Euch?
> *OFFIZIER*: Sie gehören ... *(Draußen Lärm.)* (p. 29)

The symbolism — the cross both rewarding Friedrich's bravery and welcoming him into the Christian community — is leaden but powerful nonetheless. Yet it is the very act of recognition and acceptance which causes Friedrich to question his fundamental beliefs. When the officer asks the nurse what the noise is that they have just heard outside, she replies:

> *SCHWESTER (freudig)*: Mit Gottes Hilfe haben wir den Feind geschlagen, zehntausend Tote!
> *OFFIZIER*: Ja, junger Freund ... Sieg stürmt ins Land, Sie gehören zu den Siegern. *(Friedrich allein.)*
> *FRIEDRICH*: Wie Jubel auf ihren Gesichtern tanzt. Zehntausend Tote! Durch zehntausend Tote gehöre ich zu ihnen. Warum quirlt nicht Lachen? Ist das Befreiung? Ist das die große Zeit? Sind das die großen Menschen? *(Augen starr gerade aus.)* Nun gehöre ich zu ihnen. *(Dunkel.)* (p. 29)

The following *Traumbild*, entitled *Die Krüppel*, is again linked, not dramatically, but thematically to the previous one, and Toller uses it to develop both the idea of the corruption at the heart of organised religion and another, related idea, one which was to crop up in a number of his plays, the corrupt nature of medicine and science, which, like religion, had also prostituted themselves, placed their knowledge and expertise in the service of the state.[48] The Professor in charge of the hospital here, a hospital full of horribly mutilated soldiers, is a brutal figure, coldly indifferent to the suffering about him. His task, as he sees it, is to keep pace with technology, with the latest inventions of the manufacturers of mechanised death, to ensure that the soldiers in his care are returned to the front as speedily as possible, ready to serve the Fatherland:[49]

PROFESSOR: Ja, meine Herren.
Wir sind gewappnet gegen alle Schrecken.
Wir könnten uns die positive Branche nennen,
Die negative ist die Rüstungsindustrie.
Mit andern Worten: Wir Vertreter der Synthese,
Die Rüstungsindustrie geht analytisch vor —
Die Herren Chemiker und Ingenieure
Sie mögen ruhig Waffen schmieden
Und unerhörte Gase fabrizieren,
Wir halten mit. (p. 30)

'Die Leute', he explains to his groups of visitors 'sind durch unsre Wissenschaft zu neuem Leben auferweckt' (p. 31):

PROFESSOR: Fleischrümpfe waren sie,
Nun sind sie wieder Männer.
Sahn Sie, mit welcher Freude
Und Exaktheit
Die sieben dem Befehle folgten?!
Ja, meine Herren, nun sind sie wieder
Unsrem Staate zugeführt
Und auch der Menschheit!
Wertvolle Glieder einer nützlichen Gemeinschaft!
[...] Die Leute können wieder ihrer höchsten Pflicht genügen. (p. 31)

While the Professor makes men fit for battle by tending to their physical wounds, the Priest does the same in respect of their spiritual wounds. Bearing the 'Antlitz Friedrichs', representing, that is, another facet of his subconscious mind, the Priest holds out to the cripples a crucifix and tells them 'den Heiland bring ich euch [...] Er weiß um euer Müh und Leiden, O kommt zu ihm, ihr tief Bedrückten, Er gibt euch Heilung, gibt euch Liebe'. (p. 33) But the cripples reject the priest's message and ask him why, if Jesus is so powerful, he allows such suffering? As the men rise in their beds to reveal their terrible mutilation, the Priest drops his crucifix and sinks slowly to his knees:

PFARRER: — O Jesus, deine Lehren sind verstümmelt — Wie gings sonst zu, daß kraftlos sie zerbröckeln.
Da ist kein Heil ...
Ich sehe keinen lichten Weg aus dieser Nacht,

Ich sehe nirgends eine lichte Hand.
Bereit euch zu erlösen ...
Wie könnt ich, selber trostbedürftig, den Trost euch spenden,
Nach dem mich brennender, denn euch verlangt?
Und wer sollts unternehmen, euch, vor deren Augen
Alle bloßen, schwachen Mitleidsschleier fielen,
Mit frommen Worten zu betrügen —
Ich kann es nicht.
Ich gehe euch voran ...(p. 33)

Prefigured here, in the Priest's insight into the inhumanity of his own debased Gospel, is Friedrich's own *Wandlung* which takes place in the following key scene, *Bild* seven, the first of the two which comprise the *Vierte Station*. Friedrich is now an artist, a sculptor working on an enormous marble statue of a naked man — '*ganz Muskeln, der geballte Fäuste reckt. In einer Stellung, die brutal wirkt*' (p. 35) — a statue with the imposing title of 'Sieg des Vaterlands'. Though still clinging to his old ideas, Friedrich is in the grip of a spiritual crisis, for the marble refuses to form itself under his hand, will not take on the shape he wants to give it. 'Meine Hand packt den Meißel', he says puzzled, 'allein sie bringt ihn nicht zum Glühen'. (p. 35) He wants to make this statue into a living symbol of the sacrifice he and others like him have made; 'Glutende Wellen sollen davon ausströmen', he exclaims, 'Menschen aufrüttelnd ... Daß sie nie vergessen, ihr Vaterland zu verteidigen'. (p. 35) Yet there is something in him which stays his artist's hand. 'Bin ich zu schwach, um Stein mit Blut zu füllen', he asks, 'bin ich zu klein, sie zu gestalten? ... Durchdringe ich nicht den ehernen Panzer? Ist der Panzer allzu starr?' (p. 35) Corroding Friedrich's creativity is his slowly awakening humanitarian conscience. He has begun to question the idea of the 'Feind', wants to know who determines who the enemy is. 'Ist das eine geistige Kraft, die zum Kampf zwingt? ... Oder bestimmt Willkür den Feind? ... Da klafft ein Widerspruch'. (p. 35) Yet still he cannot bring himself to abandon his patriotic beliefs. When 'der Freund' visits him in his *Atelier*, Friedrich resists the suggestion that it is his inner doubts which have delayed

work on the statue, admitting only that he wants to know 'ob nicht Höheres wächst', but adding 'und ich will's doch gar nicht wissen. Denn wüßte ich drum, ich würde mein Schicksal nicht mehr hemmen, ich würde Ahasver!' (p. 35) His refuses to give way even when Gabriele returns and reminds him that he is still an outsider, not deemed part of the Fatherland. She must leave him, Gabriele explains, for her father would renounce her if she were to marry a Jew, would drive her from her native earth, the 'Scholle' in which she is rooted with her 'Herzblut'. (pp. 36-37) Even then Friedrich clings to the myth, exclaiming that he too has put down roots, that he too has 'eine Scholle' in which he is rooted with his 'Herzblut'. 'Rot ist die Scholle gefärbt davon. Meine Scholle ist unser Vaterland. Das ganze große Vaterland'. (p. 37) Left to himself, Friedrich turns to contemplate his statue:

> *FRIEDRICH*: Mahnst du mich?
> Der Sieg des Vaterlands,
> Ich glaube an ihn,
> Ich will ihn glauben,
> Ich will ihn gestalten,
> Mit meinem Herzblut will ich ihn gestalten. (p. 37)

His will finally gives way after a visit from a 'Kriegsinvalidin' and her 'Mann', the latter a veteran of the colonial war in which Friedrich fought, indeed, a member of the same infantry company. The terrible physical and mental state of these two human wrecks appals Friedrich and makes him realise that the ideal he believed in is a corrupt, inhuman ideal:

> *FRIEDRICH*: Millionen von Armstümpfen recken sich um mich. Schmerzgebrüll von Millionen Müttern tost durch den Raum [...] Um des Vaterlandes willen ... Gott ... kann ein Vaterland das verlangen? Oder hat sich das Vaterland an den Staat verschachert? Spekuliert der Staat damit zu schmutzigen Geschäften? Ward der Staat Zuhälter und das Vaterland eine getretene Hure, die jeder brutalen Lust sich verkauft? Ausgestattet mit dem Segen der Kupplerin Kirche? Kann ein Vaterland, das das verlangt, göttlich sein? Wert seine Seele dafür zu opfern? Nein, tausendmal nein.

> Lieber will ich wandern, ruhelos wandern, mit dir, Ahasver! *(Stürzt auf die Statue.)* (p. 39)

In an act laden with symbolism Friedrich takes a hammer to his statue and smashes it to pieces. With the symbol of his ideals now lying broken at his feet, Friedrich realises he cannot face the prospect of becoming like Ahasver, that he cannot wander 'ruhelos und ewig' through 'Regennächte' and 'verpestete Straßen', and so decides to commit suicide. (p. 39) His life is saved, however, by the arrival of his sister — her first appearance in the play — who shows him the way he has to go, the way which leads back not to the family and to the Fatherland, but higher than this, back to God. Yet not to the God of the rich, the God of war, but to the God, 'der Geist und Liebe und Kraft ist [...], der in der Menschheit lebt. Dein Weg führt dich zu den Menschen'. (p. 40) But before Friedrich can go to 'den Menschen', before he can bring them enlightenment, he must first find 'den Menschen' in himself:

> Der Weg, den ich dich gehen heiße,
> Führt dich durch alle Tiefen, alle Höhen,
> Durch nächtiges Gestrüpp mußt du den Weg dir bahnen, Gestrüpp, von Toren wohl verbrecherisch geheißen,
> Nur bist du selber Angeklagter, selber Richter. (p. 40)

Accepting the vision revealed to him by his sister, Friedrich, enraptured, strides out of the door, on his way to becoming the new man, the messiah, who will lead mankind out of darkness and into the light.

Stationen 5 and 6, describe Friedrich's journey towards renewal, show him descend into the lowest depths of society to experience there the hardship, misery and degradation — physical and spiritual — which is the daily lot of the masses. *Bild* 8, another *Traumbild*, has Friedrich — or rather a figure with the 'Antlitz Friedrichs'— sharing a bedroom in a 'städtischen Mietskaserne' with a women and her children. (p.

41) The picture painted here is one of abject poverty and destitution. The woman, a prostitute, can barely feed or clothe her children one of whom, for economic reasons, has been forced to abort her own child after hearing the news that her husband had been crushed by a great hammer, presumably in some factory. Intended, among other things, as a cry of pain about the plight of the poor and dispossessed, this scene is merely maudlin and mawkish, the misery it depicts being so extreme, so overdrawn as to verge on the laughable. The false tone it strikes reminds the reader that Toller, middle class in origin, did not really know what it meant to be poor, part of the masses, to have to graft hard for a living. At the end of this *Bild*, the 'Der nächtliche Besucher' comes to rouse the 'Schlafbursche' from his sleep and leads him off to work in a great factory. To the 'Schlafbursche', the factory, its walls topped by iron spikes and its windows barred, appears as a horror vision, as a great prison. 'Der nächtliche Besucher', however, grabbing him by the arm, tells the Schlafbursche' that he is mistaken and that this is indeed a factory:

> Zur Arbeit führ ich dich —
> Die du und deinesgleichen schaffen müssen.
> Tu deine Alltagsbrille ab
> Und lerne sehen:
> Man tat dem Hause ein Ballettkleid an,
> Weil es sich nicht getraute und sich schämt —
> Beim ersten Anblick wähnst mit Freude du
> Oho - hier blüht ja ein Gefängnis —
> Streng deine Augen an! Schon sind wir angekommen!
> Siehst du das Schild?
> Du zitterst — laß mich lesen —
> Ich betrüg dich nicht:
> Die große Fabrik! (pp. 42-43)

In Toller's imagination the factory is a nightmare, a symbol of the soullessness and debasement of industrialism. In many ways, of course, this is a justifiable comparison, one with which many factory-workers would have agreed. Yet it is also a rather obvious

and shallow one. For while the factory had made possible the horrors of modern warfare, it was also the rock on which modern civilisation rested. The wealth created by the factory did not just satisfy basic human needs but also provided the material basis for the development of culture, for it allowed artists and intellectuals to step back from the production process, the daily struggle for survival, and gave them the free time necessary to develop their ideas, their art and their literature. As Toller knew, or came to know, the new society he so badly desired could not and would not dispense with the factory; instead, it would try to humanise it, try to make man the master of the machine and not the other way around.[50] At the time he wrote *Die Wandlung*, however, he had not yet arrived at this conclusion or if he had was not able to give artistic expression to it. Here, as elsewhere, the influence of Landauer is unmistakeable.

Bild 9, a *Traumbild* with the portentous title 'Tod und Auferstehung', is set in the 'Erdgeschoß eines Gefängnisses' — the factory of the previous *Bild* — and depicts in symbolic terms precisely what the title suggests, Friedrich's spiritual death and rebirth. (p. 43) 'Ein Gefangener', again with the mask of Friedrich, has thrown himself from an upper balcony and lies dead on the floor, his head, the stage directions indicate, 'zurückgebeugt, die Arme gestreckt, als ob er gekreuzigt wäre'. Though this scene is rich in biblical imagery and symbolism, Friedrich's rebirth is a secular, not a religious one. The path of renewal he points to lies quite definitely on this side of the grave and not in heaven. At the end of the scene, 'Die Frau', the wife of the 'Gefangenen', threatens to follow her husband's example and kill both herself and her unborn baby, seeing no purpose in a life which can now only hold untold hardship and misery for her, a single woman:

> *FRAU*: Was ist mir Leben jetzt .../ Ich töte mich ... und das Kind .../
> Wozu denn noch?/ Wozu?
> *GEFANGENER*: Wozu:/ Komm näher, daß ich's sage./ Vielleicht,

> gekreuzigt, kann es sich befreien,/ Aus seinen Malen wachsen lichte Kräfte./ Vielleicht, gekreuzigt kann es sich erlösen,/ Zu hoher Freiheit auferstehen. (p. 45)

Though they demand pain and suffering, renewal and redemption can be found in this world, something immediately recognised by the other prisoners who, inspired by the words of the 'Gefangenen', call out in unison 'Bruder, deine Worte künden Wege. Gekreuzigt wollen wir uns erlösen, Zu hoher Freiheit auferstehen'. (p. 45) At the end of the scene, at the moment when 'der Gefangene' dies, his wife gives birth to her baby and holds it out to the prisoners who look up at her 'voll Ehrfurcht'.

This new, reborn Friedrich, shown in *Bild* 10 in the guise of a 'Wanderer' striding towards the 'Arbeitsstätte' where he now knows his place to be, turns up in *Bild* 11 at a 'Volksversammlung' where through the power of his rhetoric, the pathos of his appeal, he convinces the masses to renounce their old ways, to discover the humanity within themselves and join him in his peaceful, joyous revolution. Before he can win the ear of the masses, however, he has to defeat a number of opponents, some of them, 'ein alter Herr', a Professor and a Priest, representatives of the old order, one of them, 'Der Kommis des Tages', apparently a revolutionary, but whom Friedrich exposes as a demagogue, a false leader whose ideas, if heeded, would bring about a society not much better, in some ways worse, than the old one. Each of the three spokesmen for the ruling-class is cruelly indifferent towards the suffering of the masses. The 'alte Herr', for instance, censures the audience — 'das Volk' — which, he claims, has forgotten the glorious struggle against 'die Wilden' and now can only complain about 'das bißchen Brot'. 'Was will das bißchen Brot bedeuten', he exclaims, 'Wenn ihr arbeiten wollt, findet ihr Arbeit, und ob ihr Kartoffeln oder Braten eßt, ist schließlich doch gleich'. (p. 47) Hiding behind convoluted and obscure language, the Professor takes the same approach, explaining that it is not bread which is important but 'Wissenschaft' and

'Bildung'. 'Geht, lernt, was es heißt, kausale Zusammenhänge, die Assoziationen verschiedener Erscheinungen zu begreifen!'(p. 47) In more blunt terms, he also explains the social function of science. Where once science had been the servant of the Church it is now 'Dienerin unseres Staates', the state having assumed the mantle the church had once worn, representing, that is, 'Wahrheit [...] und letzte Erkenntnis'(p. 47):

> Die Wissenschaft, die ich verkünde, ist voll von heiligem Ernst. Sie dient der Erhaltung des Staates, sie ist eine Apologie dieses vollkommensten ethischen Organismus. (p. 47)

If the state is a perfectly ethical organism, then it is the highest moral duty of the individual to identify him or herself with it and to be prepared to defend it with every means available in times of crisis, a point made explicit by the 'Pfarrer' in his speech. He too tells the people to forget their hunger and misery, their 'kleinen Sorgen', and to remember instead the 'glorreichen Tage', the war against 'die Wilden' when with poison gas and flamethrowers, with submarine and 'der Gewalt des Hungers' they had been God's instrument, had been 'gottgefällig'. (p. 48) For, he explains, 'der Herr der Heerscharen war mit unsern Waffen und hat den Engel gesandt, der voranschritt mit blutigen Sensen und die Reihen der Feinde niedermähte'. (p. 48)

One of the interesting things about this scene — again, a good indication of the precise stage Toller had reached in his political development — is that the character who represents the far left, the 'Kommis des Tages', is shown in just as negative a light as those who represent the old society. In his speech, the 'Kommis' tells 'das Volk' that they have no need of 'Universitätsprofessoren' or 'Pfaffen', that Jesus has become 'der Familiengott der Reichen' and that there is no need for such a God either. What they do need, he explains, is bread, is money: 'Wir müssen die Dummheit bekämpfen und an seine Stelle den Verstand, d.h. euch die Masse setzen'. (p. 48) He then goes on to expose

as fraud the notion that 'Staat' and 'Vaterland' are the same thing, arguing that the state is a capitalist state, an organisation for defending the interests of the ruling elite against any foreign threat and that posed by the poor and dispossessed at home. Both science and the church stand for the defence of those interests, for the maintenance of the *status quo*. Salvation, therefore, will not come from those quarters. So what is to be done? His answer is 'den gesunden Menschenverstand repräsentiert durch die Masse auf den Thron setzen' for that would bring 'Brot und Wohlhabenheit und Arbeit und Rechte'. (p. 49)

But how is this new social order to be achieved?:

> Was müssen wir? Die Dummheit vom Thron stoßen und darum predige ich euch: Zertrümmert die Paläste! O, ich sehe euch, alle aufgespeicherten Kräfte frei, grandiose Bilder des Kampfes. Männer, die Fahne der Freiheit schwingen! Frauen euch umfangen in heißer Umarmung! Massen wogen! Schüsse fallen! Verse und Pamphlete will ich euch dazu schreiben, die blutige Taten sind. Meine Zeitschriften sollen euch begleiten mit schmetternden Trompetenklängen! Blut fließt! Blut der Freiheit! Ich sage: Marschiert, marschiert! (p. 49)

What the 'Kommis' preaches is senseless, wanton violence, violence not with any real goal in mind, but violence simply for its own sake. This, of course, is meant to mark him out as some kind of Marxist, probably a Communist, since these groups were known to be in favour of violence. Or were they? Is it not the case that Toller caricatured and distorted the views of the Marxist left in order to make his own, pacifist position, as reflected in Friedrich, seem ethically pure and righteous? While often accused of favouring violence for its own sake, the Marxists — and this includes the KPD — actually saw violence as an unavoidable part of the revolutionary struggle, a means to and end and not, as here, an end in itself. Knowing that the ruling-class would not give up its power and privileges without a struggle, they drew the simple conclusion that, if the workers were not to remain slaves for an eternity, they would have to be prepared to resort to violence. The message Toller preaches through Friedrich, however, is that all

violence, whether used by the oppressors or the oppressed, was evil. The slave who used violence to gain his freedom was just as worthy of condemnation as the slave-owner who used violence to keep him there. In time, of course, he was forced to abandon this sterile position. Here, however, before he had tasted the reality of revolution in Munich, he makes the 'Kommis' an advocate of violence pure and simple and in so doing creates a perfect foil for Friedrich, the ethical pacifist. For in his speech, Friedrich condemns the call to violent and bloody revolution. He tells the people he knows about their plight, their poverty and hunger, their miserable houses, the oppression they suffer, their hate, their 'tiefen Widerwillen gegen die Schänder am Göttlichen'. (p. 50) But he goes on, 'ich warne euch vor den Worten des Mannes, der euch zurief: Marschiert! Warne euch vor den Halbwahrheiten, die in seinen Worten gleißen'(p. 50):

> Er wollte euch die Mittler und die Philosophen erklären und erklärte doch nur diese, die hier sprachen. Diese aber waren Drehorgelspieler, die ihren Beruf wie Zuhälter verkauften. Kennt ihr ihn? Gestern, da schrie er: Absonderung vom Volk! Heute ruft er: Das Volk ist Gott! Und morgen wird er verkünden: Gott ist eine Maschine. Darum ist das Volk eine Maschine. Er wird sich trotzdem freuen an den schwingenden Hebeln, wirbelnden Rädern, hämmernden Kolben. Volk aber ist für ihn Masse. Denn er weiß nichts vom Volk. Glaubt ihm nicht, denn ihm fehlt der Glaube an sich, an den Menschen. Ich aber will, daß ihr den Glauben an den Menschen habt, ehe ihr marschiert. Ich aber will, daß ihr Not leidet, so ihr ihn nicht besitzt. (p. 50)

Naturally, Friedrich provokes a furious reaction when he tells the people that he wants them to suffer. He goes on to explain, however, that the suffering he wants them to experience is not of a material but of a spiritual kind:

> Nicht länger sollt ihr Hunger leiden. Aber wissen sollt ihr, daß es nicht damit getan ist, sich satt zu essen. Ich wünschte euch Sattheit und wünschte euch seelische Not. Um der Liebe willen, die uns alle verbindet. Ich will nicht, daß ihr Darbende seid, die ihren Hunger stillen, Gierige, Geile. Ich will, daß ihr reich seid, Lebenserfüllte. (p. 50)

Friedrich proclaims that he too wants to fight against 'Armut und Elend' but persuades the people to postpone their struggle for one more day and join him tomorrow on the market-place where he will reveal his vision of revolution and the new humanity.

This final *Bild* takes place at noon, the brightest part of the day, and is set in the square in front of the Church, from where 'das Volk' come streaming to hear Friedrich speak. Why 'das Volk' should have been in the Church in the first place is something of a puzzle, since at the 'Volksversammlung' they had been vociferous in their denunciation of the Priest and religion in general. Be that as it may, Friedrich appears before the crowd outside the Church as a new messiah, a new Christ, a man whose pathos can move men and women to tears. In essence, his speech adds nothing to the one he had given the previous day, most of it being taken up with him telling the people once more that he knows of their suffering, knows how this suffering has damaged their souls, and turned them into 'verzerrte Bilder des wirklichen Menschen!' (p. 59):

> Ihr seid alle keine Menschen mehr, seid Zerrbilder euer selbst. Und ihr könntet doch Menschen sein, wenn ihr den Glauben an euch und den Menschen hättet, wenn ihr Erfüllte wäret im Geist. — Aufrecht schrittet ihr durch die Straßen und heute kriecht ihr gebückt. — Froh leuchteten eure Augen und heute sind sie halb erblindet. Beschwingt waren eure Schritte und heute schleppt ihr Eisenklötze hinter euch her. — O, wenn ihr Menschen wäret, unbedingte, freie Menschen.(p. 60)

Friedrich's revolution, is not — or not in the first instance — a social or economic revolution but a revolution of the spirit. The people will have to discover the humanity within themselves, become real people, 'Erfüllte im Geist' (p. 60), before they can transform their material conditions. Here again the influence of Landauer is quite palpable. Neither here or at any later stage in his political development was Toller able to accept the Marxist notion that it is conditions which determine consciousness and that the transformation of the human spirit, if it is to take place at all, would take place not

before but after the social transformation. During the *Räterepublik*, Toller was, of course, forced to bow to reality and worked quite happily hand-in-hand with the imperfect human forces who took part in it. In *Die Wandlung*, however, where he has the power to mould and shape people and events, he transforms his 'Volk', turns them into 'unbedingte, frei Menschen', imbues them, in other words, with his own rather narrow, naive and somewhat priggish political values and morality. This priggishness is reflected too in the kind of revolution Friedrich preaches. For the revolution should not only be peaceful and bloodless, it should embrace the whole of humanity, rich and poor alike. 'Geht hin zu den Machthabern', Friedrich tells the people, 'und kündet ihnen mit brausenden Orgelstimmen, daß ihre Macht ein Truggebilde sei' (p. 60):

> Geht hin zu den Soldaten, sie sollen ihre Schwerter zu Pflugscharen schmieden. Geht hin zu den Reichen und zeigt ihnen ihr Herz, das ein Schutthaufen ward. Doch seid gütig zu ihnen, denn auch sie sind Arme, Verirrte. Aber zertrümmert die Burgen, zertrümmert lachend die falschen Burgen, gebaut aus Schlacke, aus ausgedörrter Schlacke. (pp. 60-61)

At the end of the play, the whole crowd marches off, hands linked, towards the revolution and the new dawn, repeating as they march the final words of Friedrich's speech:

> Brüder recket zermarterte Hand,
> Flammender freudiger Ton!
> Schreite durch unser freies Land Revolution! Revolution!
> Revolution!(p.61)

Toller's revolution is a quite miraculous one, one which has no enemies, one in which the rich and powerful join hands with the poor and dispossessed in a spirit of human solidarity. Of course, it is very easy to do what Communist critics did and dismiss all this as hopelessly utopian and idealistic, to say that the political message contained in *Die Wandlung* had nothing whatsoever in common with the ideas of socialism. Yet while the

notion of a peaceful revolution embracing all mankind was absurd — as Toller himself was soon to learn — there is no doubting his genuine sympathy for the oppressed and his deep desire to create a better world. Toller's vision was naive and unrealistic, but it reflected the excitement kindled in him by what he had experienced in Munich, his hatred of injustice, of war of society as it stood. By no stretch of the imagination was Toller a revolutionary socialist, at least not in the terms in which the Communists would have understood the term. The dominant influence on him at this stage, as Michael Ossar and others have rightly argued, was Landauer.[51] It was his ethical idealism, his concept of revolution, his unique brand of anarcho-socialism, which provided the main ideological underpinning, both in *Die Wandlung* and the plays which immediately followed. Toller's claim, therefore, that he became a socialist about this period has to be viewed with a degree of scepticism. At the same time, it is important to recognise that he found himself here at the beginning of a long learning process. For the moment, Toller believed, and believed quite firmly, that the whole of society, 'Das Volk', an undifferentiated mass, could be won over to his vision of a better world. Experience would teach him two things: firstly, that not everyone would greet the revolution with open arms and that, regrettably, force would be necessary; and secondly, that the only force capable of leading the struggle for the new society he desired, the force which stood most to gain from it, was the working class. Gradually, and not without a great deal of inner struggle on Toller's part, these ideas came to find their reflection in his dramatic work.[52]

1. On 2 August 1914 the Trades Unions agreed an accord with the employers associations renouncing all workplace confrontation for the duration of the war. Two day later, on 4 August, after voting in favour of war credits, the SPD parliamentary fraction issued a declaration stating it would refrain from public criticism of the other political parties throughout the war:

> Da machen wir wahr, was wir immer betont haben: Wir lassen in der Stunde der Gefahr das Vaterland nicht im Stich.

For the full text of this declaration see Carl Grünberg *Die Internationale und der Weltkrieg* (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1916), pp. 76-77. Such was Lenin's surprise at the position adopted by the SPD that, initially, he believed the issue of *Vorwärts* announcing the party's support for the war was a forgery issued by the German High Command. See Leo Trotzki, *Mein Leben: Versuch einer Autobiographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987) p. 209. First published in 1929.

2. Strikes involving tens of thousands of workers against inadequate food supplies took place in Berlin, Halle, Leipzig, Magdeburg and Brunswick in April 1917, while even earlier than this, in June 1916, 50,000 had taken part in a demonstration for the release of Karl Liebknecht who was in jail accused of high treason for having organised a peace protest. See Julius Braunthal *History of the International 1914-1943*, trans. by John Clark, 2 vols (London: Nelson, 1967), II, 101. On the disturbances in the fleet, see Arthur Rosenberg, *Entstehung und Geschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1955), pp. 164-77.

3. For an inside account of the negotiations between Germany and the Soviet Union at Brest-Litovsk see Trotzki, *Mein Leben*, pp. 313-27. For the terms of the treaty, signed on 15 December 1917, see *The Communist International 1919-1943, Documents*, edited by Jane Degras (London: Cass, 1956), I, 50-51.

4. See Braunthal, *History of the International*, I, 98-99.

5. The conference was attended by 143 delegates among them 15 members of the *Reichstag* including Hugo Haase, Toller's lawyer at his trial in Munich in 1919, Franz Mehring, Rudolf Hilferding and Eisner himself. See Eugen Prager, *Geschichte der USPD: Entstehung und Geschichte der Unabhängigen Sozialistischen Partei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Verlagsgenossenschaft Freiheit, 1921), pp. 124-36.

6. See V.I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967). First published 1919.

7. Eduard Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1902) 2nd edn. First published 1899. Bernstein's goal was to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to emancipate the party from what he saw as an outdated phraseology. Instead of speculating on a 'großen Zusammenbruch' of bourgeois society, the SPD should set itself the task 'die Arbeiterklasse politisch zu organisieren und zur Demokratie auszubilden, und für alle Reformen im Staate zu kämpfen, welche geeignet sind, die Arbeiterklasse zu heben und das Staatswesen im Sinne der Demokratie umzugestalten'. (*Ibid.*, p. 9) Bernstein saw his revisionist ideas as being compatible with those of Marx and Engels, but believed that capitalism would gradually, without a revolutionary overthrow, grow into socialism.

8. Luxemburg argued that the Social Democrats, not just in Germany but internationally, by voting for war credits, had turned the Socialist movement into a servant of imperialism and betrayed the interests of the working-class. The workers, she wrote, had nothing to gain from the war and should refuse to accept any responsibility for its outcome and instead seek to achieve a real and lasting peace by overthrowing the capitalist system. In the *Leitsätze* adopted by the Spartacus Group in 1916 she wrote:

> Das sozialistische Endziel wird von dem internationalen Proletariat nur verwirklicht, indem es gegen den Imperialismus auf der ganzen Linie Front macht und die Losung "Krieg dem Kriege" zur Richtschnur seiner praktischen Politik erhebt.

The *Leitsätze* are reprinted in Paul Frölich, *10 Jahre Krieg und Bürgerkrieg* (Berlin: Vereinigung Internationaler Verlagsanstalten, 1924), pp. 234ff. Liebknecht, one of only 14 SPD Reichstag Deputies to vote against war credits, demanded an end to the *Burgfrieden* and proposed instead a revolutionary assault by the workers' movement on the German ruling-class, a position very close to Lenin's revolutionary defeatism. See his articles in Karl Liebknecht, *Politische Aufzeichnungen aus seinem Nachlaß. Geschrieben in den Jahren 1917-1918*, edited by Sophie Liebknecht and Franz Pfemfert (Berlin: Die Aktionsverlag, 1921).

9. See Prager, *Geschichte der USPD*.

10. The collapse of the USPD was accelerated by the debate on the question of affiliation to the 3rd or Communist International. At a conference to decide the issue, held in Halle in October 1920, the vote in favour of affiliation was carried by 236 votes to 156. The minority, however, refused to accept the decision and walked out of the hall. In December the same year, following a unity conference, 300,000 of the party's 800,000 members joined the KPD with roughly the same number remaining loyal, the remainder dropping out of political activity altogether. Two years later, in September 1922, the majority of the party rejoined the SPD leaving only a tiny rump, led by Georg Ledebour, retaining the name. See Braunthal, *History of the International*, p. 224.

11. The following details are taken from Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918-1919. The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 34-74.

12. See Hermann Cohen, *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (Berlin: Dummler, 1877).

13. Quoted in Freya Eisner, 'Kurt Eisners Ort in der sozialistischen Bewegung', in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 43 (1995), 407-35 (p. 417).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

15. Article entitled 'Eine Reise um die Welt in drei Tagen', quoted in Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, pp. 42-43. Apart from the date no publishing details are given.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

18. Kurt Eisner, 'Preußische Erinnerungen', *Fränkische Tagespost*, 27 June 1908.

19. See his article 'Vier Fragen', in *Sozialismus als Aktion: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Reden*, edited by Freya Eisner (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 26-39.

20. See Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, p. 60.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 61. See too an article Eisner wrote in 1916 but did not publish until after the war, 'Die Mobilmachung als Kriegsursache und Anderes' in *Unterdrücktes aus dem Weltkrieg* (Munich: Mueller, 1919).

22. For an account of the transformation in Eisner's political outlook in this period see *Revolution und Räterepublik in München 1918-1919 in Augenzeugenberichten*, edited by Gerhard Schmolze (Düsseldorf: Rausch, 1919).

23. See Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), p. 42.

24. See Kurt Kreiler, *Die Schriftstellerrepublik. Zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Politik in der Münchner Räterepublik* (Berlin: Klaus Guhl, 1978), pp. 34-35.

25. See Richard Grunberger, *Red Rising in Bavaria* (London: Arthur Baker, 1973), p. 65.

26. Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, p. 67.

27. See Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung während des Weltkrieges*, 2 vols (Vienna: Malik, 1925), I, 102-11.

28. See Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, p. 67.

29. For a good overview of the strike see A.J. Ryder, *The German Revolution of 1918. A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), pp. 116-19

30. According to some estimates the strike in Munich had involved more than 10,000 workers. In Berlin, however, more than half a million took part with significant numbers participating in Kiel, Hamburg, Magdeburg, Cologne and Nuremberg. See Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution. Germany 1918-1923*, 2nd edn (London, Chicago and Sydney: Bookmarks, 1997), p. 31. First published 1982.

31. On his return to the army Toller was posted to a reserve battalion at Neu Ulm. See Dove, *He was a German*, pp. 46-48.

32. *Die Wandlung. Das Ringen eines Menschen*, in *GW*, II, 8-61. First published in Potsdam, by Kiepenheuer and Witsch in 1919.

33. For a discussion of the development and decline of Expressionism in German and European literature see R. S. Furness, *Expressionism*, The Critical Idiom, 29 (London: Methuen, 1973); Wolfgang Rothe, *Der Expressionismus. Theologische, soziologische und anthropologische Aspekte einer Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977); Helmut Gruber, The Political-Ethical Mission of German Expressionism, *German Quarterly*, 60, no. 2 (1967) 186-203.

34. See Furness, *Expressionism*, pp. 47-48. Also *Expressionismus. Der Kampf um eine literarische Bewegung*, edited by Paul Raabe (Munich: dtv, 1965), pp. 15-84.

35. See Rothe, *Der Expressionismus*, pp. 228-43.

36. Furness, *Expressionism*, pp. 18-21.

37. See Richard Samuel and R. Hinton Thomas, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre (1910-1924)* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1939), pp. 146-70

38. See Christoph Eyckman, *Denk- und Stilformen des Expressionismus* (Munich: Francke, 1973).

39. Kasimir Edschmid, one of the leading Expressionists in the movement's early phase, described the new demands being made on language in December 1917 in a lecture entitled 'Expressionismus in der Dichtung', later printed under the title *Über den Expressionismus in der Literatur und die neue Dichtung* (Berlin: Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit, 1919):

> Die Sätze liegen im Rhythmus anders gefaltet als gewohnt. Sie unterstellen der gleichen Absicht, demselben Strom des Geistes, der nur das Eigentliche gibt. Melodik und Biegung beherrscht sie. Doch nicht zum Selbstzweck. Die Sätze dienen in großer Kette hängend dem Geist, der sie formt.
>
> Sie kennen nur einen Weg, sein Ziel seinen Sinn. Sie binden Spitze an Spitze, sie schnellen ineinander, nicht mehr verbunden durch Puffer logischer Überleitung, nicht mehr durch den federnden äußerlichen Kitt der Psychologie. Ihre Elastizität liegt in ihnen selbst. Auch das Wort enthält andere Gewalt. Das beschreibende, das umschürfende hört auf. Dafür ist kein Platz mehr. Es wird Pfeil. Trifft in das Innere des Gegenstandes und wird von ihm beseelt. Es wird kristallisch das eigentliche Bild des Dinges. Dann fallen die Füllwörter. Das Verbum dehnt sich und verschärft sich, angespannt so deutlich und eigentlich den Ausdruck zu fassen. Das Adjektiv bekommt Verschmelzung mit dem Träger des Wortgedankens. Auch es darf nicht umschreiben. *Es* allein muß das Wesen am knappsten geben und nur das Wesen. Sonst nichts!

Kasimir Edschmid, 'Expressionismus in der Dichtung', in *Expressionismus. Der Kampf um eine literarische Bewegung*, pp. 90-108 (pp. 100-01).

40. Eva Kolinsky, *Engagierter Expressionismus: Politik und Literatur zwischen Weltkrieg und Weimarer Republik: Eine Analyse expressionistischer Zeitschriften* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970).

41. Among those who, initially at least, supported the war effort and enlisted in the army were Franz Werfel, Alfred Lichtenstein, Georg Trakl, Ernst Stadler, August Stramm and Fritz von Unruh. Of these, Trakl, Stadler and Stramm did not return from the front. For an interesting discussion of the various reactions to the war among Germany's literary groupings see Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism. German Literature and Society 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), pp. 105-23.

42. Founded in Berlin in 1910, *Die Aktion* was for a time the main mouthpiece for the most politically radical among the Expressionist writers, for those people, that is associated with the movement which came to be known by the name of *Aktivismus*. Among this group were the likes of Kurt Hiller, Heinrich Mann, Ludwig Rubiner, Max Brod, Kurt Pinthus, Alfred Wolfenstein and Gustav Landauer. For an account of the development of this literary tendency — and *Aktivismus* was never much more than a literary tendency, one, moreover, which was never able to agree on anything resembling a common programme — see *Der Aktivismus 1915-1929*, edited by Wolfgang Rothe (Munich: dtv, 1969).

43. Schickele began editing the journal in December 1914, succeeding Franz Blei who had founded it earlier that same year, and moved its base from Leipzig to Switzerland in 1916. See Istvan Deak, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals. A Political History of the Weltbühne and Its Circle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 68-69.

44. Becher (1891-1958) joined the USPD in 1917 and the KPD in 1919. From 1933 until 1945 he lived in exile in the USSR, acting their as chief editor of the German exile journal, *Internationale Literatur*. Returning to the DDR in June 1945, Becher became President of the *Akademie der Künste* in 1953 and Culture Minister the following year. Having long-since turned his back on his Expressionist roots, Becher became the foremost representative of socialist realism during the post-war period. See Edgar Weiss, *Johannes R. Becher und die sowjetische Literaturentwicklung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971).

45. Pfemfert's wife, Alexandra Ramm, was Trotsky's German translator. Both she and her husband remained friends with Trotsky up to the latter's murder in August 1940. Pfemfert died in exile in Mexico City in 1954, where he and Ramm had lived since 1941. See *Kunst und Literatur im Antifaschistischenexil 1933-1945*, 7 vols (Leipzig: Reclam, 1980), IV, 182.

46. In a review of Fritz von Unruh's drama, *Ein Geschlecht*, Karl Liebknecht criticised what he felt was the lack of political insight in much Expressionist work, writing that Unruh sought to depict the social problems facing mankind with great seriousness, but, he added:

> [...] doch nur als ein mit dem Geschicke hadernder Angehöriger der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, der seine Faust gegen die Sterne ballt, das Weltall anklagt, und sich selbst zerfleischt, der keinen Ausweg sieht — fliehen möchte und nicht kann —, in tatenloser Verzweiflung zusammenstürzt, statt kämpfend zu handeln, um eine neue Welt zu schaffen. Sekundäre Probleme verdeckten ihm das Primäre, über den Folgen erkennt er nicht die Ursachen, erkennt nicht die sozialen Wurzeln des Furchtbaren, das ihn umklammert, nicht die Kraft, die sie ausrotten kann. Dieses Werk ist das Drama der aus dem Wahne von der Göttlichkeit ihrer eigenen Weltordnung gerissenen Bourgeoisie. Doch durchbrodelt revolutionärer gärender Geist die ungemein konzentrierte und intensive Gestaltung. Warten wir, ob dieser Dämmerung der Tag folgt.

Quoted in, *Deutsche Literatur Geschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Wolfgang Beutin (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), pp. 262. (No other publishing details on

Liebknecht's article are given.)

47. Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism in the Work of Ernst Toller* (New York, Berne, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 124.

48. During the strike period in Munich, Toller distributed leaflets among the strikers containing the hospital and cripple scenes from *Die Wandlung*. See *EJID*, p. 88.

49. It is interesting to note here some comments made by Marianne Weber about her husband Max and his role as a hospital administrator during the early phase of the war:

> But if Weber was not exactly cut out to be a "subordinate", he was all the more suited to being a superior. In this position he had full control over himself. His staff tried to win his approval: they loved and respected him [...] Other friendly colleagues also offered their service. Scholarly work was impossible, and everyone scrambled for a chance to lend a hand in some way. Weber let them supervise the setting up of hospitals. Together with their own staff of helpers they could now see to it that not only the mangled limbs were healed for fresh combat, but also that souls benumbed by horror thawed out in love of the homeland. The soldiers were embraced and kissed, everyone was moved to tears, and as the aides helped to cut bloody pieces of uniform from their bodies, they saw frightful things. "This was done for you" — this knowledge inspired any amount of loving strength in the souls of those who had stayed at home.

Marianne Weber, *Max Weber. A Biography*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York, London, Sydney, Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), pp. 520-21.

50. See, for instance, his comments in *EJID*, pp. 160-61.

51. Michael Ossar, *Anarchism in the Dramas of Ernst Toller* (New York: Albany, 1980).

52. From an article Toller wrote in prison in the summer of 1919, it is apparent that he had already began to realise the limitations of the anarchist philosophy he had imbibed from Landauer, to understand that social change was dependent not upon the charismatic leadership of a few remarkable individuals, but the active participation of the revolutionary masses. Moreover, he also saw clearly the importance of material conditions in shaping the consciousnes of the masses:

> Viele von uns haben die Tragik der europäischen Revolution übersehen, die darin liegt, daß die ökonomischen und politischen Bedingungen Westeuropas von denen Mittel- und Osteuropas gegenwärtig in hohem Maße verschieden sind. Und wer da glaubt, diese Differenz könne durch intensive Agitation einer kleinen Schar zielbewußter Revolutionäre, die imstande sind, von heute auf morgen die betreffenden Länder zu revolutionieren, ausgeglichen werden, der kann für sich in Anspruch nehmen, hierin ein gutgläubiger Anhänger Bakunins zu sein — mehr aber nicht. Heute, wo die marxistische Theorie der revolutionären Bedingungen von Tag zu Tag ihre plastische Bestätigung findet, wird dies Anschauung durch die Wucht der Geschehnisse widerlegt. Denn es genügt nicht, eine geistige revolutionäre Atmosphäre bei wenigen zu schaffen, die

> notwendige geistige Atmosphäre und Zielklarheit bei den Massen wird erst hervorgerufen, wenn die entsprechenden ökonomischen und politischen Voraussetzungen bestehen.

'Weltrevolution', *Kampf* (Munich), 9 August 1919. Reprinted in *Quer Durch*, pp. 216-20 (p. 216).

CHAPTER 3

TOLLER AND THE *RÄTEREPUBLIK*

Any account of Toller's role in the *Räterepublik* has to begin by stressing that his behaviour, like the behaviour of all those involved, was often irrational and contradictory in nature.[1] However, it must also be stressed that this was a reflection not so much of any personal or political shortcomings on Toller's part, but of the irrational and contradictory nature of events themselves. The most glaring contradiction was of course the fact that it was Bavaria, perhaps the most conservative region in the whole of Germany, which provided the stage for what was to be the most radical episode in the history of the November Revolution. On closer inspection, however, this contradiction is not as glaring as it might seem. War had brought about a transformation in Bavaria's social structure, for while the peasantry still comprised the majority of the population, there had been a substantial expansion in the working class in recent years. Munich, a centre of armaments production, had seen a huge influx of munitions workers, many of them from the industrial areas of Northern Germany, who were, in general, more radical than Bavaria's indigenous working class.[2] Another factor which strengthened the left in Bavaria was the presence in Munich of a large number of soldiers — about 50,000 in total — waiting on demobilisation by December 1918.[3] Tired of war and privation, they were ready to support almost any party which held out the promise of change and played an important role in the events which were to come. Finally, there existed a general feeling that things could not go on as before, a feeling widespread even among the middle classes, and one given an added dimension in the Bavarian context by the belief that it was Prussia, Prussian militarism, which was responsible for the prolongation of the war.[4] Bavarian separatism, the desire of a mainly Catholic population to break away from Germany and form a political union with Austria, contributed to the sense of instability and crisis without which the *Räterepublik* would never have come into existence.

Yet, despite all this, there is no denying that there was only a very narrow social

basis of support for the extreme left in Bavaria. Eisner's government, which came to power on 8 November 1918 in a peaceful *coup d'état*,[5] was overwhelmingly rejected by the Bavarian people at the elections to the *Diet* on 12 January 1919.[6] His party, the USPD, was humiliated at the polls, receiving only 2.5% of the votes cast. Toller himself, recently elected chairman of the Independents in Munich and now a leading light in the Bavarian Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Council, got around 800 votes, while Landauer, the man Eisner brought into his government to transform the souls of the people got exactly 82.[7] By contrast, the majority SPD, which had entered Eisner's adminstration but was opposed to the *Räte* system and the revolution in general, gained 33%, while the newly founded Catholic *Volkspartei*, despite having supported the war from beginning to end, emerged as the largest single party with 35%.[8] Of course, the outcome of the revolution was not to be decided by the ballot-box alone, yet the elections to the *Diet*, coming only a few weeks before the proclamation of the first *Räterepublik*, provided a good indication of the balance of forces in Bavaria. They confirmed what recent experience elsewhere in Germany had shown, namely that revolutionary sentiment was not widespread but confined to a relatively small section of the population, and that the dominant mood was one of simple war-weariness, a desire for peace and a return to normality.[9] This was a point Toller himself conceded in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*. After 4 long years fighting bravely 'im Schlamm und Regen Flanders, im Giftdunst der wolhynischen Sümpfe, in der sengenden Glut Mesopotamiens', the German soldiers had grown tired of the needless suffering and like the mass of the civilian population were desperate for peace, peace at any price:

> Die Soldaten an der Front erbittert über das Prassen und Schwelgen der Etappe, über das Elend der Heimat, haben den Krieg satt. "Gleiche Löhnung gleiches Essen, wär' der Krieg schon längst vergessen", singen die Soldaten. (*EJID*, p. 78)

What Toller was keen to stress was that the November Revolution was not a carefully planned attempt to overthrow the state, not, as conservative circles claimed, the work of left-wing agitators or saboteurs, but a spontaneous and elemental outburst of pent-up frustration and impatience. The sailors who mutinied in Kiel, for instance, 'des Kaisers blaue Jungen', (*EJID*, p. 79) did so not because they wished to emulate their Russian counterparts, but because they had no desire to throw their lives away in a lost cause merely to shore up the honour of a bankrupt military caste.[10]

Yet it was precisely this, Toller shows, the unplanned, spontaneous nature of the revolution, that factor which lent the movement its truly popular character, which turned out to be its greatest weakness. 'Die deutsche Revolution', he maintained, 'fand ein unwissendes Volk' and 'eine Führerschicht bürokratischer Biedermänner'. (*EJID*, p. 81) Though they clamoured loudly for socialism, the German people had never formulated a clear idea of what socialism really was. 'Es wehrte sich gegen seine Bedrücker', he wrote, 'es wußte, was es nicht wollte, aber es wußte nicht, was es wollte'. (*EJID*, p. 81) Whereas in Russia mass discontent had been channelled and formed by the Bolsheviks into an instrument not only for overthrowing the old state but for forging a new one, in Germany it simply dissipated after the collapse of the monarchy, allowing the old ruling-classes to re-establish their hegemony once the revolutionary wave had receded. In Toller's eyes this was great misfortune of the November Revolution, the fact that the SPD saw the post-war crisis not as an opportunity to realise socialism, but as an excuse for postponing it. Despite their Marxist heritage, the socialist leaders were not at all radical in outlook, but timid reformists who sought not to overthrow capitalism but to save it. Socialism, they argued, was the music of the distant future, at present the task was to restore stability and set about improving the lot of the working-class within the framework of the existing socio-economic set-up. 'Die Rechtssozialisten und

Gewerkschaftsführer', Toller explained, 'waren versippt und verfilzt mit den Gewalten der Monarchie und des Kapitalismus':

> Deren Sünden waren ihre Sünde. Sie hatten sich abgefunden mit dem bürgerlichen juste milieu, ihr Ideal war die Überwindung der Proletariar durch den kleinen gehobenen Bürger. Ihnen fehlte das Vertrauen zu der Lehre, die sie verkündet hatten, das Vertrauen zum Volk, das ihnen vertraute. (*EJID*, p. 81)

The trust the SPD enjoyed, a trust barely dented by their having supported the Imperial Government throughout the war, allowed them to outmanoeuvre their opponents on the extreme left, those grouped around Liebknecht and Luxemburg, and to place themselves at the head of the revolution, not to drive it forward but to guide it into calmer waters. The first step in this process was to win support for the argument that the kind of regime most suited to German conditions was not the Soviet or *Räte* regime Toller and company supported, but a parliamentary republic.[11] At a meeting in December of the Congress of Worker's Councils, the supreme representative body of all the various revolutionary institutions which had sprung up in that period, the *Räte* idea was rejected and support given instead to the SPD's proposal to convene a National Assembly.[12] Of course, this decision was influenced in no small degree by the fact that the Soviet Union itself seemed poised on the brink of social and economic breakdown. It was this too which affected the debate over socialisation. In the eyes of the moderate socialists, the kind of large-scale socialisation measures demanded by the far left were not only premature but harmful; before there could be even any talk of the government taking control of industry, there would have to be a long period of economic reconstruction and regeneration.[13] Some, among them Kurt Eisner, even argued that the war had left behind such destruction and chaos that there was scarcely anything of real value left to nationalise anyway.[14] In the event, when the question was put before the National Assembly, the only body, the SPD

argued, with the authority to settle such an important issue, socialisation was not immediately rejected — this would not have been acceptable to the mass of workers. Instead, in what was a clear attempt to thwart the left by bureaucratic methods, it was decided to set up a socialisation commission, which, as expected, proposed only the mildest of socialisation measures, and even these were rejected by the SPD-led government.[15]

Toller believed that the decision of the Congress of Workers' Councils to oppose both the Soviet model and large-scale socialisation marked a turning point in the history of the revolution, indeed of the Weimar Republic itself. By refusing to take state power into its own hands, by renouncing, that is, what Toller called 'das unverhoffte Geschenk der Revolution', (*EJID*, p. 82) the Republic and its advocates had pronounced their own death sentence. They had failed to crush the economic and social power of those forces opposed to the revolution, left almost untouched '[den] Fuchsbau der alten reaktionären Bürokratie', (*EJID*, p. 81) and so, he suggests, merely paved the way for the revival of reaction in a more virulent form some 14 years later in the shape of National Socialism. Not only that, but on the day after the revolution, the SPD took up the fight not against the enemies of the revolution, but against its most passionate pioneers, 'hetzten und jagten sie, bis sie zur Strecke gebracht waren, und quittierten den Dank in den Salons der feinen Gesellschaft'.[16] Behind the slogan of *Ruhe und Ordnung* and with Gustav Noske acting as self-proclaimed bloodhound,[17] the Ebert government set about ridding Germany of what it saw as the spectre of Bolshevism.[18] These people hated the revolution, Toller asserted, 'Ebert hatte den Mut es auszusprechen'.[19] In a sense, of course, in attacking the revolution the SPD was only acting according to the logic of its own position. For having once decided that no attempt should be made to interfere with bourgeois property relations, the party had no option but to crush those elements who

wanted to go further. The fact that it had to rely upon the old reactionary state to do so was to them a matter of no importance. Ebert, Scheidemann and Noske were concerned, first of all, to avoid revolutionary chaos, and secondly, to maximise the social base of support for the new regime. In oder to do this, to win the backing not just of the working class but of the middle classes too, it was necessary, they believed, to proceed with caution in the fields of economic and social policy, not to frighten moderate elements with attacks on private property.[20] Yet as Toller pointed out, while such an approach may well have succeeded in gaining the approval of conservative and nationalist circles, it weakened working-class support for the Republic. Once the workers realised that the ruling classes were 'wieder Herren und obenauf' (*EJID*, p. 86) and that the promised gains of the revolution were not going to materialise, their enthusiasm for the parliamentary road began to ebb and the idea of a *Räterepublik* came to capture their imagination — at least in Bavaria.

> Die Arbeiterschaft, von der sozialen Tatenlosigkeit der Republik enttäuscht, fordert, daß der politischen Revolution endlich die soziale Revolution folge, was in Rußland gelungen ist, muß auch hier gelingen. (*EJID*, p. 86)

Leaving to one side the question of the degree of support there was for a Soviet regime in Bavaria, it is interesting to note that, in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, Toller concedes that the *Räterepublik* had been a mistake, indeed he describes the whole affair as a 'tollkühner Handstreich verzweifelter Arbeitermassen, die verlorene deutsche Revolution zu retten', (*EJID*, p. 90) an expression of hopelessness and despair rather than of genuine revolutionary optimism. Significantly, he also claims he was aware of this at the time but had swallowed his doubts because he could not bring himself to abandon the workers in a time of crisis. Describing the discussions which took place within the USDP, the party he had joined, as to whether or not support should be given to the revolutionary

movement, Toller writes:

> Hat eine revolutionäre Partei das Recht, die Massen im Stich zu lassen? Revolutionäre Führer dürfen nicht blindlings Massenstimmungen folgen, auf die Gefahr, verkannt zu werden, müssen sie sinnlosen Aktionen wehren. Aber sind es nur Stimmungen? Sind nicht schon Tatsachen geschaffen, die unser Tun beeinflussen müssen? Die Parteibürokratien beraten, das Volk handelt. In jeder Stunde ist in Würzburg, Augsburg, Fürth, Aschaffenburg, Lindau, Hof die Räterepublik ausgerufen. Wir hätten das Volk früher über die wahren Machtverhältnisse in Deutschland aufklären müssen, daß wir es nicht taten, war unsere Schuld. (*EJID*, p. 89)

While willing to accept the blame for having failed to enlighten the masses, Toller seems here to be trying to shift the responsibility for the creation of the *Räterepublik* onto the shoulders of the masses themselves, implying that it was their precipitate actions which had forced the hand of the revolutionary leaders, and had obliged them to accept a *fait accompli* not because they felt it was the right thing to do, but because they saw it as their revolutionary duty. But was Toller right to suggest that those who came to stand at the head of the *Räterepublik* were merely reacting to events? Is not the truth of the matter it was the leaders themselves, Toller and his comrades, who set the whole affair in motion and that it was they, therefore, who had to accept responsibility for the consequences?

Toller was not present at the meeting in Munich on April 5 1919 which took the decision to establish a *Räterepublik*, but he gave the proclamation his full and enthusiastic endorsement.[21] Despite what he says to the contrary in his autobiography, he was, like so many others, caught up in the excitement of the times and honestly believed that this bold experiment in a new form of government could succeed, and could actually become a pole of attraction, not just for the rest of Germany, but for the whole of Europe.[22] To be fair, there were a number of what seemed at the time to be valid reasons for holding this belief. While normality had been more or less restored in Germany following the

unrest of the previous few months, unrest which had found its bloody high-point in January in the so-called *Spartakist-Woche* in Berlin, discontent with the Weimar Republic was still deep enough to provide fuel for the odd, isolated outbreak of revolutionary violence.[23] In March, for instance, a general strike broke out in the Ruhr, while in Frankfurt and Stuttgart there were strikes and riots, these being so serious in the latter case as to necessitate the declaration of a state of emergency.[24] Moreover, Hungary had just witnessed the proclamation of soviet-style republic while Austria too seemed poised to go down the same road, the general impression, therefore, being that what was being formed was a revolutionary corridor linking western Europe with Bolshevik Russia, the first step on the road towards the transformation of Europe.[25] In Bavaria itself, the political situation had grown increasingly radical in the few weeks since Eisner's electoral defeat, with events moving inexorably towards a confrontation between the forces of revolution and counter-revolution.[26] On February 21, on his way to the first meeting of the newly elected *Landtag* where he intended to hand in his resignation, Eisner was assassinated by a right-wing fanatic, Count Arco-Valley.[27] His murder ushered in a period of chaos which ended with the government led by the SPD's Johannes Hoffmann fleeing Munich to take up residence in Bamberg and the proclamation of a *Räte* government.[28] The immediate pretext for the proclamation of the *Räterepublik*, however, was not Eisner's death but the decision of the *Zentralrat* of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in conjunction with the SPD to reconvene the *Diet* — effectively in abeyance since Eisner's murder — on April 8.[29] This decision outraged Toller and his comrades on the far left, for they realised that, as had already happened in the rest of Germany, the *Räte* were about to be sidelined and Bavaria turned into a parliamentary republic. They decided, therefore, the time had come to act.[30] Interestingly, however, the proposal to establish a *Räterepublik* did not come from the far left itself, but from Ernst

Schneppenhorst, a member of the Majority SPD and War Minister in Hoffmann's cabinet.[31] Given this man's previous hostility towards the *Räte*, it would have been only natural if his proposal had aroused a degree of suspicion.[32] Yet most of those present at this meeting, around 100 of the most prominent representatives of the left in Bavaria, among them Mühsam and Landauer, were so enthused by the idea that they did not stop to ask themselves whether this might not be a deliberate provocation, an attempt by the SPD to incite the left into a rash act which would then provide the excuse for a government crack down.[33] Significantly, the only person present who did express scepticism was the new leader of the Communists in Bavaria, Eugen Leviné.[34]

Leviné had been sent to Bavaria by the KPD with strict orders to ensure that the party avoided involvement in any kind of putschist activities, that it did not repeat, in other words, the ultra-left tactics which had led to the blood-bath of the *Spartakist-Woche*[35]. Within weeks he had purged the party of the adventurist and anarchist elements and set about ensuring that it was more firmly rooted in the industrial working class, turning attention towards winning influence and support at shop-floor level among trades union militants in the factory councils.[36] To the dismay of many of those present at the aforementioned meeting, Leviné not only refused to participate in the *Räterepublik* but denounced the whole affair as an adventure. A Soviet Republic, he declared, could not be proclaimed from a conference table at the whim of a revolutionary minority, but required the support and active participation of the proletariat as a whole, or a sizeable section of it at least. Since there was no such support, the proposal under discussion was impermissible.[37] Referring to recent experience, Leviné argued that a premature attempt to create a *Räterepublik* would only play into the hands of the SPD and end in disaster, summing up his speech with a passage of remarkable foresight:

> Die Mehrheitssozialisten würden sich unter dem ersten besten Vorwand

> zurückziehen und das Proletariat bewußt verraten. Die USPD würde mitmachen, dann umfallen, anfangen zu schwanken, zu verhandeln und dadurch zum unbewußten Verräter werden. Und wir Kommunisten würden mit Blut unserer Besten eure Tat bezahlen. Wir lehnen es ab, der Sündenbock für die Dummheit und Verworrenheit der anderen zu sein, und setzen uns nicht an einen Tisch mit Schneppenhorst, dem Nürenberger Noske, und Dürr, der Gasbomben für streikende Arbeiter verlangte.[38]

Levine's prediction about the role of the Majority Social Democrats was borne out within a matter of hours. A conference of the Bavarian SPD held in Nuremberg the very next day opposed the proclamation of a *Räterepublik* and declared that neither Schneppenhorst nor any other party member should have anything to do with it.[39] This, however, made no impression upon the radical left which, on April 7, issued a proclamation declaring Hoffmann's government deposed and the establishment of a *Räterepublik*. With Ernst Niekisch, Chairman of the *Zentralrat* and, therefore, formal head of the new government, resigning after only a day, leadership fell into Toller's lap.[40] His enthusiasm for the idea soon waned, however, once he became fully aware of the enormous gulf which separated his ideal from concrete reality. In one or two places, for instance, in Regensburg and Augsburg, the local *Räte* supported the new regime, yet the writ of the Bavarian Soviet Republic never extended much further than Munich itself. Moreover, the decrees it issued during the mere 6 days of its existence — decrees ordering the socialisation of press and the mines, the restructuring of the banks, revolutionary tribunals to replace the courts, and so on — were, for the most part, paper decrees, having the character of promises to be redeemed in the future rather than articles of immediate practical significance.[41] Surrounded by enemies on all sides, without a sufficiently large base of support among the populace, too far in advance of events in the rest of Germany, the *Räterepublik* had no chance of success.

The inevitable end of this, the first *Räterepublik*, labelled by the Communists the *Scheinräterepublik*,[42] came on Palm Sunday, 13 April 1919, in the wake of an attempted

coup by right-wing elements in Munich acting at Hoffmann's behest.[43] What is significant here, however, is not the *coup* itself but the consequences of it. Disregarding the instructions given him by the leadership of the KPD and the warnings he himself had previously given, Leviné declared the period of the *Scheinräterepublik* was over and that the time had come for a true *Räterepublik*, a Communist *Räterepublik*.[44] In *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* Toller describes with a fair degree of accuracy as well as a good deal of contempt the thinking which had led to Leviné's change of mind:

> Kaum eine Woche ist vergangen, seit die Kommunistische Partei erklärt hat, diese Räterepublik könne nicht lebensfähig sein, die inneren und äußeren Bedingungen fehlten, die Arbeiterschaft sei nicht reif, die Lage im übrigen Deutschland denkbar ungünstig, die Übernahme der Regierung nur ein Dienst für die Reaktion. Der Sieg der Arbeiter wirft alle Bedenken der Kommunisten über den Haufen, der bewaffnete Kampf habe die Einheit des Proletariats geschaffen, im Gegensatz zur Scheinräterepublik sei diese Republik das Werk der Massen, die Kommunistische Partei als revolutionäre Kampfpartei gehöre in diesem Augenblick an die Spitze der Kämpfe, vielleicht lasse sich die Räterepublik so lange halten, bis die kommunistische Revolution auch in Österreich gesiegt habe, und sich ein revolutionärer Block Österreich-Ungarn-Bayern bilden könne. (*EJID*, p. 99)

As indicated above, on one level, Toller's criticism of the Communists' actions is fully justified. Contrary to what Leviné and the apologists for the KPD subsequently claimed, there had been no fundamental change in the situation in the short period since the proclamation of the first *Räterepublik*.[45] There could be, therefore, no theoretical or practical justification for embarking on this suicidal path. Yet could not the same argument be put forward in Leviné's defence that Toller had put forward in his own: namely, that events left him and his party with no real alternative? Leviné, it should be noted, did not order the workers to take up arms to crush the attempted *coup*.[46] Yet, as leader of a revolutionary party, he could not afford simply to turn his back on them once they had moved into action. He had to stand by them in the struggle, to try to make the

best of a bad situation — the workers involved would not have forgiven him or his party had he acted otherwise. Despite having been ordered to avoid becoming embroiled in a revolutionary adventure, he was forced almost against his will to place his party at the head of the movement in order to try to give it some sort of guidance, even though he would have been well aware that the affair was bound to end in disaster.[47] Naturally, Leviné could not admit this openly. In his public proclamations and in his trial speech he was compelled to give his actions a more solid and consistent theoretical foundation, arguing that he had been guided in his actions by the belief that a Bavarian Soviet Republic could have acted as a model for the rest of Germany and Europe as a whole.[48] As some historians have pointed out, however, it seems likely that Leviné only arrived at this position *after* he had taken power, that he merely used this argument, in other words, to justify what he himself knew to have been a mistaken policy.[49]

Despite his misgivings about the wisdom of proclaiming a new *Räterepublik*, Toller did offer his services to Leviné. Like him, Toller was not prepared to turn his back on the workers in the middle of a life-or-death struggle.[50] His services accepted, he soon found himself in the unlikely position of Commander in the hastily improvised Red Army, in which position he scored a notable though ultimately hollow victory at the siege of Dachau. (*EJID*, pp. 104-11) It was Dachau, however, which finally brought to a head Toller's fundamental differences with the Communist Party. When ordered by Egelhofer, the Communist Commander in Chief of the Red Army, to bombard the town, he refused. Subsequently he refused another order to shoot a group of White prisoners and instead released them unharmed to return to their own side. (*EJID*, p. 106) Justifying his decision in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland,* Toller wrote that, in his opinion, it was the virtue of the revolution to show 'Großmut gegenüber dem besiegten Gegner', adding:

> Mögen die Gesetze des Bürgerkrieges noch so brutal sein, ich weiß, die

> Konterrevolution hat in Berlin rote Gefangene ohne Schonung gemordert, wir kämpfen für eine gerechtere Welt, wir fordern Menschlichkeit, wir müssen menschlich sein.(*EJID*, p. 106)

In the eyes of the Communists, of course, Toller's actions — or lack of them — were tantamount to betrayal and in years to come they would denounce him as a petty-bourgeois moralist, arguing that his pacifist-humanitarian principles were incompatible with the harsh demands of the class struggle.[51] Yet in his speech to the court at his own trial, Toller pointed out that, while he was indeed a pacifist, he did not reject violence completely and argued that he recognised there were certain conditions under which violence was not only permissible but necessary:

> Ich würde mich nicht Revolutionäre nennen, wenn ich sagte, niemals kann es für mich in Frage kommen, bestehende Zustände mit Gewalt zu ändern. Wir Revolutionäre anerkennen das Recht zur Revolution, wenn wir einsehen, daß Zustände nach ihren Gesamtbedingungen nicht mehr zu ertragen, daß sie erstarrt sind. Dann haben wir das Recht, sie umzustürzen.[52]

Toller refused to obey Eglhofer's orders, then, not because he was opposed to violence *per se*, but, he claimed, because he felt there was nothing to be gained by it, and that he was being asked to commit a pointless act of savagery. What also informed this decision was the fact that he had fully accepted what the Communists had not: that the situation was hopeless and the only way out, the only way to avoid further needless bloodshed, was to open peace negotiations with Hoffmann.[53] In the isolated situation in which it found itself, Toller believed, the workers' movement had no real option but to take two steps backwards 'um später, gesammelter und reifer, einen Schritt vorwärts gehen zu können':

> Wir haben kein Recht, die Arbeiterschaft zu einem Kampf aufzurufen, der zur sicheren Niederlage, zu sinnlosem Blutvergießen führt. So lange der Gegner nicht weiß, wie schwach wir sind, müssen wir für die

> Arbeiterschaft retten, was zu retten ist. (*EJID*, p. 111)

Toller argues that the Communists too had known that the situation was unsustainable but had rejected negotiations and pushed for a military solution hoping that a defeat would create 'mächtige revolutionäre Antriebe', adding 'sie glauben durch die Niederlage werde das Proletariat reifer und aktiver'. (*EJID*, p. 111) That this was indeed the position the Communists had come to adopt is confirmed by Rosa Leviné-Meyer, Leviné's wife, who writes that her husband had declared:

> We cannot avert the catastrophe, but a revolutionary leadership is responsible for the state in which the workers emerge from it: as a downtrodden, disappointed herd or as high-spirited revolutionaries ready to resume the struggle. We will tell them the truth: an honourable death and experience for the future is all we can salvage from the present situation. But this is a great contribution to our final task and it is in our power to achieve it.[54]

It is easy to criticise Leviné's stance, to denounce him and the ideas to which he was committed as brutal and inhumane. Yet this would be unfair on two counts. Firstly, it makes no allowance for the catastrophic situation in which he found himself. Leviné's talk of a heroic defeat was predictable, a way of convincing both his followers and himself that their sacrifices had not been in vain. In any case, as explained above, official Communist policy had been to avoid at all costs a revolutionary entanglement in Bavaria, to hold back from struggle and await the development of more favourable conditions. The idea that the Communists somehow consciously desired the defeat they eventually suffered in Bavaria is ridiculous. Secondly, the situation Leviné faced was not entirely of his own making. Toller and his friends were at least as much to blame for the bloody events in Munich as Leviné and the Communist Party. In *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* Toller himself admits that all those involved had to accept some share of the blame:

> Wir sind gescheitert, alle. Alle begingen Fehler, alle trifft Schuld, alle waren unzulänglich. Die Kommunisten ebenso wie die Unabhängigen. Unser Einsatz war vergebens, das Opfer nutzlos, die Arbeiter vetrauten uns, wie können wir uns jetzt vor ihnen verantworten? (*EJID*, p. 112)

Yet, while willing to admit to having made mistakes, Toller was not willing to accept full responsibility for all that went on during the *Räte* period.[55] He was horrified by the excesses of the revolution, in particular the murder in the *Luitpold Gymnasium* of 10 hostages on 30 April, an act which he felt besmirched the revolution and ran counter to everything he believed in.[56] This was, without doubt, a bloody and foolish deed, one which provided the White armies with the excuse they needed for the reign of terror they unleashed when the captured Munich on May 1 1919.[57] Yet should not Toller have been aware beforehand of the danger of such excesses? Should he not have known that violence was inevitable in Bavaria from the very moment the first *Räterepublik* was proclaimed? He and his comrades might have managed to convince themselves that theirs would be a peaceful, bloodless revolution, but it was clear to any objective observer that this was wishful thinking. There never was any prospect that Germany's rulers would meekly accept what they saw as an experiment in Bolshevism. Sooner or later they were bound to use force to crush it. Having thrown down this challenge to the German state, Toller should either have been prepared to accept the consequences — all of them — or refrain from revolutionary activity altogether. Until the rise of Hitler forced him to review his position, Toller described himself as a revolutionary pacifist, as someone, that is, who, as indicated, did not renounce violence completely, but who sought to draw a dividing line between necessary and unnecessary violence, who was prepared to sanction it only really as a last resort. Yet is such a distinction possible in the midst of a civil war? From the moral and ethical standpoint on which Toller stood, the killing of the *Luitpold* hostages was wrong. But was it really any worse that killing people by, for

instance, heavy artillery fire in self-defence, something which Toller's moral code did allow? In the former case, at least a conscious selection of victims is possible, whereas a random shell can kill young and old, women and children as well as friend and enemy. Toller's distinction between necessary and unnecessary violence, then, is not only impracticable but worthless. What it reflects was his horror and confusion in the face of the events he had helped unleash. Unlike Leviné, who *was* prepared to be held to account for all of his actions, Toller did not want to be associated with the excesses of the *Räte* period, but only with what he saw as its positive side. He wished to be seen as the champion of a humane and gentle form of revolutionary socialism, not the inhumane and violent form allegedly advocated by the Communists. It is this, the conflict between the peaceful, ethical revolutionary and the violent unethical one which forms the basis of *Masse Mensch*, the first of the plays Toller wrote while serving the five-year prison term imposed for his role in the *Räterepublik*.[58]

1. For an interesting discussion of the role played by Toller and other left-wing artist intellectuals in the *Räterepublik* see Stephen Lamb, 'Intellectuals and the Challenge of Power: the case of the Munich *Räterepublik*', in *The Weimar Dilemma: intellectuals in the Weimar Republic*, edited by Anthony Phelan (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1985), pp. 132-61.

2. Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution. Germany 1918-1923* (London, Chicago and Sydney: Bookmarks, 1997), pp. 123-27.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

5. For one of the fullest accounts of the revolutionary period in Bavaria see Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918-1919. The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965).

6. For the election results see Richard Grunberger, *Red Rising in Bavaria* (London: Arthur Baker, 1973), p. 65.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

8. The *Bayerische Volkspartei*, founded immediately after the November Revolution, represented in the main farming interests and was more conservative in outlook than the old *Zentrum*, rejecting any form of co-operation with the SPD. See Walter Tormin, *Geschichte der deutschen Parteien seit 1848*, 3rd edn (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne and Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1968), p. 139.

9. On this see A. J. Nichols, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 10-19.

10. On October 28 1918, the fleet was ordered to put to sea, but some sailors stationed at Wilhelmshaven refused to obey, rightly sensing that any encounter with the British fleet at this stage would be suicidal. Moreover, it was clear that the officers had decided on this course not just to preserve their honour but to undermine the peace plans then being considered by the administration headed by Prince Max von Baden, this having taken over from the discredited government led by Georg Graf von Hertling (1843-1919) on 3 October 1918. See Daniel Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969).

11. For the debate between the advocates of soviets and parliamentary democracy see Eberhalb Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik 1918-1919* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1962).

12. Of 488 delegates to this congress, which met from 16 to 21 December 1918, 289 supported the SPD, 90 the USPD, 10 the IKD (Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands), a left-wing group based in Bremen whose leading members included Paul Frölich, Karl Radek and Heinrich Laufenberg, while the few dozen others gave no party affiliation. Liebknecht and Luxemburg failed even to be elected as delegates. A resolution in favour of a *Räte* form of government, put forward by Ernst Däumig, one of the leaders of the *revolutionäre Obleute*, was defeated by 344 votes to 98, while the resolution in favour of a National Assembly was carried by 400 votes to 50. For details

see, *Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte Deutschlands vom 16. bis 21. Dezember 1918 im Abgeordnetenhaus zu Berlin: Stenographische Berichte*, edited and published by the Central Council of the German Socialist Republic (Berlin: Herrenhaus, n.d.)

13. The timidity with which the SPD approached the question of socialisation is clear from the following extract from a leading article in *Vorwärts* which discusses proposals for setting up a socialisation commission:

> Aufgabe der Sozialisierungskommission wird es sein, von vornherein beruhigend zu wirken in dem Sinne, daß keine unvernünftigen Experimente zu befürchten sind, und daß zum mindesten niemand einen Schaden davon haben wird, wenn er zunächst seiner vor dem Kriege gewohnten Beschäftigung wieder nachgeht. Sie wird sich des weiteren dessen bewußt sein müssen, daß zu jeder Nationalisierung, Verstaatlichung, Vergesellschaftung eine konstituierte Nation, ein konstituierter Staat, eine konstituierte Gesellschaft vorhanden sein muß, wie sie im Augenblick bei uns noch nicht bestehen. Die müssen erst wieder geschaffen werden, wenn wir festen Baugrund bekommen wollen.

Vorwärts, 5.12.1918.

14. Kurt Eisner, *Die neue Zeit*, 2 vols (Munich: Mueller, 1919), I, 25 and 117. Eisner did not see large-scale socialisation of industry as either practicable or desirable at this stage, arguing that so much productive capacity had been either destroyed or disrupted by war that there was nothing left to socialise in any case. Socialisation, he believed, should be postponed until conditions for it had become more favourable. In the meantime, he proposed the nationalisation only of some large scale mining enterprises and a comprehensive programme of electrification. Under his government in Bavaria, the capitalist system continued almost as before, private ownership not interfered with and the workers granted only very limited concessions, such things as the 8-hour-day and slightly higher unemployment relief, concessions which soon came under attack once the capitalist class felt solid ground under its feet again.

As far as the *Räte* are concerned, despite what Toller says to the contrary, Eisner was never entirely clear about the proper functions of these bodies. Initially, after his coup of November 7 1918, he saw their role as largely that of preventing the breakdown of law and order, not the taking over and running of the state. Subsequently, he did come to the view that the councils should form a crucial part of the new democratic order, but argued not that they should supplant parliamentary democracy, but should exist side by side with it, acting as a vehicle which would allow the masses continuous and direct participation in governmental affairs. Under his government, however, the rights the *Räte* enjoyed were of a more symbolic than practical character, more supervisory and advisory than executive. In the final analysis, effective control was always in the hands of his cabinet ministers.

15. The socialisation commission, consisting of 9 members, 5 professors of economics and 4 from the socialist parties, began its work on 5 December 1918 and quickly produced a report proposing the nationalisation of the coal industry. This, however, was rejected by the government on 15 January 1919. On the advice of the commission, laws were eventually passed calling for public ownership of the coal, potash and electric industries, yet, once again, nothing was done. Finally, in July 1919, Economics Minister

Wissell resigned in protest at the government's lack of progress on this front. See *Die deutsche Revolution 1918-1919 -Dokumente*, edited by Gerhard A. Ritter and Susanne Miller (Frankfurt am Main and Hamburg: Fischer, 1968), pp. 235-51.

16. *EJID*, p. 81. Toller quotes the following telegram sent by Noske to the Commander of the government which crushed the Räterepublik in Munich:

> Für die umsichtige und erfolgreiche Leitung der Operation in München spreche ich Ihnen meine volle Anerkenung aus und den Truppen meinen herzlichen Dank. *Ibid.* p. 144.

17. Noske himself relates the following discussion in which the cabinet debated how to deal with the unrest emanating from the left:

> Ich forderte, daß ein Beschluß gefaßt werde. Darauf sagte jemand: "Dann mach' doch du die Sache!" Worauf ich kurz entschlossen erwiderte: "Meinetwegen! Einer muß der Bluthund werden; ich scheue die Verantwortung nicht!"

Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp - Zur Geschichte der deutschen Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wissenschaft, 1920), p. 68.

18. Noske, Ebert's Defence Minister, called on the notorious *Freikorps*, the counter-revolutionary military grouping which did so much to undermine Weimar democracy, to crush the *Spartakist* rising in Berlin in January 1919. Officially, 156 people were killed during the *Spartakist-Woche*, among them Liebknecht and Luxemburg, who were brutally murdered by *Freikorps* soldiers after being arrested. In the months which followed, Noske's troops put down risings in Hamburg, Bremen, Halle, Leipzig, Magdeburg, in the Ruhr and in Berlin again. This semi civil-war period in which hundreds of people lost their lives cemented in blood the divisions in the German labour movement, divisions which did so much to paralyse the resistance to Hitler. For details of Noske's campaign against the left see Rudolf Lindau, *Revolutionäre Kämpfe 1918-1919* (Berlin: Dietz, 1960).

19. *EJID*, p. 81. What Toller is alluding to here is a comment Ebert made to Chancellor Prince Max von Baden on 7 November 1918 as he tried to make Germany's rulers understand that only the abdication of the *Kaiser* could prevent a revolution:

> Wenn der Kaiser nicht abdankt, dann ist die soziale Revolution unvermeidlich. Ich aber will sie nicht, ja, ich hasse sie wie die Sünde.

Quoted by Joachim Streisand in, *Deutsche Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Eine marxistische Einführung*, 3rd edn (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1976), p. 281. For Prince Max of Baden's own account of this conversation see his *Memoirs*, 2 vols, translated by W.M. Calder and C.W.H. Sutton (London: Constable and Co., 1928), II, 318.

20. See, for instance, comments made by Scheidemann at a cabinet meeting of November 21 1918 in *Protokolle der Kabinettssitzungen*, 1-3, 14 November 1918 to 8 February 1919, Serial no. 8935 H. Quoted by A. J. Ryder, *The German revolution of 1918. A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), p. 168.

21. This 5 April meeting only decided in principle to establish a *Räterepublik*, the official proclamation did not come until two days later. A meeting held in the *Wittelsbacher Palais* on 6 April decided the composition of the new government. USPD members made up the bulk of the new cabinet but there were also a few belonging to the BBB, *Bayerischer Bauernbund*, a party which stood close to the USPD and represented the interests of the poorer, more radical sections of the peasantry, and some belonging to the RAR, *Revolutionäre Arbeiter Rat*. This tiny organisation, about 50 people in all, was made up mainly of USPD members and some anarchists, foremost among the latter being Erich Mühsam, *the* most consistent advocate of the creation of *Räterepublik*, the real guiding force behind the whole movement. For his own interesting account of the revolutionary period see his work 'Von Eisner bis Leviné. Die Entstehung der bayerischen Räterepublik. Persönlicher Rechenschaftsbericht über die Revolutionsereignisse in München vom 7. November 1918 bis zum April 1919', in *Erich Mühsam. Ausgewählte Werke*, 2 vols, edited by Christlieb Hirte (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1978), I, 239-325 (pp.363-67).

The composition of the first *Räte* government was as follows:

Frank Lipp (USPD) *Vorsitzender, Auswärtige Politik*
Fritz Soldmann (USPD) *Innenpolitik*
Gustav Landauer (RAR) *Volksaufklärung*
August Hagemeier (USPD) *Volkswohlfart*
Killer (USPD) *Militärwesen*
Silvio Gesell (RAR) *Finanzen*
Konrad Kübler (BBB) *Justiz*
Gustav Paulukum (USPD) *Verkehr*
Martin Steiner (BBB) *Landwirtschaft*
Arnold Wadler (USPD) *Wohnungskommissar*
Johann Wutzelhofer (BBB) *Ernährungswesen*
Otto Neurath (USPD) *Zentralwirtschaft*

See *Literaten an der Wand. Die Münchner Räterepublik und die Schriftsteller*, edited by Hansjörg Viesel (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1980), p. 27.

22. A good example of Toller's mood at the time is provided by this extract from a placard, drawn up by Toller, issued by the *Räteregierung* and addressed to the *Brüder am Schraubstock, am Pflug am Schreibtisch*:

> Unser Kampf für die Weltrevolution wird unsere Brüder im Westen Europas aufrufen, auch mit ihren Regierungen die große Abrechnung vorzunehmen, damit wir endlich unser Schicksal selbst in die Hand nehmen und Brot, Freiheit und Frieden allen Schaffenden der Welt bringen können. Es lebe die sozialistische, die kommunistische Revolution Bayerns, Deutschlands und der Welt! Es lebe das einige Proletariat!

Reprinted in *Literaten an der Wand*, pp. 347-48.

23. The immediate pretext for the *Spartakist* rising, the rising which cost Liebknecht and Luxemburg their lives, was the decision of the SPD-led government in Prussia to dismiss from his post as chief of police, Emil Eichhorn, a man known to be sympathetic to the *Spartakist* standpoint. The more radical sections of the workers viewed this as a provocation, a sign of the government's intention to clamp down on the revolution, and began a protest campaign against the government and in favour of Eichhorn, a campaign which culminated in a demonstration in Berlin on January 5 1919 of some 700,000 people. Carried away by this show of apparently overwhelming strength, the most militant sections of the left tried to stage an insurrection, found they were hopelessly isolated and were finally subject to the most savage repression by Noske's *Freikorps*. Liebknecht and Luxemburg, leaders of the newly formed KPD, tried to exercise a restraining influence on the movement, but, having failed to do so, decided they had no option but to stand shoulder to shoulder with the radical workers. For a full account of these events see Richard Müller, *Der Bürgerkrieg in Deutschland. Geburtswehen der Republik* (Berlin: Phobus, 1925).

24. In the Ruhr, discontent centred on the government's failure to do anything about socialisation. Things changed only after the mine workers occupied the pits and declared them nationalised. It was this action which led to the passing of the law referred to above empowering the government to take over the coal and potash industries. However, this law remained a dead letter. The strike only came to an end in April following a series of violent clashes between strikers and *Freikorps* units. On this, see Richard Müller, *Bürgerkrieg in Deutschland*, pp. 117-125.

25. The Hungarian Soviet Republic, headed by the Communist Béla Kun (1886-1939), was proclaimed on 21.3.1919 and held out until 1.8.1919, when it resigned rather than wait to be overthrown. See Rudolf L. Tökes *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic* (New York and London: Hoover Institution Publications, 1967). In Austria, where workers' and soldiers' councils had also come into being, the far left had even less of a base of support than in Germany and were unable to win support for the idea of a *Räte* government. An attempt by the fledgling Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ) to create such a regime by force ended as a bloody fiasco. See Julius Braunthal, *Die Arbeiterräte in Deutschösterreich. Ihre Geschichte und Ihre Politik* (Vienna: Brand, 1919).

26. Eisner had continued as Minster President of Bavaria after his election defeat simply because no other party could find enough support for a majority in the *Landtag*.

27. While conservative forces already hated Eisner because of his socialist views, they found even greater reason to do so after the Congress of the Second International in Berne in February 1919 at which he denounced German imperialism and militarism for its part in the outbreak of the war. Of course, conservatives like Arco-Valley were outraged by what they saw as a slur on Germany's national prestige and were determined to make Eisner pay a heavy price. Eisner's speech to the Congress is reprinted as *Schuld und Sühne*, with a foreword by Heinrich Stroebel (Berlin: Neues Vaterland, 1919). For the reaction to Eisner's speech and the events surrounding his assassination see *Revolution und Räterepublik in München 1918-1919 in Augenzeugenberichten*, edited by Gerhard Schmolze and with a foreword by Eberhalb Kolb (Düsseldorf: dtv, 1978), pp. 200-49.

28. The chaos began when Alois Lindner, a member of the USPD and the RAR and involved in Munich's Workers' and Soldiers' Council, incensed by Eisner's murder, burst into the *Landtag* building with the intention of killing the SPD deputy Eberhard Auer, Minister for the Interior in Hoffmann's cabinet. Like many other people, Lindner suspected Auer of being in some way implicated in Eisner's murder. Though this was never proved, it was generally known that Auer had good relations with some of the most conservative forces in Bavaria. He had, after all, been instrumental in issuing an appeal for the creation of a *Bürgerwehr*, a reactionary defence-force whose task was to be the defence of the existing social and economic set-up against the demands of the revolution. Auer survived Lindner's attack, though he was badly wounded. Two others, an Army Major on duty in the parliament building and a Catholic Member of the *Landtag* were killed. See Erich Mühsam 'Seit sieben Jahren im Zuchthaus', in *Erich Mühsam. Ausgewählte Werke*, I, 363-67.

29. See Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, pp. 300-03.

30. Mühsam, for one, was firmly convinced of the counter-revolutionary nature of this decision and believed that it left the radicals with no other choice but to declare a Soviet Republic, as demanded by the local *Räte* in Augsburg on 4 April:

> Man habe daher keine Wahl, wenn man sich nicht vollständig den Kapitalisten ausliefern wolle, als sofort zu handeln und den Willen des Augsburger Proletariats zu erfüllen.

Mühsam, 'Von Eisner bis Leviné', in *Gesammelte Werke*, I, 287.

31. After arguing in favour of a Soviet Republic, Schneppenhorst then asked for the official proclamation to be postponed for two days to allow him time to travel to the provinces to win support for the idea there. He argued that his special influence among the Second and Third Bavarian Army Corps (until recently he had been political advisor to the Third Army Corps) would secure the whole of North Bavaria for the *Räte*. Schneppenhorst, however, only used this delay to intrigue against the *Räte* regime, eventually being given the task by Hoffmann of creating a military force big enough to launch a direct assault on Munich. Despite great efforts, he was only able to muster about 8,000 men, not enough for the task in hand. See Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, pp. 315-16 and pp. 306-07.

32. It is a measure of Schneppenhorst's hatred for the whole *Räte* affair, that, according to Mühsam at least — and this claim was never refuted by Schneppenhorst — he voted for the execution of Leviné after the latter was found guilty of high treason in a farcical trial. See Erich Mühsam 'Eugen Leviné zum Gedächtnis', in *Gesammelte Werke*, I, 403-04 (p. 403).

33. For a discussion of the conflicting theories advanced to explain why Schneppenhorst promoted the idea see Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, pp. 306-07.

34. Born in Moscow in 1883, Leviné was educated in Germany, took part in the 1905 Russian Revolution as a member of the Social Revolutionary Party, was arrested, returned to study in Germany, joined the SPD, then the USPD and finally became a founding member of the KPD. He arrived in Munich on 5 March 1919, was leader of the second *Räterepublik* from 14 until 27 April when he was forced to resign and cede

leadership to a provisional *Aktionsausschuß* headed by Toller and Klingelhöfer of the USPD. He was arrested on 13 May and executed on 5 June 1919. See the biography of Leviné by his wife Rosa Leviné-Meyer, *Leviné. The Life of a Revolutionary*, with an introduction by E. J. Hobsbawm (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1972).

35. A message addressed to the Munich leadership of the KPD by the Central Committee in Berlin of 18 March 1919 states:

> It is to be understood that any occasion for military action by government troops must be strictly avoided. In all frankness and with every emphasis the workers must be told that they should forego any kind of armed action even where a local or momentary success might be possible.

Quoted in Mitchell, *The Bavarian Revolution, p. 308.*

36. See Grunberger, *Red Rising in Bavaria*, p. 89

37. See Leviné's speech in Hans Beyer, *Von der Novemberrevolution zur Räterepublik in München* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiterverlag, 1957), p. 72.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

39. Mitchell, *Red Rising in Bavaria*, p. 309

40. Explaining the reasons for his resignation as chairman of the *Zentralrat*, Niekisch spoke of how he too had allowed himself to be carried along on the wave of revolutionary enthusiasm but had now come to realise that, in view of its traditions and specific social composition, Bavaria was the wrong place for a *Räte* experiment. Moreover, he did not want to break ranks publicly with his party, the SPD, which was opposed to the *Räte*. See Ernst Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben. Begegnungen und Begebnisse* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1958), p. 68. See also Viesel, *Literaten an der Wand* p. 552 for the text of Niekisch's resignation statement.

41. For the proclamations see Max Gerstl, 'Die Münchner Räterepublik,' *Politische Zeitfragen* (Munich: Pfeiffer, 1919), 311-358.

42. In an article written just before the official proclamation of the *Räte* government, Leviné put forward a programme for a Soviet regime — nationalisation of industry, the large estates and the banks, disarming the bourgeoisie, abolition of the old civil service, the setting up of revolutionary tribunals etc — and claimed that the proposed new regime would not implement a single one of these conditions:

> Nein, keinen Sozialismus können wir von ihnen erwarten, keine Diktatur des Proletariats. Nur eine Diktatur einzelner Abhängiger und Unabhängiger soll er werden, Diktatur des Zentralrates und der Volksbeauftragten, schamhaft verhüllt mit dem Namen Räterepublik. "Räterepublik", die mit einer proletarischen Räterepublik nichts gemein hat. An der Proklamierung einer solchen *Scheinräterepublik* können sich die Kommunisten unmöglich beteiligen.

Eugen Leviné, 'Auch eine Räterepublik', *Münchner Rote Fahne*, 6 April 1919.

43. Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*, pp. 316-20.

44. Rosa Leviné-Meyer, *Leviné*, pp. 102-06.

45. Writing under the pen-name of Paul Werner, Paul Frölich justified the Communists' sudden about turn after the Palm Sunday coup as follows:

> Die Kommunisten wurden durch den Rechtsputsch vor eine neue Situation gestellt. Jetzt handelte es sich nicht mehr um die Erhaltung dieser Mißgeburt von einer Räterepublik, sondern um die Aufnahme des Kampfes gegen die offene Konterrevolution.

Paul Werner, *Eugen Leviné* (Berlin: Vereinigung Internationale Verlagsanstalt, 1922), p. 40.

46. See Kreiler, *Die Schriftstellerrepublik*, p. 104.

47. That this was Leviné's view is confirmed by his wife who quotes from a speech her husband gave at a meeting on 9 April, just two days after the *Räte* government had been proclaimed:

> Ich fürchte wir sind verloren, so oder so. Es gilt nur, in Ehren unterzugehen. Das bedeutet für uns, aus der jetzigen Situation eine machtvolle Kundgebung des Willens des Proletariats zu gestalten. Wir wollen aus der Schein-Räterepublik eine richtige Räterepublik gestalten. Wir wollen den Massen Anschauungsunterricht geben, ihnen zeigen, wie eine Räterepublik aufgebaut wird, und was sie von ihr zu erwarten haben. Den blutigen Preis müssen wir doch zahlen. Viele von uns werden die Sonne nicht mehr lachen sehen, viele von uns durch unseren Tod die künftige Freiheit einleiten. Wir wollen wissen, wofür wir sterben.

Quoted in *Die Münchner Räterepublik. Zeugnisse und Kommentar*, edited by Tankred Dorst (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 140. From Rosa Leviné-Meyer, *Aus der Münchner Rätezeit* (Berlin: Vereinigung Internationaler Verlagsanstalten, 1925).

48. Leviné told a meeting of the *Arbeiterräte*:

> The danger is not passed. The White Guards might assail us. Hunger might knock at the gates of Munich. But Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann can only hold out for a matter of weeks. Saxony is in ferment; in Braunschweig a Soviet Republic has been proclaimed. Abroad the news of the establishment of the First Soviet Republic has been greeted with jubilation. Hungary is a Soviet Republic. Italy looks with joy and hope to Bavaria [...] We are holding an advanced post. The Russian proletariat also held a front line position. They persevered and proved right.

Quoted in Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 138-39.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

50. Rosa Leviné-Meyer recalls her husband's reply when she asked him what Toller's response was to the new Communist *Räte* government:

> Er stellt sich uns zur Verfügung. Er will mit "seinem Blute seine Liebe zum Proletariat bekunden", trägt bereits die Uniform ... Ich fürchte, er wird uns noch viel zu schaffen machen, aber er hat Instinkt. Hat tatsächlich in diesem Augenblick das Richtigste getroffen. - Man kann doch nicht einen Mann abschütteln, der "für das Proletariat sterben will".

Quoted in Gerhard Schmolze, *Revolution und Räterepublik in München*, p. 303.

51. One of the most bitter attacks by a KPD member on Toller is Erich Wollenberg's, *Als Rotarmist vor München. Reportage aus der Münchner Räterepublik* (Berlin: 1929). Making no allowances at all for Toller's lack of military experience, Wollenberg is scathing about the mistakes — or perceived mistakes — Toller made during the fighting around Dachau, putting it all down to treachery and writing that after the Communists had set up their own *Räte* government Toller 'organisierte nunmehr mit leidenschaftlichem Eifer den Verrat an der Revolution', *ibid.*, pp. 41-50. For Toller's reply to Wollenberg's accusations see 'Ernst Toller antwortet auf E. Wollenbergs Angriffe', *Die neue Bücherschau*, 7, no. 10 (1929), 542-44, and 'Zur bayerischen Räterepublik. Legende und Geschichte', in *GW*, I, 51-61. See too 'Brief 3. Kleiner Zwischenfall', in *Quer Durch*, pp. 96-103, Toller's account of a renewed attack on him by Paul Frölich (real name Paul Werner) during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1926.

52. Toller's speech before the court in *GW*, I, 49-51 (p. 49).

53. See the transcript of Toller's interrogation by the Public Prosecutor in Munich after his arrest on 4. June 1919, *Protokoll der Vernehmung vor dem Staatsanwalt am 4 Juni 1919*, in Viesel, *Literaten an der Wand*, pp. 361-70 (pp. 364-67). From 'Staatsarchiv' Munich, Public Prosecutor Files no. 2242.

54. Quoted by Rosa Leviné-Meyer in *Leviné*, p. 98.

55. During his interrogation by the *Staatsanwalt* on 4 June 1919, Toller sought to distance himself from responsibility for what went on after 13 April, saying that he had continued to serve the Communist-led regime mainly out of a sense of loyalty to the working class and to prevent even worse excesses taking place:

> Ich habe mich lediglich aus dem Grunde unter der kommunistischen Räteregierung weiterbetätigt, um Schlimmeres zu verhindern und weil es für mich nicht darauf ankam, die jeweilige Regierung zu stützen, sondern im Interesse des werktätigen Volkes zu arbeiten. Nur aus dem Grunde, um noch schwereres Unglück zu verhüten und um den Weg zu Verhandlungen mit der Regierung Hoffmann zu bahnen, habe ich auch den Befehl in Dachau übernommen und beibehalten.

While Toller claimed that the Public Prosecutor was guilty of distorting his testimony, he never challenged it in any detail, certainly not the above-quoted remarks. *Protokoll der Vernehmung vor dem Staatsanwalt am 4 Juni 1919*, in Viesel, *Literaten an der Wand*, pp. 361-70 (p. 369).

56. See *EJID*, pp. 114-16. Those shot were members of the reactionary anti-Semitic *Thulegesellschaft*, an organisation with close links to the newly formed Nazi Party and which was extremely active in planning the overthrow of the *Räte* government. Among its members were people like Rudolf Heß, subsequently Hitler's deputy as party leader, and Hans Frank, General Governor of Poland during the Nazi occupation of that country. See Gerhard Schmolze, *Revolution und Räterepublik in München*, pp. 349-60.

57. It is not certain who gave the order for the executions, but it seems likely that it was Eglhofer, possibly reacting to news of the atrocities being carried out by government soldiers as they made their way to Munich. See Oscar Maria Graf, *Gelächter von Außen: aus meinem Leben* (Munich: Desch, 1966), p. 93.

58. For an account of the end phase of the *Räterepublik*, Toller in hiding, his capture and trial, see *EJID*, pp. 116-44 and Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), pp. 84-93.

CHAPTER 4

TOLLER'S PRISON YEARS

I. Masse Mensch

Like *Die Wandlung*, *Masse Mensch* is a *Stationendrama*, divided this time into 7 relatively short *Bilder* which again alternate between *Real-* and *Traumbilder*, though here the *Realbilder* too are to be played in 'visionärer Traumferne'.[1] As in *Die Wandlung*, these *Traumbilder* also reveal the workings of the sub-conscious mind of one of the protagonists, 'die Frau', and anticipate in symbolic, visionary form that which she will experience in the following *Realbild*. In this respect, the only real difference between *Die Wandlung* and *Masse Mensch* is that 'die Frau', appears in the *Traumbilder* as herself, accompanied, however, by a 'Begleiter' who fulfils a function similar to that played by those figures who appeared in *Die Wandlung* wearing 'das Antlitz Friedrichs'. In themselves, these scenes are well crafted and, on occasion, as in the scene set in the *Börse* when a group of *Bankiers* scheme to make a profit out of the war, humorous in a grotesquely morbid way. Yet the question which forces itself upon the reader or audience with some insistence here is what is the precise function of these *Traumbilder*, what do they contribute in artistic terms? For they do not advance the action in any way — indeed they retard it — nor do they add anything meaningful in thematic terms, merely elaborating that which is dealt with in the corresponding *Realbild*. Toller himself must have come to feel the limitations of this dramatic device, for *Masse Mensch* is the last play in which he uses it. As previous critics have pointed out, however, in terms of form, *Masse Mensch* does represent some development as compared to *Die Wandlung* in that there is a real dramatic conflict here, a clash of opposing ideas, the most important being that which takes place between the two central characters, 'Die Frau' and 'Der Namenlose'.[2]

Written in October 1919, only a few months after his arrest and trial,[3] *Masse Mensch* was Toller's attempt to give dramatic form to the conflicts, both political and

ethical, which had confronted and tormented him during the period of the *Räterepublik*.[4] In the foreword to the second edition to the play, in the form of an open letter to Jürgen Fehling, the director of the first Berlin production, he described *Masse Mensch* as 'visionäre Schau, die in zweieinhalb Tagen förmlich aus mir "brach"', adding that these two days had been for him 'Abgründe der Qual', days in which he had felt as if he was being 'gepeitscht von Gesichten, von dämonischen Gesichten, von in grotesken Sprüngen sich überpurzelnden Gesichten'.[5] Of the demons which haunted him, the one Toller found most difficult to lay to rest, the one which forms the central dramatic conflict at the heart of *Masse Mensch*, was that of the legitimacy or otherwise of the use of violence in the revolutionary struggle. Reflecting on this in his autobiography, Toller wrote:

> Je mehr ich mich an die Gefangenschaft gewöhne, je mehr die Haft zum Alltag wird, desto stärker bedrängen mich die Erlebnisse der Revolution. Ich war gescheitert, ich hatte geglaubt, daß der Sozialist, der Gewalt verachtet, niemals Gewalt anwenden darf, ich selbst habe Gewalt gebraucht und zur Gewalt aufgerufen. Ich haßte Blutvergießen und habe Blut vergossen.[6]

Though united by a common goal, the creation of a new society free of oppression and injustice, the play's two protagonists, the two revolutionary leaders, 'die Frau' and 'der Namenlose', differ fundamentally about means. 'Die Frau' favours peaceful methods of struggle only and condemns as 'unheilig' any cause which demands human life.[7] 'Der Namenlose', by contrast, argues that the new society can come about only through force and calls on the masses to fight one, final bloody fight which, if successful, will bring about 'ewig Frieden'. The conflict between these two irreconcilable viewpoints, is, of course, intended to reproduce in dramatic form Toller's own ideological conflict with the Communists during the *Räte* Republic, in particular that which took place between him and Leviné.[8] The views of 'Die Frau', it must be admitted, are not a mirror image of Toller's — she is an unconditional pacifist whereas Toller had come to believe, or

claimed he did, that violence was an unavoidable necessity in certain circumstances — but in most important respects they are so close as to be almost identical. But what about 'der Namenlose'? Are the views ascribed to him really those, or at any rate, similar to those, which Leviné and the Communists had advocated? Or does Toller treat the figure of 'der Namenlose' in much the same way as he treated 'der Kommis' in *Die Wandlung*? That is, does he furnish him with a moral and political philosophy deliberately designed to compare unfavourably with that championed by 'die Frau'?[9]

As indicated above, *Masse Mensch* examines the ethical dilemma — or what Toller perceived to be a dilemma — of how the oppressed masses are to achieve their desired end, how they are to overthrow the old order and create a new one, a socialist one, without in the process corrupting and besmirching the end itself. Toller's thinking on this question, as he himself reveals, was strongly influenced by Max Weber, in particular by the ideas he had expressed in what is now a famous lecture given in Munich in 1918 and entitled 'Politik als Beruf'.[10] What Weber did in this lecture, among other things, was to define what he saw as the two main philosophical approaches to politics, two main categories of political type, what he called the *Gesinnungsethiker* and the *Verantwortungsethiker*. The *Gesinnungsethiker* was defined by Weber as someone who became involved in politics in order to realise their ethical convictions, who sought 'das Heil seiner Seele und die Rettung anderer Seelen', who wanted to establish 'die absolute Gerechtigkeit auf Erden'.[11] Such people, Weber believed, were not only naive and impractical but dangerous. Naive, because they did not realise that to enter politics was to enter a pact with 'diabolischen Mächten', for political goals could not be realised other than by force; dangerous because they could not foresee the consequences of their actions and were prepared, therefore, to lay waste to the world in order to realise their ethical ideals.[12] The *Verantwortungsethiker*, by contrast, entered the political arena with a set

of practical goals in mind and not with the aim of transforming mankind. Moreover, he or she could foresee the consequences of his or her actions and was prepared to accept the moral responsibility for them.[13] Only this second type, Weber argued, should take the political path:

> Nur wer sicher ist, daß er daran nicht zerbricht, wenn die Welt, von seinem Standpunkt aus gesehen, zu dumm oder zu gemein ist für das, was er ihr bieten will, daß er all dem gegenüber: "dennoch!" zu sagen vermag, nur der hat den "Beruf" zur Politik.[14]

But what about the *Gesinnungsethiker*? Their ethical postulates, Weber explained, like the fundamental tenets of Christianity — like, for instance, the *Bergpredigt* — were not relative but absolute and demanded unconditional observance from those who held them. *Gesinnungsethiker,* in other words, if they wanted to keep their ethical principles intact, were obliged to stay out of politics since politics was unthinkable without the use of force:

> Die absolute Ethik des Evangeliums — ist eine ernstere Sache, als die glauben, die diese Gebote heute gern zitieren. Mit ihr ist nicht zu spaßen [...] man muß ein Heiliger sein in *allem*, zum mindesten dem Wollen nach, muß leben wie Jesus, die Apostel, der heilige Franz und seinesgleichen, *dann* ist diese Ethik sinnvoll und Ausdruck einer Würde. *Sonst nicht.*[15]

Much of Weber's thesis is, of course, eminently sensible. Most people would share his view of the nature of the political struggle and agree that those not willing to accept the consequences of that struggle would be better advised to stay at home in order, as he put it, 'die Brüderlichkeit schlicht und einfach von Mensch zu Mensch zu pflegen und im übrigen rein sachlich an ihrer Tagesarbeit zu wirken'.[16] Yet Weber's lecture does not just seek to discredit the position of the ethical idealists like Toller; it also wants to invalidate the standpoint of all those committed to the revolutionary struggle. In the case

of the Bolsheviks and Spartacists — particular objects of his scorn — Weber does this by lumping them together with the pacifists and so on, and insinuating that their revolutionary programme, their concept of socialism is also an ethical creed and, therefore, also logically inconsistent:

> Sehen wir nicht, daß die bolschewistischen und spartakistischen Ideologen, eben, weil sie dieses Mittel der Politik anwenden, genau die *gleichen* Resultate herbeiführen wie irgendein militaristischer Diktator? Wodurch als eben durch die Person der Gewalthaber und ihren Dilettantismus unterscheidet sich die Herrschaft der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte von der eines beliebigen Machthabers des alten Regimes? Wodurch die Polemik der meisten Vertreter der vermeintlichen neuen Ethik selbst gegen die von ihnen kritisierten Gegner von der irgendwelcher anderen Demagogen? Durch die edle Absicht! wird gesagt werden. Gut. Aber das Mittel ist es, wovon hier die Rede ist, und den Adel ihrer letzten Absichten nehmen die befehdeten Gegner mit voller subjektiver Ehrlichkeit ganz ebenso für sich in Anspruch. "Wer zum Schwert greift, wird durch das Schwert umkommen", und Kampf ist überall Kampf.[17]

It is so plain that Weber has constructed a straw man here that it is scarcely worthwhile pausing to comment on it. Yet it is important to underline the fact that no Communist theoretician ever defined Communism as an ethical or 'edle' doctrine nor rejected in principle the use of violence to obtain the desired end. Moreover, they did not seek to disavow responsibility for the consequences of the use of force. In truth, the Communists were *Verantwortungsethiker par excellence*, and it is surprising that Weber could not see this.

For Toller, of course, whose socialism *was* primarily an ethical creed, there was no way out of the dilemma depicted so sharply by Weber. At this stage, he believed that there existed, and always will exist — at least, so long as mankind has not transformed itself internally — an absolute and irreconcilable contradiction between ethical principle and the revolutionary goal. In *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, written some 10 years after *Masse Mensch*, he discussed at length the question of what fate awaited that person who

intervenes in the political affairs of the world hoping to realise 'die als recht erkannte sittliche Idee'? Was Weber right, he asked, when he argued that those not willing to countenance the use of force to resist evil should stay out of politics altogether, that '[es] für die absolute Forderung nur einen abslouten Weg gäbe, den des Heiligen'?:

> Muß der Mensch schuldig werden, immer und immer? Oder wenn er nicht schuldig werden will, untergehen? Treiben die Masse sittliche Ideen, treiben sie nicht vielmehr Not und Hunger? Kann sie je siegen, wenn sie vom Kampf abläßt, um sittlicher Idee willen? Ist der Mensch nicht Individuum und Masse zugleich? Spielt sich der Kampf zwischen Individuum und Masse nur in der Gesellschaft ab, nicht auch im Innern des Menschen? Als Individuum handelt er nach der als recht erkannten moralischen Idee. Ihr will er dienen, und wenn die Welt dabei zugrunde geht. Als Masse wird er getrieben von sozialen Impulsen, das Ziel will er erreichen, auch wenn er die moralische Idee aufgeben muß. Unlösbar scheint mir dieser Widerspruch, weil ich ihn handelnd erlebt hatte, und ich such ihn zu formen. So entsteht mein Drama *Masse Mensch*.[18]

Toller's argument, then, was that *Masse Mensch* did not favour one side or the other of the ethical dilemma it deals with, but simply showed that the dilemma had no solution.

In 'Arbeiten' he wrote on this point:

> Es war sehr merkwürdig: nach der Aufführung des Stückes sagten die einen, es sei konterrevolutionär, weil es jede Gewalt verwerfe, die anderen, es sei bolschewistisch, weil die Trägerin der Gewaltlosigkeit untergehe, und die Masse zwar im Moment unterliege, aber auf die Dauer Sieger bleibe.[19]

While it is true that certain groups did interpret *Masse Mensch* as 'bolschewistisch', the overwhelming impression it leaves is not that Toller sought to be balanced and objective in his treatment of the problem of violence, but that he wanted to show that the result of a revolution conceived in violence would not be a new, more ethical society, but one hardly better than that which had been overthrown.[20]

'Die Frau', the advocate of ethical, non-violent means, though from a middle-class background, finds herself, like Toller, at the head of a strike movement, a movement

whose aim is to bring to an end some unspecified war. In the first *Bild*, set in a back-room of a working-class tavern, she and the workers' committee she heads discuss details of the strike which is due to take place the following day. When one of the workers present asks the 'Frau' if she is prepared she replies:

> Ich bins. Mit jedem Atem wächst mir Kraft—
> Wie sehnt ich diese Stunde,
> Da Herzblut Wort und Wort zur Tat wird [...]
> Bin ich es noch, die Streik verkünden wird?
> Mensch ruft Streik, Natur ruft Streik!
> Mir ists, als bellts der Hund, der an mir aufspringt,
> Betrete ich mein Haus ...
> Als gischtet Streik der Strom!
> Mein Wissen ist so stark. Die Massen
> Auferstanden frei vom Paragraphenband
> Der feisten Herrn am grünen Tisch,
> Armeen der Menschheit werden sie mit wuchtender Gebärde
> Das Friedenswerk zum unsichtbaren Dome türmen. (p. 67)

What is significant here is that, though opposed in principle to violence, 'die Frau' has no moral scruples about supporting a strike, seeing this as the only way of putting an end to the senseless carnage of war. In *Bild* 3, the scene of her first confrontation with 'der Namenlose', she proclaims:

> Den Ausweg, Brüder, wollt ihr wissen?
> Ein Ausweg bleibt uns Schwachen,
> Uns Hassern der Kanonen.
> Der Streik! kein Handschlag mehr.
> Streik unsre Tat!
> Wir Schwachen werden Felsen sein der Stärke,
> Und keine Waffe ist gebaut, die uns besiegen könnte. Ruft unsre stummen Bataillone!
> Ich rufe Streik! (p. 82)

The strike weapon, Toller seems to be saying, is an ethical instrument, one which can bring about a peaceful social transformation, one which does not stand in conflict with the fundamental principles of the revolution itself. All through the play, 'die Frau' with

her call for a strike is placed in sharp contrast to 'der Namenlose' who preaches a bloody, violent way to revolution. Yet what Toller ignores here is one of the most valuable lessons of the November Revolution: namely, that there is no Chinese Wall separating a strike from a revolution and that every strike, particularly the kind of political strike depicted in *Masse Mensch*, contains within itself the possibility of violence, for the ruling-classes are certain to use every means at their disposal to defend their material interests. It might be argued, therefore, that anyone serious about revolution ought to be aware of this, ought to be prepared to draw the necessary organisational consequences. If not, if their moral scruples rule out the use of violence, then again it could be argued it might be better to refrain from calling for a strike in the first place. This is the position taken by 'der Namenlose', though Toller undermines the logic and force of his argument by making him, like 'der Kommis', an advocate of violence for its own sake. 'Wer Brücke bauen will', 'der Namenlose' explains to the strike meeting, 'Muß auch für Pfosten sorgen':

> Streik ist heute Brückensteg, dem Pfosten fehlen. Wir brauchen mehr als Streik.
> Das Kühnste angenommen.
> Durch Streik erzwingt ihr Frieden,
> *Einen* Frieden.
> Schafft Ruhepause nur. Nicht mehr.
> Der Krieg muß enden
> In alle Ewigkeit! (p. 84)

It seems quite clear that Toller himself shared these sentiments, for experience had taught him that a strike by itself is not enough to overturn a social system and replace it with another. It is, however, a sign of his own confusion and hesitancy that, after allowing 'Der Namenlose' to express this idea, Toller then makes him go on to put forward the view that what is necessary to make the revolution successful is, quite simply, violence, unreflected, malicious violence:

Was nützts, wenn ihr den Krieg beendet?
Auch Friede, den ihr schafft,
Läßt euer Los unangetastet.
Hie Friedensmaske, altes Los!
Hie Kampf und neues Los!
Ihr Toren, brecht die Fundamente,
Brecht Fundamente! rufe ich.
Dann mag die Sintflut
Das verweste Haus, durch goldne Ketten
Vor Verfall bewahrt, fortschwemmen [...]
Ich rufe mehr als Streik!
Ich rufe: Krieg!
Ich rufe: Revolution!
Der Feind dort oben hört
Auf schöne Reden nicht.
Macht gegen Macht!
Gewalt...Gewalt! (pp. 84-85)

In her *Nachwort* to *Masse Mensch*, Rosemarie Altenhofer writes that Toller's aim with this play was to provide an objective picture of the political differences in the revolutionary camp of the *Rätezeit*, the differences, that is, between the ethical position advocated by Toller and the unethical one advocated by the Communist Party, to counterpose the former's humanitarian idealism with the allegedly immoral Communist doctrine 'der Zweck heiligt die Mittel', the belief, that is, that the revolutionary end justifies any and all means.[21] To take up first the point about the play's objectivity. Like the Jesuits who first formulated the doctrine of 'der Zweck heiligt die Mittel',[22] the Communists — at least not at this stage in their development — did not argue that any means were acceptable so long as they lead to the desired end; what they argued was that the means were a matter of indifference but that the moral justification for them could only be provided by reference to the end. The taking of human life, for instance, was in itself neither good nor bad; in some circumstances, such as murder, it was obviously bad, but in others, the killing of a murderer to prevent him from harming a defenceless child — or an even more clear-cut example, the blowing up of Hitler and his General Staff —

it was just as obviously good.[23] Of course, the Communists rejected the holy principle of 'Thou shalt not kill' and must, therefore, stand condemned in the eyes of the transcendental, humanitarian morality to which Toller subscribed. That, however, says more about the sterility of the absolute pacifist position than it does about Communism.

This sterility is revealed quite plainly in *Bild* 5 which shows how the attempt to make a violent revolution ends, and must always end, in bloody chaos. Unwilling to upset the unity of the revolutionary side, 'die Frau' has swallowed her moral principles and reluctantly gone along with the strategy advocated by 'der Namenlose'. Now, however, the awful reality of revolution, the terrible price it demands in human life, reignites her moral conscience and makes her recoil in horror from that to which she had given her tacit assent. When news reaches her of the hundreds who have died in the battle raging around the railway station she exclaims:

DIE FRAU: Er sprach von Toten.
Viele hundert.
Schrie ich nicht gestern gegen Krieg??
Und heute ... laß ichs zu,
Daß Brüder in den Tod geworfen? (p. 94)

'Der Namenlose', however, unmoved by the human suffering, tries to persuade her that it is wrong to draw a moral parallel between an imperialist war and a revolution, saying:

DER NAMENLOSE: Ihr Blick ist unklar,
Im Kriege gestern warn wir Sklaven.
DIE FRAU: Und heute?
DER NAMENLOSE: Im Kriege heute sind wir Freie.
(Stille fiebert.)
DIE FRAU: In ... beiden Kriegen ... Menschen ...
In ... beiden Kriegen ... Menschen ... (p. 94)

Her sole concern now, however, is not the revolution but the defence of 'Menschheit, ewige Menschheit' and she appeals to the workers, to those she calls 'Kampfverstörte',

(p. 95) to end their futile struggle, a struggle which she believes is motivated by nothing more than a desire for bloody revenge. 'Mensch, der sich rächt', she exclaims, 'zerbricht', pleading with them to understand that when they kill their enemy they are also killing the spirit of the state they claim to be fighting against? (p. 96) She tells them that she supports them in their battle to destroy the foundations of injustice but pleads with them not to do this in a spirit of hate and revenge but in a spirit of 'Liebe' and 'Gemeinschaft':

> Zerbrecht die Ketten der geheimen Knechtschaft,
> Doch zerschellt die Waffen der verwesten Zeit.
> Zerschellt den Haß! Zerschellt die Rache!
> Rache ist nicht Wille zur Umgestaltung,
> Rache ist nicht Revolution,
> Rache ist Axt, die spaltet
> Den kristallnen, glutenden,
> Den zornigen erzenen Willen zur Revolution. (p. 97)

In place of hate and revenge, 'die Frau' preaches 'Gemeinschaft', for 'Gemeinschaft', she explains, 'zerstört das Fundament des Unrechts. Gemeinschaft pflanzt die Wälder der Gerechtigkeit'. (p. 95) What she does not explain, however, is precisely what 'Gemeinschaft' is or how it is to be realised. Can 'Gemeinschaft' be realised without a revolution, within the existing social structure, or does it demand the destruction of the old order, and if so how, and with what weapons? Will the ruling elites simply accede to it or will they resist its creation arms in hand? In *Bild* 7, set in prison where 'die Frau' awaits her execution, it is clear that she, like Toller, has no answer to any of these questions.

What is most interesting about this scene is that, once more, 'die Frau' places 'der Namenlose' on the same moral level as the representatives of the oppressive state apparatus against which they have been fighting. Seen from her standpoint, the standpoint of absolute morality and unconditional pacifism, there is nothing to choose between the

forces of revolution and reaction since both use the same means, violent ones, in order to achieve their ends. When 'der Namenlose' turns up in her prison cell to tell her that he has come to liberate her, she rejects his offer of help telling him:

> Du bist nicht Befreiung,
> Du bist nicht Erlösung.
> Doch weiß ich, wer du bist.
> "Schlägst nieder!" Immer schlägst du nieder!
> Dein Vater der hieß: Krieg.
> Du bist sein Bastard.
> Du armer neuer Henkermarschall,
> Dein einzger Heilweg: "Tod!" und "Rottet aus!"
> Wirf ab den Mantel hoher Worte,
> Er wird papierenes Gespinst. (p. 108)

He, of course, tries to defend his actions, indeed his whole political philosophy, by arguing that the reactionary Generals served an unjust, oppressive state apparatus whereas what he was fighting for was the liberation of mankind. To 'die Frau', however, the end is no longer of any real interest, only the means, and she rejects the notion that a new humane society can be brought about through inhumane methods:

> *DIE FRAU*: Ich sehe keine Unterscheidung:
> Die einen morden für ein Land,
> Die andern für die Länder alle.
> Die einen morden für tausend Menschen,
> Die andern für Millionen.
> Wer für den Staat gemordet,
> Nennt Ihr Henker.
> Wer für die Menschheit mordet,
> Den bekränzt ihr, nennt ihn gütig,
> Sittlich, edel, groß.
> Ja, sprecht von guter, heiliger Gewalt. (pp. 108-09)

Toller's belief in non-violence, his support for a peaceful, ethical way towards a new society is, as indicated above, a legitimate and honourable one, but one, nonetheless, which is difficult to square with his professed belief in revolutionary socialism. For as experience had shown, the belief that moral persuasion alone could bring the oppressor

class to see the error of its ways, the belief which lay at the heart of *Die Wandlung*, was utopian, not to say irresponsible and dangerous. To renounce all force, therefore, as 'die Frau' does here, amounts in practice to saying that there can be no meaningful social change, or that change can come about only if it is sanctioned by the ruling elite. The question which arises then is, does *Masse Mensch* express a deep pessimism as regards the prospects for socialism, is it quite simply a counsel of despair on Toller's part?

As explained above, Toller himself rejected such an interpretation, arguing that his aim had been to show not the impossibility of revolution, merely that the individual involved in it was confronted with an insoluble moral dilemma, whether to abandon moral principle or the revolutionary goal.[24] But is this all that *Masse Mensch* does? Is it really neutral on the ethical and political issues it deals with, or does it come down in favour of one side or the other? It is true, as Toller claims, that 'Die Frau', the representative of the ethical position, is defeated at the end of the play?[25] Yet it seems rather disingenuous to argue that the masses, though temporarily defeated, 'auf die Dauer Sieger bleibe'. In the final confrontation between 'die Frau' and 'der Namenlose', the audience is quite clearly invited to sympathise with her arguments, arguments which not only carry most moral force but which are also shown to hold out the only hope for a better future. The philosophy advocated by 'der Namenlose' is depicted as a cruel, inhuman one, one which sets no value on human life at all, sees the cause as everything and one which demands the sacrifice of the present generation for the sake of those yet to come:

DER NAMENLOSE: Die Lehre über alles!
Ich liebe die Künftigen!
DIE FRAU: Der Mensch über alles!
Der Lehre willen
Opferst du Die Gegenwärtigen.
DER NAMENLOSE: Der Lehre willen muß ich sie opfern.
Du aber verrätst die Masse, du verrätst die Sache.

Denn heute gilts sich zu entscheiden.
Wer schwankt, sich nicht entscheiden kann,
Stützt die Herren, die uns unterdrücken,
Stützt die Herren, die uns hungern lassen,
Ist Feind. (p. 109)

'Die Frau', by contrast, stands for a peaceful transformation of society and believes that no cause can be good which demands human sacrifice, saying 'Wer Menschenblut um seinetwillen fordert,// Ist Moloch:// Gott war Moloch.// Staat war Moloch. //Masse war Moloch'. (p. 110) It is significant, however, and an indication that Toller was not blind to the weaknesses of the absolute pacifist position, that when 'der Namenlose' asks her 'Und wer heilig?', she can offer only the following vague reply:

DIE FRAU: Einst ...
Gemeinschaft ...
Werkverbundene freie Menschheit ...
Werk ... Volk. (p. 110)

'Der Namenlose', however, is not allowed to probe too deeply the deficiencies in the arguments put forward by 'die Frau', and she, in fact, is given the upper hand in the final exchange between the two:

DER NAMENLOSE: Dir fehlt der Mut, die Tat, die harte Tat
Auf dich zu nehmen.
Durch harte Tat erst wird das freie Volk.
Sühne durch den Tod.
Vielleicht dein Tod von Nutzen uns.
DIE FRAU: Ich lebe ewig.
DER NAMENLOSE: Du lebst zu früh.
DIE FRAU: Du lebtest gestern.
Du lebst heute.
Und bist morgen tot.
Ich aber werde ewig,
Von Kreis zu Kreis.
Von Wende zu Wende,
Und einst werde ich
Reiner,
Schuldloser,
Menschheit

Sein. (p. 110)

Masse Mensch — and this is, perhaps, the most significant feature of the play — shows no real development in Toller's political views since *Die Wandlung*. Despite the experience of the *Räterepublik* — or perhaps because of it —, he continued to hold firm to the belief that mankind would have to transform itself before it could transform its material circumstances, and that the spiritual *Wandlung* would have to precede the social one.[26] Quite clearly, he had not yet managed to free himself entirely from Landauer's influence, and was still infected by the latter's aristocratic disdain for the masses, deeming them to be not yet ripe for the tasks of the revolution, not cultured or enlightened enough, lacking the humane qualities which they would need if they were to create the new society. 'Masse ist Trieb aus Not', 'die Frau' tells 'der Namenlose', 'Ist gläubige Demut ... Ist grausame Rache ... Ist blinder Sklave ... Ist frommer Wille ... Masse ist zerstampfter Acker, Masse ist verschüttet Volk'. (p. 107) While prepared to concede that it is material conditions which have made 'die Masse' what it is — 'Gewalt schuf Masse. Besitzunrecht schuf Masse'— (p. 107) Toller does not seem willing to accept that it is only a change in material circumstances, only a social revolution, which can bring about a change in the spiritual outlook of 'die Masse'. At the end of the play, after 'die Frau' has been led off to face the firing squad, two half-starved women prisoners enter her cell intending to steal her food and other personal belongings. When they hear the salvo of the guns, however, they suddenly realise that what they are doing is morally wrong. Despite their hunger, therefore, they replace the goods they were about to steal, turn to each other and fall to their knees exclaiming 'Schwester, warum tun wir das?' (p. 112) Even although 'die Frau' is physically defeated, it is again her idealist, ethical position which is seen to triumph in the end. The only hope for the future, it seems, is for the masses to follow her example, to discover the true humanity within

themselves, to become real individuals and not just to be part of an anonymous mass. In the words of 'die Frau' the task was 'Mensch in Masse befreien, Gemeinschaft in Masse befreien'. (p. 108) Having seen her humanitarian ideals consumed in the fire of revolution, 'die Frau' now wishes to turn her attention away from the class struggle, the struggle for political power, and to devote herself to inculcating her own pacifist-humanist ideas into the masses in order to promote and develop the idea of *Gemeinschaft*. The difficulty with this is two-fold. Firstly, this belief that the 'Masse', had to be spiritually reborn before it could make a revolution was, as Toller must have been aware,[27] a utopian one, one with very little hope of appealing to the mass of ordinary workers, some of whom must have felt that Toller and those who thought like him would have been more profitably employed trying to enlighten the ruling class, teaching them to obey the precepts of humanity and transcendental morality. Secondly, and more importantly, central to the notion of *Gemeinschaft* — as already shown, an extremely nebulous, impractical, quasi-mystical one — was the belief that it was possible to turn one's back on the machine age and return to an agrarian life-style, to a stateless society organised on the basis of small farming communities with everyone co-operating with each other for mutual benefit.[28] This, at any rate, was a central part of Landauer's definition of *Gemeinschaft*. Toller, however, rejected this idea in *Masse Mensch*, arguing that it was impossible to do away with the machine and the factory, describing this as 'Ein Traum von Kindern, die vor Nacht erschreckt'. (p. 81) In *Bild* 3, for instance, in a discussion with a group of young workers who want to blow up their own factory, 'die Frau' explains 'Wir leben zwanzigstes Jahrhundert [...] Fabrik ist nicht mehr zu zerstören', adding:

> Nehmt Dynamit der ganzen Erde,
> Laßt eine Nacht der Tat Fabriken sprengen,
> Im nächsten Frühjahr wärn sie auferstanden

> Und lebten grausamer als je.
> Fabriken dürfen nicht mehr Herr,
> Und Menschen Mittel sein.
> Fabrik sei Diener würdigen Lebens!
> Seele des Menschen bezwinge Fabrik! (p. 81)

Accepting the fact that the task was not to destroy the machine but to gain mastery over it, Toller knocks away one of the main pillars of Landauer's concept of *Gemeinschaft*, but is not yet ready to reject his anarcho-socialist philosophy in its entirety — not as a dramatist, at any rate, though as shown in chapter 2, in his practical political life, he had come to recognise the limitations of these ideas.[29]

Despite what Toller subsequently wrote in his interpretations of *Masse Mensch*, its central political message is a quite pessimistic one. In his eyes, the revolutionary strategy advocated by the Communists was immoral, inhumane and at odds with the final goal, indeed, it was a strategy which made the final goal unattainable. Yet his own ethical, pacifist philosophy had been shown in practice to be hopelessly utopian, for the oppressors had shown themselves to be somewhat less than willing to renounce their power and privileges without a violent struggle. Though Toller did not care to admit it, not even to himself, to reject the only realistic means of changing society, revolution, was to reject the end itself, socialism. The only way out of this dilemma he could point to, was the glittering prospect of a new *Gemeinschaft* constructed, so it seems, behind the back of existing society by 'unbedingten freien Menschen', by, that is, the masses purged of sin and wickedness, transformed in spirit through the example of heroic individuals like 'Die Frau'. Yet in the hard school of revolution, Toller had learned that the masses could not transform themselves by an act of will, that they were the product of their social environment, were as backward and narrow in outlook as the society which oppressed them. It tool some time before he was able to reflect this simple fact in his dramatic work. Indeed, it was not until *Hoppla, wir leben!* that he finally broke free from

Landauer's influence, resolved the moral dilemma he could not solve in *Masse Mensch* and painted a positive picture of committed revolutionaries struggling to create a new society with the imperfect human materials at their disposal.

II. Die Maschinenstürmer

Written during the winter of 1920-21, *Die Maschinenstürmer*,[30] Toller's second prison play, looks back to an early episode in the history of the British labour movement, the rise of Luddism,[31] and depicts a group of impoverished weavers and their families whose jobs, whose way of life, indeed whose very existence are threatened by the introduction into the factory where they work of new technology in the form of a massive, steam-driven weaving machine. Toller had, it seems, been interested in the history of Luddism for a number of years past and undertook a good deal of research into it before writing his play,[32] even asking friends and colleagues abroad, particularly in England, to furnish him with the material for his studies.[33] In Luddism he found — or thought he found — a precursor of the modern workers' movement and on a number of occasions explained that his aim in writing *Die Maschinenstürmer* had been to show the 'erstes Aufflackern jener Bewegung, die später zum Chartistenaufstand reifte', the 'erste Erwachen des Volkes zu revolutionärem Bewußtsein'.[34] Clearly, however, Toller's interest in this subject was not purely or even primarily an historical one. In a letter from prison to Gustav Meyer he explained that he hoped to find in the history of Luddism 'gewisse Übereinstimmung im Historischen', 'Übereinstimmung', that is, between the situation which faced the workers' movement in Great Britain in the early nineteenth century and that which faced the German workers movement in the early twentieth.[35] Toller, of course, was still obsessed by the experience of the November Revolution, and

in particular by a desire to find an answer to the question he had already addressed in *Masse Mensch*: that of the legitimacy of the use of violence in the struggle for liberation.[36] As in the previous play, therefore, one of the central conflicts in *Die Maschinenstürmer* is that which takes place between the ethical, humane revolutionary who abjures violence, and the revolutionary, or pseudo-revolutionary, who preaches it as the only solution to the workers' problems. In this case, the character who expresses Toller's own standpoint — or something very similar to it — is Jimmy Cobbett, while the Communist view — or the view Toller liked to ascribe to the Communists — is represented by John Wible.[37]

Wible, the weavers' leader until Jimmy arrives on the scene, is an unsympathetic, almost loathsome figure. He is the man who has led the workers out on strike in protest against the introduction of the machine and is the most militant and unyielding in his opposition to Ure, the factory owner. Yet early on the play it is made clear that he is a hypocrite for it is revealed that he has induced his wife to sleep with Ure in return for money, thus providing a secret source of income which helps them cope with the hunger and privation the other men and their families are left to deal with as best they can. Later on too, after Jimmy has gained the confidence of the weavers, has replaced Wible as leader and convinced the men that they have to work with the machine and not destroy it, Wible plots with Ure to get rid of a man both have come to regard as an enemy, and in the final scene actually incites the workers to kill Jimmy, the 'Verräter'. Naturally, it was not in this, in his perfidy and deceitfulness, that Toller sought to equate Wible with the Communists — though it might seem rather unlikely that a man with such a base character would be a revolutionary in the first place — rather in the nature of the strategy he advances to resolve the weavers' problems.[38] At a strike meeting in his cottage, Wible, the most eloquent and persuasive of the weavers, explains to the men that the only

solution to their problems is to destroy the machine, to declare war on the 'Tyrannen Dampf':

> Ein Moloch lebt in Nottingham. Erschlagt ihn!
> Bis morgen mehrt er sich und heckt zu tausenden
> Die Ungeheuer! ... Wir schwören Fehde, schwören Haß. (p. 140)

In his enthusiasm for random violence Wible is a first cousin of 'der Namenlose', though it has to be said that at least the latter was a genuine if misguided revolutionary and not, as Wible is shown to be, a conscious traitor. He has nothing to offer in the way of a credible strategy and goads the weavers on to what he knows is a futile act of destruction because he believes that defeat will lead them to draw revolutionary conclusions. 'Proleten müssen mit Ochsenziemern angetrieben werden', he says at one point, 'Blut heißt die Peitsche, die sie aus trägem Schlafe reißt!'. (p. 147) As indicated above, Toller ascribed such ideas to Wible in order to mark him out as a Communist figure, for he himself was convinced that this was how the Communists viewed the dynamics of the revolutionary process. Compare, for instance, what he wrote in a letter from prison on this very subject. Referring to recent events in Saxony and Thuringia, where Communist-led revolutionary activities had been crushed by government troops, he declared:

> Welche Tragödie in Mitteldeutschland! Die Putschtaktik ist nicht zu rechtfertigen. Katestrophenpolitik, die dieses Land der hemmungslosen Reaktion in die Arme treibt.
> Wie gewisse Radikale jetzt um einer Phrase willen Arbeiterblut opfern, so taten sie es in den Apriltagen in München, als sie zum sinn- und aussichtslosen Kampf auf die Barrikaden riefen, weil die "blutige Niederlage die Reife des Proletariers beschleunige" und "Verhandeln Verrat bedeute".[39]

Like John Wible, then, the Communists — at least the German variety — urge violence, so Toller believes, and because they are politically and morally bankrupt, because they can conceive of no other way of expediting the revolutionary process. The same criticism

can be made of *Die Maschinenestürmer*, however, as was made in relation to *Masse Mensch*: namely, that Toller makes Wible an advocate of senseless violence so that his position can be contrasted unfavourably with Jimmy Cobbett's, so that his views, the views of the ethical revolutionary, then seem morally superior and unassailable. In other words, Toller avoids having to deal with the views of his political opponents by simply distorting them.

Like 'die Frau' in *Masse Mensch*, indeed like Toller himself, Jimmy Cobbett is something of an outsider within the workers' movement. Though he is working class, he is not really a typical representative of the masses, being more educated, more politically experienced, more advanced in outlook than they are. An itinerant weaver who has spent some time on the continent, he returns to Nottingham, his home town where his mother and brother still live, in search of a job. When he arrives there, however, in Act 1, set on the church square in a working-class district, he finds himself confronted by terrible poverty and deprivation, almost the first thing he sees being half-starved children squabbling over a crust of bread and pitiful wretches of workers who have been trying to forget their sorrows by drowning them in alcohol. In the midst of all this misery, indeed, trying to capitalise on it, there is a 'Hausierer', a swindler and exploiter, who sells 'Paars Lebenspillen', wonderful pills which do away with the need for food, eradicate hunger and make everyone bloom like the Queen of England. Then there is a tramp, a kind of philosopher-tramp who reappears at key moments in the play, and through whom, in this act at least, Toller exposes what he saw as the reactionary role of organised religion, because of the way in which it propped up the existing state structure by, among other things, teaching the poor to be content with their lot, not to struggle for a better life in this world but to wait for salvation in the next. When Jimmy, having been asked for money, says he has none for he too is poor, the tramp replies:

BETTLER: Da fand ich den rechten. Glaubst du, ich würde mich an einen Fettsack wenden? Wenn es nur Reiche auf Erden gäbe, da müßten die Bettler verhungern. Die Armen teilen mit uns. Dafür kommen sie auch ins Himmelreich.
JIMMY: Woher weißt du das?
BETTLER: Kennst du nicht die Worte von unserm Herrn Jesus Christ: Eher geht ein Kamel durch ein Nadelöhr, denn ein Reicher in das Himmelreich ein. Die Reichen raffen and schenken nicht gerne. Darum haben sie so dicke Bäuche. Und die Tür zum Himmelreich ist eine enge Pforte. Gerade recht für schwindsüchtige Hungerleider, wie es unsere Armen sind. Und sehr niedrig ist die Pforte. Wer von großer Statur ist wie du, den hindert die Mütze. Dein Seelenheil steht auf dem Spiel, Mann. (p. 127)

'Du hast deinen Beruf verfehlt, Freund', Jimmy tells him, 'Du hättest Pfaffe werden sollen oder Abgeordneter im Unterhaus'. (p. 127)

Having thus set the scene, having outlined the social conditions which help shape the consciousness of the characters in the play, Toller then introduces Jimmy to the striking weavers, previously seen brandishing effigies of strikebreakers and swearing bloody revenge upon them. It is from Ned Lud, who will become Jimmy's most devoted disciple, that he, Jimmy, learns what the strike is about and that there is to be a strike meeting that evening in Wible's cottage. Despite Wible's objections, Jimmy is invited to address the meeting and denounces Wible's strategy as senseless and tells the men that their task is not to destroy the machine, which would be impossible anyway since there are so many, but to accept it and make it work for them. In any case, Jimmy tells the weavers, there exists an enemy greater than that which Ure has installed in the factory, 'gewaltiger als das Gerüst von Eisen, Schrauben, Drähten, Holz, das man Maschine nennt', (pp. 141-42) by which he means the enemy within themselves. 'Er hält eure Seelen umklammert', Cobbett exclaims, 'Er atmet in eurem Blut ... Er wandelt euren Geist in Starre und Dumpfheit'. (p. 142) Cobbett's answer to the problems facing the weavers — or part of it at least — is the by-now familiar one in Toller's plays, to look within themselves and discover their true humanity, to rekindle the stifled sense of *Geist*

and build a new *Gemeinschaft* based on love and human solidarity:

> Und doch ist Traum in euch! Traum vom Land der Wunder ... Traum vom Land der Gerechtigkeit ... vom Land der werkverbundenen Gemeinden ... vom Land des werkverbundenen Volks ... vom Land der werkverbundenen Menschheit ... vom Land der schaffenden, freudigen Werkarbeit ... Brüder! Bündet euch! Beginnt! Beginnt! Nicht Ich und Ich und Ich! Nein: Welt und Wir und Du und Ich! Wollt die Gemeinschaft allen Werkvolks und ihr werdet sie erkämpfen. O eure Seele wird die mächtigen, verschütteten Schwingen entfalten! Die Erde wird euch wieder Schoß der Kraft sein! *Und der Tyrann Maschine, besiegt vom Geiste schaffender Menschen ... wird euer Werkzeug, wird euer Diener.* (emphasis in original) (p. 142-43)

Looking back at this period of his life, at the period, that is, in which he wrote *Die Maschinenstürmer*, Toller maintained that his political outlook, his understanding of socialism and the class struggle, was beginning to deepen and mature, to become less idealistic and more in tune with social reality. He had, he wrote, come to perceive the 'sozialen Boden' which determined the nature of social conflict and the changes in outlook of the broad masses, to understand 'die große Not des Tages, die die Kraft lähmt, die Abhängigkeit des Menschen vom Arbeitsmarkt, von der Maschine':

> Diese Konflikte und den Zusammenprall von Rebellen und Revolutionären, den Kampf des Menschen mit der Maschine und seine Gefährdung, versuche ich in meinem Drama *Die Maschinenstürmer* zu bilden [...][40]

As indicated above, Toller does try here — and quite successfully and realistically too — to show the social and economic conditions which influence people's behaviour and to make it clear that the weavers have rebelled not because they wanted to but because circumstances have left them with no option. Yet despite this, and despite claiming that he had learned to see the 'sozialen Boden', Toller continues to clings tenaciously to the vision of socialism he had imbibed from Landauer, and still seems to see it primarily in moral rather than economic and social terms, still seems to believe that mankind had to

transform itself before it could transform its social environment. In this sense, his political outlook has not really matured at all since *Masse Mensch*. Indeed, it could be argued that it has regressed. Whereas 'die Frau' in *Masse Mensch* rejects the notion that the factory could be dispensed with, Jimmy seems to suggest that this is in fact possible, couching his vision of the future in the same terms as Landauer had used when describing his *Gemeinschaft* of small-scale producers living and working in self-sufficient, land-based communities. Admittedly, this is not stated explicitly in the text — at least, not by Jimmy — but it is clear that the vision was one which had a powerful appeal for Toller. Towards then end of the play, for instance, after Wible has managed to persuade the striking men to return to their original plan and destroy the machine, Ned Lud recalls wistfully Jimmy's vision of the new society:

> Wie klar schien alles, da Jimmy zu uns sprach ... Man müßte aufs Land zurück ... Wir haben das Blut der großen Städte wie Gift in unserm Leib. Die großen Städte sind nicht gläubig ... Man müßte Erde haben. So hätte man einen Pfahl im Boden seines Heimatlandes. (p. 173)

Toller's vision, of course, is projected back into the past, to a time, that is, before the factory system had really taken hold and when the idea of a return to the land — or in many cases, staying on the land — might have seemed feasible and attractive to some. Yet history shows that this did not happen and it must have been obvious to Toller in 1920 that there was no chance of it happening in the future. Given Toller's recent experience in Bavaria, which had shown him, among other things, the folly of trying to construct a socialist utopia in isolation from the rest of society, it is remarkable that he continued to cling so firmly to Landauer's precepts. What this exposes, of course, is the central weakness at the heart of *Die Maschinenstürmer*, the fact, that is, that Toller could not really decide whether or not he was writing a historical drama or a contemporary one. Had he decided to concentrate on showing the first stirrings of revolutionary

consciousness he might have written a more credible, internally consistent, more historically accurate drama.[41] Instead, seeking to settle scores with his Communist opponents, hoping to show the superiority of his ethical vision of socialism, he allowed himself to be tempted into one of his favourite pastimes, wish fulfilment. And wish fulfilment, the desire to see his vision triumph, if not in real life then at least on stage, is the only fitting term to describe the confrontation between Cobbett and Ure, the factory owner, in Act 4.

Having won the confidence of the weavers and persuaded them to call off their strike and to prepare themselves instead for the great day when the nascent national trades union organisation will lead them in struggle, Jimmy turns up at Ure's villa hoping to negotiate with him an orderly return to work. But Ure is not interested in negotiations and soon reveals himself to be a brutal, hard-nosed representative of the capitalist class, a Social Darwinist who believes that it is only right and proper that the best things in life come to the strongest and fittest, to those most able to assert themselves in the struggle for survival:

> Im Kampfe aller gegen alle reift das Leben,
> Der starke Hirsch verdrängt den schwachen Nebenbuhler,
> Und zeugt ein adlig mächtiges Geschlecht.
> Der Sieger pflanzt sich fort, nicht der Geschwächte!
> Dem rücksichtslosen Kampf der Interessen
> Entwächst die Harmonie der Welt.
> Wer oben bleibt, bleibt oben nach Naturgesetzen,
> Die unserem Menschensinn für immer unergründlich
> Bleiben. Nur so entwickelt sich Kultur. (p. 162)

In opposition to Ure's ruthless, inhumane philosophy, Toller has Jimmy puts forward a view of social development based mainly on that worked out by Kropotkin in his *Mutual Aid*, the view which had such a profound influence on Landauer and which formed such a central part of his *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*. Nature, Jimmy tells Ure, knows not only

a fierce struggle for survival but also co-operation, citing the example of the strong 'Hirschbock' which will protect its weaker brother when it is under attack, and the eagle, the most solitary of all creatures, when it spies its prey, will loudly proclaim the fact to all its fellows in the neighbourhood and share the 'Beute' with them. 'Allein die freien Menschen der Kultur', Jimmy explains, 'sind taub/ Der Gnade: *Du*, dem göttlichen: *Einander*'. (p. 163) Ure's philosophy, then, is not the expression of the immutable laws of nature but a social construct designed to give the impression of scientific impartiality to naked class interests:

> Ich nenne Euch das ewige Naturgesetz,
> Von dem Ihr spracht. Das ewige Naturgesetz heißt
> *Geld!* Wer Geld besitzt, kann Arbeit schaffen,
> Und so er Arbeit schafft, zum Herren über Massen
> Sich erküren.
> Nicht Geist erwählt den Adel! Geld bestimmt ihn! (p. 163)

And so, since the domination of 'Geld' is merely a social construct, it can also be changed, can be replaced by a new, more just, more humane one. After defining the cruelty of the dynamic of capitalist development in a passage which could have been lifted straight from the Communist Manifesto, Jimmy goes on to lay his vision before Ure:

> In unsern Herzen lebt entfaltungsehend,
> Wie eine Knospe, deren Hülle Wunder über Wunder birgt,
> Das *Du*. Und jenes Du bezwingt den Bibelfluch der Arbeit,
> Was Qual in unsern Zeiten, Schandmal des Verfehmten,
> Wird wieder seliges, beseeltes Werk. (p. 164)

It is at this point, following Jimmy's passionate statement of his vision of the future, that Toller abandons any idea of historical authenticity and gives free reign to his private philosophy. Ure, the uncaring, hard-hearted capitalist exploiter, is completely captivated by Jimmy's rhetoric, so captivated, in fact, that he seems to be on the verge of

undergoing some sort of spiritual transformation. Telling Jimmy that he is welcome in his house at any time, Ure pleads with him to fight alongside him on his side of the social divide. Jimmy, of course, refuses, but after he leaves the following conversation ensues between Ure and one of his managers, Henry Cobbett, who is, in fact, Jimmy's brother, something of which none of the weavers, apart from Wible, is aware:

> *URE*: Ein Narr ... Ein sonderbarer Narr ... Ein gläubiger Narr ... Ein gefährlicher Narr ... Ein Mann! Ein Mann!
> *(Henry ist eingetreten.)*
> *URE*: Ein Mann war in meinem Haus! Ein Mann!
> *HENRY*: *(verdutzt)*: Wie meinen Der Herr Ure? (pp. 164-65)

The moment passes, however, and Ure, suddenly coming to his senses, says to Henry Cobbett 'Schärfste Überwachung dieses Mannes!', (p. 165) the scene ending with Ure ordering the factory to be prepared for the strikebreakers he has recruited from another town. Nevertheless, it is not Ure's inhumanity, expressed in his cold indifference towards his workers, which is the main impression left here, but the magnetic force of Jimmy's personality. Like Friedrich, the hero of *Die Wandlung*, Jimmy is a *neuer Mensch*, a visionary messiah, possessed of the extraordinary ability to transform — or to begin to transform — even people like Ure through rhetorical appeal and the sheer power of example. Again, it is remarkable just how little development there had been in Toller's political outlook, how tenaciously he clung to his ethical, idealistic vision of socialism, to the notion of revolution not as a transformation of social reality but as a process which takes place first and foremost in the heads of men and women.

It must be admitted, however, that, despite this, there is a sense in which the *Die Maschinenstürmer* is a step forward from both *Die Wandlung* and *Masse Mensch* in that Toller makes some effort to create credible, individually delineated working-class characters, to show the weavers to be not just an abstract, homogeneous, passive mass,

but an active and, moreover, extremely important ingredient in the struggle for a new society, however that may be conceived. Ned Lud, for instance, based on the probably fictitious figure who gave the movement its name,[42] is a somewhat simple-minded and easily-led character, but also the most loyal and trusting of Jimmy's supporters among the weavers.[43] Having no real understanding of the root of the weavers' problems, but at the same time desperate for a solution to them, he initially goes along with Wible's plan to organise the destruction of the machine. When he first meets Jimmy, shortly after the latter's arrival in Nottingham, he is not impressed by the argument that 'die Maschine unser unentrinnbar Schicksal ist', (p. 130) and strongly rejects the suggestion that their planned attack on Ure's factory is 'Wahnwitz':

> Und wenn es Wahnwitz ist, und wenn es zwecklos ist. Wir *müssen* kämpfen, weil wir *Menschen* sind. Schweigen wir, so sind wir Tiere, die sich stumm ins Joch beugen. (p. 130)

Though only a simple man, Ned can see that economic circumstances are bearing down upon both himself and his comrades as irresistibly and inevitably as fate itself. He knows — even if only rather dimly and subconsciously — that the fight against the machine is a desperate and probably futile one but one to which there is no real alternative; if he doesn't fight then the best he and his family can hope for is a lifetime of poverty and degradation; if he does and is defeated then at least he will have preserved some shred of human dignity. What Toller seemed to be saying was that Luddism was not an entirely reactionary and backward-looking phenomenon, did not deserve, in other words, the negative epithets which have since come to be attached to the name. Caught in the grip of circumstance and faced with no other way out, the weavers resorted to desperate acts of violence and destruction rather than let themselves be slowly ground into the dirt. Luddism, in other words, as Toller himself believed, represented the very first faint

flickering of working class rebellion and solidarity, and saw the workers develop, if not a revolutionary, than at least a Trades Union consciousness as they recognised the need to build organisations for the defence and promotion of their own class interests against those of the oppressors.[44] Yet despite its militant character, Luddism could not provide a long-term solution to the problems facing the workers' movement at that stage in history. As Jimmy explains, the weavers had no option but to accept that the machine was here to stay; their only hope for the future lay in the embryonic National Trades Union Federation which one day would lead the struggle against the capitalist system and help create a new society in which man would be master of the machine and not the other way around:

> *JIMMY*: Die Schaffenden von England bereiten den Kampf vor. In London haben wir geheimen Bund gegründet, der alle Werkenden des Königreichs umfassen soll. In vielen Städten regt sich schon der Feuerstrom erwachten Willens! *Gemeinschaft soll führen, nicht der Mammon! Der Mensch soll führen, nicht die Maschine!* (emphasis in original) (p. 143)

Jimmy recognises, however, that this was a painful, unpalatable solution, one which would not alleviate the weavers' misery in the short term but would, in fact, increase it, would demand even greater sacrifices from them:

> *JIMMY*: Der Kampf ist schwer und heischt Geduld, ihr Brüder. Der Kampf ist schwerer, als ihr heute ahnt. Aufnehmen müßt ihr Dienst an der Maschine. Die alte Bürde müßt ihr tragen manchen Tag ... müßt sehen eure Weiber, eure Kinder hungern ... und hungernd euch anklagen, euch verfluchen sehen. (p. 144)

Jimmy's vision of a grand Trades Union alliance is, of course, one which did not gain much ground until much later than this, until, that is, about the middle of the nineteenth century when Chartism began to flourish on the back of a severe, European-wide economic downturn.[45] It was not Toller's ignorance of historical chronology, however,

which led him to raise the idea here, but political considerations. His appeal to the weavers to join together in struggle was, in essence, an appeal to the German labour movement to overcome the ideological barriers dividing it and form a common front, an *Einheitsfront*, in the face of bourgeois reaction, an idea which, it will be seen, came to dominate Toller's thinking during the Weimar Republic, particularly during the period of Hitler's rise to power.[46]

Significantly, however, the play does not end with a display of working-class unity, but with division and rancour as Jimmy is beaten to death by men who have been led to believe he is a traitor. In this final scene, the enraged weavers, having learned that, following a secret deal, their jobs have been taken by women and children and that they are now surplus to requirements, break into to Ure's factory determined to destroy the hated machine. Before they can set about their work, however, the factory engineer begins to harangue them, telling them bluntly that their actions are futile and self-destructive, explaining in words which, in a distorted way, echo those spoken earlier by Jimmy:

> Geschaffen vom Geist des Menschen!
> Gebändigt vom Geist des Menschen!
> Wer wider die Maschine kämpft,
> Kämpft wider göttliche Vernunft!
> Der Dämon Dampf ist überwunden
> Und beugt sich dem Gesetz der Zahl.
> Die Kraft, die menschenklammernde,
> Gestürzt vom Throne der Tyrannen,
> Gehorcht dem früh'ren Untertanen Mensch.
> Den Dingen waret ihr versklavt,
> Jetzt seid ihr Meister, königliche Meister [...]
> Was hilft es euch, zu kämpfen wider die Maschine?
> In allen Städten Englands ... auf dem Kontinent ...
> Beginnt sie ihr gewaltig Leben. Sie leuchtet Zukunft!
> Fortschritt triumphiert! (p. 181)

Quick to draw attention to the similarity between these views and the ones Jimmy holds,

Wible exclaims 'Wer Unterwerfung unter die Maschine rät, Der meint's nicht gut mit uns', (p. 182) going on to describe Jimmy as a traitor for having preached patience and, crucially, revealing that he, Jimmy, is Henry Cobbett's brother. What the weavers do *not* know, however, is that Wible and Ure have colluded in the attack on the machine, Wible seeing this as a way of destroying Jimmy's influence and Ure believing that an act of extreme violence is just what is needed to provoke the government into cracking down on the Luddite movement. When Jimmy turns up, therefore, hoping to dissuade the men from undertaking what he sees as a senseless act, his voice is drowned amidst the din of accusations hurled upon his head. Yet still he tries to persuade his comrades to see the light:

> Ihr armen Brüder Knechte ... War keiner,
> Der's euch anders lehrte ... ihr kämpfet
> Gegen den unrechten Feind!
> O Brüder, wenn die Schaffenden von England
> Abtrünnig werden ihrer heiligen Sendung ...
> Die Schaffenden des Kontinents, die Schaffenden der Erde ...
> Sich nicht zur großen Menschheitstat vereinen ...
> Aufrichten Weltgemeinschaft allen Werkvolks ...
> Den Menschheitsbund der freien Völker ...
> Dann Brüder, bleibt ihr Knechte bis ans Ende aller Tage! (p. 187)

Unfortunately, Jimmy's call for the unity of the oppressed falls on deaf ears, and at the very end of the scene, goaded to the extreme by Wible, the weavers beat him to death, the first one to raise a hand against him being his most loyal supporter, Ned Lud. The note of extreme pessimism struck here is tempered somewhat in the last few lines once the weavers discover that it is not Jimmy, but John Wible who is the traitor. With a group of soldiers waiting before the door to arrest them, their rebellion now clearly a failure, Ned Lud proclaims:

> So sperrt uns ein! Wir wissen, was wir taten!
> Und wollen sühnen, daß wir den erschlugen,

> Andere werden kommen ...
> Wissender, gläubiger, mutiger als wir.
> *Es wankt schon euer Reich, ihr Herren Englands!* (emphasis in original)
> (p. 189)

Ned at least has learnt something from Jimmy's death and looks forward to the day when a more enlightened and better organised working class will fulfil the vision of a just and more humane society that their dead leader had laid before them. The ending of *Die Maschinenstürmer*, then, parallels almost exactly the ending of *Masse Mensch*, with the death, that is, of the ethical revolutionary, in this case, Jimmy Cobbett, but also with the confident prophecy that it is his ideas — or, to be precise, Toller's — which will triumph in the end.

What, then, does *Die Maschinenstürmer* say about the development of Toller's political ideology? One of the things which had distressed him most about the November Revolution was not so much that it had been defeated as the fact that defeat had been due in no small measure to the divisions within the working class itself.[47] Many workers — and not just the more politically backward ones, but many members of the SPD and the Trades Unions too — had actively opposed the revolution, supported the government's attacks on the far left and even joined in the chorus of approval after the murder of the likes of Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Eisner, Landauer and Leviné.[48] Their tragic fate is, of course, echoed by that which befalls Jimmy Cobbett, who is also abused and reviled by his very own supporters. At one level, therefore, *Die Maschinenstürmer* can be seen as both a criticism of the ordinary workers and a warning to the left, in particular to the leaders, not to mistake their own subjective feelings and opinions for those of the masses, not to idealise these and to be aware of the dangers which might emanate from them. At the beginning of Act 5, for instance, just after Wible has succeeded in turning the weavers against Jimmy, the Bettler makes another appearance, giving Jimmy a prophetic

warning of the dangers facing him, dangers facing all those who take part in the revolutionary struggle. Finding Jimmy writing what seems to be a strike leaflet, he tells him that these are like 'Flugsand' for they 'verstopfen [...] Augen und Ohren, aber sie dringen nicht ins Herz'. (pp. 173-74) He then goes on to ask Jimmy if he is sure of his support among the men, to which Jimmy replies indignantly that these are 'Arbeitsmänner' and that 'Arbeitsmänner' keep their word. (p. 174.) The Bettler's response to this is very revealing:

> *BETTLER*: Einige schon. Alle? ... Das ist fraglich. Halten *alle* Menschen ihr Wort, sind *alle* Menschen mutig, aufrecht, treu, selbstlos? Nein. Warum sollten es alle Arbeitsmänner sein? Weil sie "Arbeitsmänner" sind? Du siehst sie, deucht mich, wie du sie sehen *möchtest*. Du hast dir neue Götter erschaffen, die heißen "heilige Arbeitsmänner". Reine Götter [...] Englische Arbeitsmänner von 1815, du Träumer! Freundchen, mit Göttern verbündet kämpfen, heißt zum Sieg kommen, wie eine Apfelblüte zum Apfel kommt. Erwache, erkenne, daß du mit kleinen Menschlein, gutwilligen, böswilligen, gierigen, selbstlosen, kleinlichen, großmütigen ... kämpfst, und versuchs trotzdem! Wenn du mit denen den Sieg erkämpfst und sie sich kämpfend wandeln, will ich den Hut vor dir ziehen. Wenn ich wieder einen habe! Denn der eine ertrank. Er liegt warm. Wer die Menschen nicht sieht, wie sie sind, darf nicht von Verrat und Undankbarkeit sprechen, wenn er nicht verstanden wird und Backenstreiche einheimst. (p. 174)

Drawing heavily on Max Weber's lecture, 'Politik als Beruf'— indeed, the words spoken by the 'Bettler' might almost have been lifted directly from it [49] — what Toller seeks to do here is to show that he understood what qualities were needed by the *Verantwortungsethiker* — to borrow Weber's term — that he knew, and himself accepted, that the revolutionary politician had to see the masses as they were, 'warts and all', and yet still be able to say that he or she was willing to fight alongside them 'dennoch'. The difficulty with this passage, however, is that there is something forced, artificial and not totally convincing about it. Inadvertently, it expresses Toller's own uncertainty and reservations, the fact that there was still raging within him an intense struggle over the

ethical dilemmas thrown up by revolution. He had still not developed a positive attitude to the central question of the use of force — in fact, he never really did — and was unable to create a hero, a figure with whom the audience was meant sympathise, who could be described as a *Verantwortungsethiker*. In political terms, then, Toller marks time with *Die Maschinenstürmer*, does not move much beyond the ethical-pacifist position of his previous two plays and has very little, if anything, new to say to the workers' movement.

III. Hinkemann

Toller completed the first draft of *Hinkemann*, his third prison play, as early as November 1921,[50] but it was not premiered in the theatre until some time later, in September 1923, when it appeared in the *Altes Theater* in Leipzig under the title *Der deutsche Hinkemann*, in a production by Alwin Kronacher.[51] In a letter to Stefan Zweig written just a few months before the premiere, Toller explained that he had worked on the play at a time in which he had come to the painful recognition of 'die tragische Grenze aller Glücksmöglichkeiten sozialer Revolution. Die Grenze, jenseits der die Natur mächtiger ist als menschliches Einzelwollen und gesellschaftliches Wollen'.[52] He continued:

> Darum wird Tragödie niemals aufhören. Auch der Kommunismus hat seine Tragödie. Immer wird es Individuen geben, deren Leid unlösbar ist. Und gibt es ein Individuum, dessen Leid nie enden kann, ist die Tragik des einen Individuums gleichzeitig die Tragik der Gesellschaft, in der er lebt.[53]

There was no social system possible, Toller explained, which would create 'das Absolut-Gute, das "Paradies auf Erden"'; all that could be done, was to strive to achieve 'das

relativ beste, das der Mensch finden und verwirklichen kann',[54] a point he repeated some years later in his article 'Arbeiten':

> Wir wissen, daß auch der Sozialismus nur jenes Leid erlösen wird, das herrührt aus der Unzulänglichkeit sozialer Systeme, daß ein Rest bleibt von unlöslicher Tragik, bestimmt durch den Einbruch kosmischer Kräfte. Solange wir nicht Blitz und Erdbeben, Feuerbrünste und Hagelschauer, Menschenbuckel und häßliche Gesichter, blinde Augen und krumme Seelen, Unfruchtbarkeit und Tod bezwingen können, sollten wir bescheidener werden.[55]

Socialists like himself, Toller wrote, didn't seek salvation in heaven, for they recognised that there were two kinds of suffering which confronted mankind, the suffering which arose out of the human condition itself, and that which arose out of the 'Ungerechtigkeit des gesellschaftlichen Systems'.[56] Of course, even under socialism — in his opinion, the best of all conceivable social systems — there would always be an ineradicable residue of human suffering and misery. Yet this did not mean that socialism was not worth struggling for; what it meant was that socialists had to go into that struggle with their eyes wide open and not succumb to the belief that the Communists held, namely that the establishment of socialism would solve every problem facing humanity, the existential as well as the social and economic:

> Dennoch und trotzdem müssen wir kämpfen, und wir werden es mit um so größer Ausdauer, je hellsichtiger wir sind. Ist es nicht schon viel, wenn das soziale Leid getilgt und dem alten Adam, der alten Eva, wie man in Amerika zu sagen pflegt, eine Chance geboten wird? Aus diesem Erlebnis entstand *Hinkemann*.[57]

The question which has to be asked, however, is to what extent Toller's interpretation is a reinterpretation, and an attempt to draw something positive out of a play which exuded almost complete pessimism?[58]

Set in a small industrial town in Germany around 1921, *Hinkemann* tells the tragic

story of a 'Kriegsheimkehrer', Eugen Hinkemann, who has been grotesquely deformed in combat, an enemy rifle shot having castrated him. Naturally, he finds it virtually impossible to come to terms with his condition, in particular he finds it difficult to build any sort of relationship with his wife, Grete. She has stood by her husband until now, but from the beginning of the play it is made clear that she herself is in an equally desperate situation, that she cannot cope with Hinkemann's behaviour, constant fear of losing her and of being exposed to public ridicule provoking, among other things, intense jealousy and causing his mood to swing rapidly from tenderness to violence, or the threat of violence. In despair and in the certain knowledge that she is doing something morally reprehensible, something which offends her religious beliefs, Grete begins an affair with a friend of her husband, the notorious womaniser, Paul Großhahn. Strolling through a fairground, Grete and Großhahn come across Hinkemann who, unable to find any other work, has taken a job as a fairground attraction, a hideous and bizarre job which consists in his biting the throats of live rats and mice. Overcome by both pity for her husband and remorse at her own heartless actions, Grete runs away from Großhahn and in the final scene returns home to Hinkemann, hoping against hope that they will be able to build a life together. Unfortunately, in the penultimate scene, Großhahn meets Hinkemann in a local tavern and takes great pleasure in telling him of the affair, and that Grete has seen him performing his disgusting job. What horrifies Hinkemann, however, is not so much the affair or that Grete has seen him at work but that she had laughed at him. Although he subsequently discovers that this is a lie, he feels that the basis for his marriage, indeed the basis for his life itself has been destroyed. In the end, however, it is not he but Grete who commits suicide, though the play closes with him making a noose for himself with the clear intention of following her example.[59]

Even this brief outline is enough to lay bare the deep pessimism which lies at the

heart of *Hinkemann*. Surprisingly, however, Toller's own interpretation of Hinkemann is one which even some so-called Marxist critics have been happy to share. Martin Reso, for instance, admits that the play is characterised by a sense of 'Einsamkeit und Resignation' and that in 'der Traurigkeit des Hinkemann mischt sich die des Dichters über die verlorene Revolution und die sinnlosen Opfer'.[60] Yet at the same time he sees a positive side to *Hinkemann*, arguing that with it Toller wanted to criticise 'bestimmte Erscheinungen', wanted, that is, 'die Einsamkeit des Menschen in einer entmoralisierten Welt deutlich [zu] machen'.[61] Accepting fully Toller's point about the dual nature of human suffering, Reso writes that Toller's aim was to show that:

> [...] dieses Leid durch die noch bestehende Gesellschaftsordnung um ein Vielfaches gesteigert wird. Der Schluß, den jeder Leser und Hörer selbst zu ziehen hat, ist die Erkenntnis, daß ein allseitiger Kampf gegen diese Zeit und ihre unmenschliche Ordnung notwendig ist, wenn der doppelten Not gesteuert werden soll [...] Trotz allem Pessimismus, der dem Werk durch Anlage und Handlungsführung eignet, trägt es optimistische Züge, weil es der Läuterung des Menschen dienen soll.[62]

It has to be said that Reso's analysis, his discovery of an optimistic side to *Hinkemann*, is not shared by many critics, particularly not by other Marxist critics. Hans Marnette, for instance, argues that Toller's despair about the situation facing the German workers' movement at that period and about the fact that the movement itself was so deeply divided, provoked in him an ideological crisis, a crisis which destroyed his faith in the 'Wandlung zu 'neuem' Menschtum' and which resulted in a 'pessimistische Haltung [...] die sich sogar bis zum Zweifel an der Möglichkeit der Befreiung der Unterdrückten überhaupt und bis zu völliger Verzweiflung steigert'.[63] Toller repudiated the view that the struggle of the working class could overcome human suffering, he made the tragedy of Eugen Hinkemann's into a symbol of '"ewiger menschlicher Not"' and he 'zweifelte schließlich am Sinn der kommunistischen Gesellschaftsordnung':

> Toller hat die positiven Ansätze zum Übergang auf die Position der proletarisch-revolutionären Literatur, die wir in den *Maschinenstürmer* fanden, mit dem *Hinkemann* nicht weiter entwickeln können. Der zwar abstrakte, aber doch deutlich ausgeprägte historische Optimismus des Ludditen-Dramas ist einem tiefen politischen und weltanschaulichen Pessimismus gewichen.[64]

Critics of Marnette's type were, of course, almost bound to look unfavourably on any play which did not show the inevitable triumph of the socialist idea. As Toller himself explained some years later in 'Arbeiten':

> Manche Ultralinken lehnen das Werk ab, sie fordern in revolutionären Werken einen Banal-Optimismus, der in seiner Unzulänglichkeiten den deutschen Heeresberichten gleicht, die das Volk so lange im unklaren ließen, bis Klarheit nicht mehr helfen konnte, sondern zum Zusammenbruch führte.[65]

Yet it was not only the extreme left which saw in *Hinkemann* an expression of Toller's political pessimism: many liberal critics in the West, people normally well-disposed towards Toller, share this view. Richard Dove, for instance, maintains that *Hinkemann* is redolent of Toller's own state of depression and that the predominant note struck is not one of revolutionary optimism but 'existential pessimism'.[66] Of course, Toller eventually overcame this mood of pessimism, Dove claims, and developed a new form of revolutionary commitment, a 'commitment without illusion, summarised in the word 'dennoch''.[67] It was only then, however, that he sought to revise *Hinkemann*, having come to the recognition that, as it stood, 'it offered no political solutions':

> The central scene of the play, with its critique of working-class consciousness, concludes that men cannot change society until they have changed themselves: Hinkemann's vision suggests that they are incapable of such change. The final act of the play acquires increasingly visionary and metaphysical overtones: Hinkemann's plight is portrayed, not as a consequence of social oppression, but of cruel and predatory human nature. It is the ideological implications of this realisation which drive Hinkemann to despair.[68]

Before examining in detail the question of whether or not *Hinkemann* reveals pessimism about the possibility of creating socialism and about what difference socialism would make to the human condition, it is worth while looking at another important aspect of the play, one which has come in for a good deal of criticism and which even Toller's defenders have been forced to concede is a serious source of artistic weakness. The question here concerns the central character himself and Toller's alleged failure to make clear whether or not Hinkemann was meant to be interpreted an individual or as a purely symbolic figure. Is not the problem with this criticism, however, the fact that it fails to accept that all art, even that which calls itself realistic, is symbolic? Is it not the case that the real function of art is not to reproduce an exact replica of reality but to bring out the essence of it by highlighting what the artist feels to be its most important features? What causes difficulty in this work, therefore, is not that Toller cannot make up his mind about whether or not Hinkemann is a symbol, but that he is not clear in his own mind about what he is a symbol for. To put it another way, he makes him symbolise too much and, moreover, much that is contradictory. That Hinkemann the war-cripple is a representative of poor, oppressed, suffering humanity is obvious and requires no further comment. But what exactly is he supposed to represent, for instance, in the scene set in the fairground?

The fairground itself, of course, stands for contemporary German society, a society sapped to its roots by war and revolution and which now found itself in the throes of the most acute inflationary crisis ever experienced by any capitalist society. Hinkemann himself is a typical victim of all these developments, having been mutilated by war, disappointed by the failure of the revolution and left unemployed and virtually destitute by the unfolding economic calamity. With no control over his destiny, he, like millions of others, is at the mercy of unscrupulous and rapacious exploiters like his employer, the 'Budenbesitzer', a man who thrives on misery and poverty, making a

fortune out of misfortune and need. Even though Hinkemann is nauseated by the very thought of the work on offer, he is not in a position to refuse, something the 'Budenbesitzer' knows only too well:

> Könige, Generäle, Pfaffen und Budenbesitzer, das sind die einzigen Politiker: die packen das Volk an seinen Instinkten! (p. 206)

There is, of course, no problem with the 'Budenbesitzer' as a representative of the ruling class, but there is a real difficulty with the symbolic role allotted to Hinkemann here. Having accepted the position of fairground freak, he stands in front of his booth as the 'Budenbesitzer' seeks to attract customers to his show:

> Homunkulus, deutscher Bärenmensch! Frißt Ratten und Mäuse bei lebendigem Leibe vor Augen des verehrten Publikums! *Der* deutsche Held! *Die* deutsche Kultur! *Die* deutsche Männerfaust! *Die* [...] fleischgewordene deutsche Kraft! (pp. 208-9)

Some of the first performances of *Hinkemann* were disrupted, in some cases their planned theatre runs cancelled, following violent protests by nationalist and conservative groups who felt the play made a mockery of everything they believed in.[69] And indeed, it would have been surprising had they not taken offence at scenes such as this in which German culture, manhood and vitality is embodied by an empty shell of a man, a weak, ineffectual imposter, a eunuch. Yet is there not something deeply incongruous and unconvincing about forcing Hinkemann into this role here? As already explained, he represents suffering humanity in general and, as we shall see, a particular section of the working class. How, then, can the same character also be made to stand for reaction? Recognising the interpretative difficulties this presents, Malcolm Pittock argues that what is symbolic here is not Hinkemann himself but the role he is playing, the role, that is, which he is forced into by his unscrupulous employer.[70] It is the 'Budenbesitzer',

Pittock maintains, who makes the connection between 'the brutal sadist, which Hinkemann is supposed to be, with the quality of contemporary Germany'.[71] Yet it requires a good deal of subtle argument to prove that this was Toller's intention, and Pittock himself would surely admit that his careful distinction is not one likely to be made by the average audience or reader, was one clearly not made, at least by conservative groups. It is much more plausible to argue that Toller made Hinkemann a depository for all the ideas he had in his mind at that moment, and that this play, like all the others he wrote in jail, suffered, as he himself put it, 'an einem zuviel'.[72]

The fact that Hinkemann himself is such a contradictory character obviously creates a difficulty in deciding what the play reveals about Toller's political development. However, it is not the only difficulty. Equally problematic is the figure of Paul Großhahn. He is a deeply unattractive and unsympathetic individual, a man who has an affair with a good friend's wife, indeed, makes her pregnant, and then in an act of cold revenge, after Grete has turned her back on him, exposes Hinkemann to ridicule by revealing his terrible secret to the whole world when he meets him in the tavern. Yet at the beginning of the play, Großhahn, like Hinkemann, an ordinary worker, is depicted as a revolutionary socialist with the views he expresses being quite close to if not identical with those which Toller himself held. From the very first he is shown to have a clear, sober understanding not only of the inequality at the heart of capitalist society but also of the ideological framework which underpins that inequality, of the role, for instance, which organised religion plays in helping to reconcile the poor and dispossessed to society as it is organised. Talking to Eugen and Grete in Act 1 he says:

> *PAUL GROSSHAHN*: [...] Armes Volk ist schlechter dran als Vieh ... Das wird wenigstens gemästet, auf die Wiese gebracht, und erst wenn es so recht fett, so recht kugelrund fett ist, wirds geschlachtet.
> *GRETE HINKEMANN*: Sie versündigen sich am Herrgott.
> *PAUL GROSSHAHN*: Wie kann armes Volk sündigen? Selbst wenn es

> sowas wie ein Jenseits gäbe, müßte das Volk die ewige Seligkeit gewinnen, einmal, weil es keine Zeit hat zu sündigen vor lauter Schuften und Schinakeln ... und dann, weil es dafür belohnt werden muß, daß es seinen Peinigern die Seligkeit auf Erden verschafft ... Übrigens bin ich Atheist. Ich glaube nicht mehr an Gott. An welchen sollte ich denn glauben? An den Judengott? An den Heidengott? An den Christengott? An den französichen Gott? An den deutschen Gott?
> *HINKEMANN*: Vielleicht sind sie alle zusammen im Drahtverhau hängen geblieben ... die ewigen Schlachtenlenker. (p. 199)

Interestingly, Hinkemann, unlike his wife, shares Großhahn's attitude towards religion, or at least towards the churches which, in the First World War, as in every other war, lined up behind their respective governments to give God's blessing to unprecedented carnage. Echoing Toller's own views on this subject, Großhahn tries to make Grete see what a swindle the whole of official Christianity is, and to understand that what it represents, what it is really interested in, is not love and justice but the interests of a tiny minority of society:

> Wenn Gott gerecht wäre, müßte er auch gerecht handeln, Frau Hinkemann. Und wie handelt der gerechte, liebe, gute Gott? Hä? Brauche ich es Ihnen noch zu sagen? Mit Gott für König und Vaterland, mit Gott für Menschenmord, mit Gott für Obergott Mammon. Alles gottgewollt. Man meint bald, wenn die Herren es nicht für nützlich halten, wenn sie sich schämen, "Ich" zu sagen, dann sagen sie "Gott". Das klingt besser ... und darauf fällt das Volk leichter herein ... Den Glauben überlasse ich denen, die Profit draus schlagen. Wir kämpfen nicht um den Himmel, wir kämpfen um die Erde, wir kämpfen um die Menschen. (p. 199)

Later on, of course, Großhahn is shown to be a hypocrite, his concern for humanity at best only an abstract concern, one which does not extend to include Hinkemann. The question is, however, when Toller invites the audience to condemn Großhahn for his lack of real humanity does he also wants it to condemn the views he holds? In other words, does Großhahn represent Toller's rejection of socialism or did he merely want to show the inadequacies of individual socialists? Part of the answer to this question is provided by scene 4, the scene set in a workers' tavern in which Großhahn reveals to the general

public that Hinkemann is a eunuch.

While the fairground scene sets out to reveal the rottenness and corruption at the heart of German society at large, this scene tries to do much the same in respect of the German labour movement. Gathered together in this tavern are a number of figures who are meant to represent various attitudes and shades of thought then current within the working class, from Sebaldus Singegott, as his name suggests, a religious believer, through Max Knatsch, the Anarchist, to Michel Unbeschwert, a Marxist, though whether he is of the Communist or Social Democratic variety is difficult to say. To say that Toller is critical of the workers' movement here would be putting it mildly: he paints a devastating picture of the working class, and shows that it is not only hopelessly divided among itself, but full of reactionary ideas and prejudices and almost completely lacking in the kind of revolutionary consciousness which Toller believed had to be in existence before there could even be any talk of a social transformation.[73] The scene opens, for instance, with an idiotic and depressing argument between two workers, one a 'Schieferdecker' the other a 'Ziegeldecker', with the 'Schieferdecker' convinced that his trade bestows on him a far higher social status than that of the 'Ziegeldecker'. The former trade, he declares proudly, is an art-form while the latter is mere 'Tagelöhnerdienst'. (p. 214) Unable to reflect on anything beyond his own personal experience, this man neither wants a change in the structure of society nor believes that anything ever *can* change it. 'An meine Ehre kann keiner ran', he tells the 'Ziegeldecker', 'auch keine Revolution!'. (p. 215) It is not only the 'Schieferdecker', however, whom Toller shows to be infected with this kind of slave-mentality: both Peter Immergleich and Sebaldus Singegott are infected with it too. Immergleich is indifferent to politics, has no interest, that is, in trying to understand the forces which shape his life, and wants only to be left in peace. Singegott *is* interested but, being a religious believer,

rejects the class struggle and sees the solution to the workers' problems will only be found on the far side of the grave. When Michel Unbeschwert, pointing to the fact that war has undermined the power of the ruling-class, declares 'es wird Licht, Genossen', Singegott answers:

> Dein Licht ist nicht das wahre Licht. Dein Licht ist ein Flackern vor den Toren der himmlischen Burg. Du scheinst zu meinen, daß jeder Arbeiter Parteisoldat ist. Es gibt viele Arbeiter, die suchen ihr Ideal ganz wo anders. Das überseht ihr immer. (p. 216)

Toller's real target in this scene, however, is not these more or less apolitical figures but the more ideologically committed ones, Max Knatsch and Michel Unbeschwert. Yet it has to be stressed that the criticism, or implied criticism, Toller directs towards Knatsch, the Anarchist, is not of the same level of intensity, not of the same fundamental character, as that directed towards Unbeschwert, the Marxist. Knatsch, for instance, is allowed a degree of insight into his own shortcomings, both political and personal, that is completely denied to Unbeschwert. Unlike Unbeschwert, he recognises that there is a large element of hypocrisy in the conduct of most of those who call themselves socialists, himself included, that while they are happy to preach justice for the workers as a class, they are less than just in their dealings with their own wives and families. In a conversation with Hinkemann, Knatsch explains why it is that he spends so much time in the tavern:

> Wenn ich zu Haus die Küche sehe, die unser Salon ist, und unser Wohnzimmer, unser Waschraum und unser Trockenboden ... wenn ich die armseligen Kinder sehe ... wenn ich an die Frau denke, die Frau, die keift und keift ... dann mache ich auf der Treppe kehrt und gehe meinen Heilsweg ... zur Heinrichen! Zwar ... wir Männer sind nicht ohne Schuld. Maulfaul sind wir. Maulfaul. In jeder Versammlung reden wir zu fremden Menschen vom neuen wahrhaften Leben ... bei der eigenen Frau bringen wir kein Wort über die Lippen. (p. 215)

As explained above, however, while Knatsch does not live up to his ideals, he is made a more sympathetic, more human character than Unbeschwert, by being at least allowed to recognise his failings. Moreover, the ideals he stands for are also viewed in a more positive light than those which Unbeschwert advocates. During the scene's main set-piece, a discussion in which Hinkemann asks the key question of whether or not his condition could find a remedy under any social system, Knatsch takes the opportunity to attack Unbeschwert's dogmatic Marxism, criticising the materialist philosophy which lies at its heart, a philosophy which he feels places too much emphasis on conditions in determining social development and leaves out of account man with his free will. When Unbeschwert ridicules Knatsch, describing idealists like him as 'jene radikalen Sendlinge und Schwärmer aus dem Osten, die den Glauben an die Stelle der Wissenschaft setzen wollen', (p. 217) Knatsch replies:

> Wendet euch an den Willen der Menschen! Wenn die Menschen nicht revolutionären Willens sind, helfen alle "Verhältnisse" nicht! Und wenn die Menschen revolutionären Willens sind, können sie in allen Verhältnissen ein neues Leben beginnen. Gleich. Noch heute. Keine besonderen "Verhältnisse" brauchen sie abzuwarten. Aber ihr! Gehorchen: ja. Verantworten: nein. Übrigens habt ihr noch immer versagt, wenn die "Verhältnisse" reif waren und taten verlangten. (p. 217)

Although Knatsch joins with the others at the end of this scene in laughing at Hinkemann when his terrible secret in revealed, there is no doubt that Toller sympathises with the ideological standpoint he puts forward. What this means, in other words, is that Toller's attitude towards social change, his view of the nature of the revolutionary process, was much the same as that which he had advanced in his first play, *Die Wandlung*. Despite the harsh experience of the *Räterepublik*, indeed, of the November Revolution as a whole, he continued to believe both that a spiritual transformation had to precede a social one and that men and women were masters of their own fate, that they could bring about

a revolutionary situation, could achieve socialism, at any time, irrespective of material conditions, simply by an effort of will. The crucial difference between *Hinkemann* and *Die Wandlung*, however, is that by this stage Toller had become pessimistic about mankind's ability to transform itself spiritually. Indeed, the confrontation between Hinkemann and Unbeschwert seems to indicate that he held out no hope at all of there ever being the kind of change he desired.

As already indicated, it is not entirely clear from the text whether Unbeschwert is meant to be interpreted as a Communist or a Social Democrat. In a sense, however, this is not of fundamental importance, for what Toller wanted to create in this figure was a dogmatic Marxist, someone who believed that a socialist or communist society would solve all of the problems facing humanity, both the spiritual and psychological as well as the social and economic. He wanted to create, in other words, a figure who would provide a contrast with Hinkemann. Having listened in silence to the discussion which has been taking place, Hinkemann finally intervenes after Unbeschwert again declares that the decisive factor in the revolutionary process are 'die Verhältnisse'. Interestingly, he expresses agreement, or partial agreement, with this position, and tells Unbeschwert that he is right to point to the crucial role played by economic factors:

> Da hast du mir ganz aus der Seele gesprochen ... das mit den Wollhemden und das mit den Seidenhemden ... Der Mensch ist nicht gut, wenn er hungert ... man muß ihm erst Obdach und Nahrung und ein bißchen Schönheit geben, ehe man von ihm verlangen darf, daß er gütig sei ... (p. 217)

What is more, Hinkemann also explains that he understands fully the importance to the working class of its own political party and how the party means something more to the worker than it does to the 'Bürger'. For the 'Bürger', Hinkemann says, the party is simply a party and nothing more; for the worker, by contrast, 'ist sie ... trotz aller

Flecken ... trotz aller Schmutzspritzer ... *mehr*. Seinen Menschenglauben, seine Religion bringt er der Partei'. (p. 218) Yet while it is made clear here and in other places that Hinkemann understands the need for revolutionary struggle and sees his proper place as being part of it, it is also clear that he has serious reservations both about the possibility of change and what change could achieve for the likes of himself. Addressing himself to 'Genosse' Unbeschwert he says:

> Du sprichst von Glück [...] Ich habe lange darüber nachgedacht, was denn nu eigentlich Glück ist. Und ... weißt du ... ich bin zu dem Ergebnis gekommen, daß wir das Glück auch nicht *jedem* bringen können ... das wahre Glück meine ich ... daß das Glück etwas ist *(schwer atmend)* was einer hat oder was einer nicht hat. (p. 216)

Too ashamed to reveal his secret source of torment, Hinkemann invents a fictitious friend to whom he ascribes his own predicament, hoping in this way to force Unbeschwert and the others to confront the fact that there were certain problems which even a socialist society could do little or nothing to resolve. Unbeschwert, however, is so limited in outlook, his mind so cramped and stifled by party ideology, that he is not able to understand what Hinkemann is talking about. Once socialism has been established, he firmly believes, once mankind has liberated itself from economic compulsion, in Marxist terms, once it has made the leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom, then there will be nothing standing in the way of creating an earthly paradise. Even when Hinkemann pushes him a little further, points out that there are some, war cripples for instance, whose condition would not be bettered by a change in the economic basis of society, Unbeschwert still cannot see the problem and replies quite simply that such people would be cared for by the community and would be able to live just as happily as everyone else. Moreover, a socialist society would be one in which war was unknown and so problems such as that described by Hinkemann would not arise in the

first place. Of course, Hinkemann's emasculation is not intended to be understood as a purely physical condition; primarily it is a symbol for the existential problems man will have to deal with no matter what social system he lives under. When Hinkemann tries to suggest this to Unbeschwert, pointing out to him that under socialism too castration was still thinkable, in a machine accident, for instance, Unbeschwert is finally left without an answer, being only able to mutter that this was 'eine verteufelt verzwickte Frage'. (p. 220) Even Max Knatsch, as already indicated, the figure who comes closest to articulating Toller's own views in this scene, says of Hinkemann's questions that they are 'Spitzfindigkeiten', adding:

> Der Mensch ist am glücklichsten, wenn er an so was nicht denkt. Und wir Proleten brauchen im revolutionären Kampf an solche Spitzfindigkeiten gar nicht zu denken. Die Menschen, denen sowas zustößt, sind eben Opfer. Das Proletariat hat ein Recht auf Opfer. (p. 220)

Again, it is interesting to note that Hinkemann does not reject outright Knatsch's view that the proletariat has a right to demand sacrifice in struggle. Indeed, he says that he is of the same opinion. Yet he is still not satisfied with the superficial answers his comrades have provided to the problem he has raised. Moreover, towards the end of this scene, the hollowness of their socialism, the limits to their concern for their fellow beings, is fully exposed when they too break into mocking laughter after they learn of Hinkemann's secret from Großhahn. Hinkemann's despairing reply to their laughter reveals the pessimism which lies at the heart of this play:

> *HINKEMANN*: [...] Ihr Toren! Was wißt ihr von der Qual einer armseligen Kreatur? Wie müßt ihr anders werden, um eine neue Gesellschaft zu bauen! Bekämpft den Bourgeois und seid aufgebläht von seinem Dünkel, seiner Selbstgerechtigkeit, seiner Herzensträgheit! Einer haßt den anderen, weil er in einer anderen Parteisekte ist, weil er aufn andres Programm schwört! Keiner hat Vertrauen zum andern. Keiner hat Vertrauen zu sich. Keine Tat, die nicht erstickt in Hader und Verrat. Worte habt ihr, schöne Worte, heilige Worte, vom ewigen Glück. Die

> Worte sind gut für *gesunde* Menschen! Ihr seht eure Grenzen nicht ... es gibt Menschen denen kein Staat und keine Gesellschaft, keine Familie und keine Gemeinschaft Glück bringen kann. Da wo Eure Heilmittel aufhören, da fängt unsere Not erst an
> Da steht der Mensch allein
> Da tut sich ein Abgrund auf, der heißt: Ohne Trost
> Da wölbt sich ein Himmel, der heißt: Ohne Glück
> Da wächst ein Wald, der heißt: Hohn und Spott
> Da brandet ein Meer, das heißt, Lächerlich
> Da würgt eine Finsternis, die heißt: Ohne Liebe
> Wer aber hilft da? (pp. 225-26)

As explained above, Toller was always at pains to refute the criticism made by the Communists and others that *Hinkemann* was a pessimistic play, arguing that his aim had been to show 'die Grenzen aller Glücksmöglichkeiten, die durch individuelle und soziale Willenskraft erkämpft werden können'.[74] Unlike the revolutionary poets of the nineteenth century, he wrote, the modern revolutionary writer knew that there could be no such thing as an earthly paradise, that 'ein Rest bleibt von unlöslicher Tragik, bestimmt durch den Einbruch kosmischer Kräfte':

> Wir haben erkannt, daß zweierlei Not drückt: die Not, die gegeben ist durch das menschliche Leben und die Not, die gegeben ist durch die Ungerechtigkeit des gesellschaftlichen Systems.[75]

As has been shown, *Hinkemann* does disclose that much human suffering is socially conditioned and could be eliminated if society were organised on a more just and humane foundation. Yet Toller strains credibility when he suggests that there was something positive and optimistic about his play, that his aim — or one of them — had been to show that it was necessary to carry on the revolutionary struggle despite the knowledge that perfect human happiness could never be attained. In truth, the overwhelming impression left *is* one of unrelieved pessimism and gloom.

As Hinkemann stumbles out of the door of the tavern, leaving his so-called comrades to reflect on the terrible way in which they have treated him, he finds himself

back in a world of corruption and despair, a world in which the weak are at the mercy of people like the 'Budenbesitzer'. In scene one of the final act, a street somewhere in the west end of the town, Hinkemann is seen clinging to a lamp-post trying in vain to make sense of the madness going on around him. First to talk to him is a small boy who tries to interest him in his 13-year old sister, then comes the 'Budenbesitzer', who threatens to have him arrested if he breaks his contract and refuses to return to work:

> Kontrakt ist Fundament bürgerlicher Gesellschaft. Mann, Sie tasten heiligste Güter der Nation an, Mann, Staatsmacht steht hinter mir. (p. 229)

His nerves giving out, Hinkemann falls unconscious to the ground and lies there motionless as various figures emerge to complete the vision of horror and inhumanity, the vision of German society circa 1921. There are the newspaper vendors who proclaim all the wonders of the modern age, the marvellous new poison gas, for instance, capable of destroying even the biggest city, and whose inventor has been made honourary member of the academy of every known country and appointed by the Pope as a Papal Count. Then there is a figure described only as a 'Gummiknüppel' who tells his companion, 'ein Flammenwerfer', how he had helped crush a workers' revolt in Mittelborussien:

> Kurzer Prozeß ... dem Aas einen Revolver in die Hand gedrückt ... Mußte sich erschießen oder eins mit dem Kolben! Vorher auf Befehl! "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!" ... Hähähä ... Gesindel muß wieder parieren lernen ... Stiefel ins Genick ... (p. 232)

Dismissed by these two as just another 'Spartakistenbiest', Hinkemann awakes from this nightmare as military music, signalling the final and complete triumph of reaction over the forces of revolution, fades into the distance. In the final scene, set in his own home, Hinkemann seems to be preparing to commit suicide. As he had previously explained to

the 'Budenbesitzer', it is only now, after his horrendous injury, after he has experienced the depths of despair, that his eyes have been opened to reality. At the beginning of the play, Hinkemann returns from a visit to his mother-in-law in a state of distress having witnessed her putting out the eyes of a Goldfinsch, a newspaper report having claimed that blind birds sang better. He, of course, identifies himself with this poor 'Tierchen, ein Geschöpf der Erde wie du, wie ich', (p. 195) and, initially, cannot comprehend the woman's cruelty. Suddenly, however, the terrible thought strikes him that, were it not for his own condition, he too would probably have acted just as cruelly:

> Hätte ich nicht früher das gleiche getan? Ohne Bedenken? Was war mir früher der Schmerz eines Tieres? Ein Tier, nun gut. Man dreht ihm den Hals um, man sticht es tot, man schießt es. Was weiter. Als ich gesund war, erschien mir das alles, als müßte es so sein. Nun ich ein Krüppel bin, weiß ich: Es ist etwas Ungeheuerliches! Es ist Mord am eigenen Fleisch! Schlimmer als Mord! Foltern bei lebendigem Leib! ... Aber früher! ... Wie mit Blindheit geschlagen ist der gesunde Mensch! (p. 196)

Compare this with the passage in Act 3, after Hinkemann has been exposed to ridicule in the eyes of the world:

> Ich bin sehend geworden! Bis auf den Grund sehe ich! Bis auf den nackten Grund. Die Menschen sehe ich! Die Zeit sehe ich! Herr Direktor, der Krieg ist wieder da! Die Menschen morden sich unter Gelächter! *Die Menschen morden sich unter Gelächter!* (p. 228)

In *Die Wandlung*, after Friedrich had cast off the ideology which had blinded him, he sees a vision of humanity striding towards a brighter and better future. In *Hinkemann*, when Eugen learns to see, he sees humanity in its blackest possible colours. Significantly, it is not his own physical condition which causes him most pain, but the reaction to it of the people in his own environment, their cruel, mocking laughter, in particular the laughter of his wife. Even though Hinkemann learns at the end that Großhahn had lied and that Grete had not laughed at him after all, he has suffered too much and is unable

to see any hope for the future. At the end, just before Grete's dead body is brought before him, she having taken her own life, he makes a speech which sums up the sheer sense of hopelessness which lies at the heart of the play:

> *HINKEMANN*: [...] *Ein* Geist sind wir, *ein* Leib. Und es gibt Menschen, die sehen das nicht. Und es gibt Menschen, die haben das vergessen. Im Krieg haben sie gelitten und haben ihre Herrn gehaßt und haben gehorcht und haben gemordet! ... Alles vergessen ... Sie werden wieder leiden und werden wieder ihre Herren hassen und werden wieder ... gehorchen ... und werden wieder ... morden. So sind die Menschen ... Und könnten anders sein, wenn sie wollten. Aber sie wollen nicht. Sie steinigen den Geist, sie höhnen ihn, sie schänden das Leben, sie kreuzigen es ... immer und immer wieder...
> Wie ist das sinnlos! Machen sich arm und könnten reich sein und brauchten keine himmlische Erlösung ... die Verblendeten! Als ob sie so tun müßten im blinden Wirbel der Jahrtausende! Nicht anders könnten. Müßten. Gleich Schiffern, die der Mälstrom an sich reißt und *zwingt* einander zu zermalmen ... (p. 246)

History seems to him to be an never-ending cycle of despair and oppression with mankind seemingly doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again, unable to transform itself and build a new and better society. With no way out of this cycle, Hinkemann himself prepares to commit suicide, tying a length of rope into a noose as the curtain comes down, and as he does so, reflecting on chance and fate and how they have dealt with him:

> [...] ich steh hier, kolossal und lächerlich... Immer werden Menschen stehen in ihrer Zeit wie ich. Warum aber trifft es mich, gerade mich?... Wahllos trifft es. Den trifft es und den trifft es. Den trifft es nicht und den trifft es nicht ... Was wissen wir?... Woher? ... Wohin? ... jeder Tag kann das Paradies bringen, jede Nacht die Sintflut. (p. 247)

As Toller himself explained, there was no answer to the existential questions he deals with in this play, no society conceivable which could root out entirely human suffering. He could, therefore, allow himself to sink even further into despair and renounce the struggle for socialism as pointless, or else accept that there were problems which had no

solutions and carry on fighting regardless. As his next play, *Der entfesselte Wotan*, shows, Toller took the latter course, quickly shook off his pessimism and developed a much more realistic and mature approach to all the questions posed by revolution.[76]

1. *Masse Mensch. Ein Stück aus der sozialen Revolution des 20. Jahrhunderts*, *GW*, II, 63-112. Further references are given after quotations in the text. First published in Potsdam by Gustav Kiepenheuer in 1921. The play was premiered in the *Stadttheater* in Nuremberg on 15 November 1920 in a production by Friedrich Neubauer.

2. Cecil Davies writes:

> [...] there is in this play a central dramatic conflict [...] which was lacking in *Die Wandlung*. and the dramatic conflict is expressed both externally/objectively and internally/subjectively, in the outer conflict between Sonia and *The Nameless*, and the inner debate between Sonja and her so-called *Begleiter*. It is thus clear from the start that *Masse Mensch* is fundamentally dramatic in a way that *Die Wandlung* was not.

The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), p. 83.

3. In a letter from prison Toller explained to Tilla Durieux that *Masse Mensch* seemed suddenly to burst forth from within him:

> Es wird sie interessieren, daß ich das Drama, nachdem ich bis auf ein paar Verse fast 1 $^{3}/_{4}$ Jahr nichts geschaffen hatte, in drei Tagen, ohne äußere Vorarbeiten, in einem Tag schrieb.

Letter dated only 1920, in *GW*, V, 36-37 (p. 36). Durieux, wife of the Munich art dealer, Paul Cassirer, was an actress friend of Toller's — possibly even lover — whom he had met shortly before the *Räte* period. See Richard Dove, *He Was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990). In his autobiography Toller also writes:

> In wenigen Tagen schreibe ich das Stück, abends um neun erlischt das Licht in den Zellen, eigenes Licht ist verboten, ich verhänge den Tisch mit einer Decke, ich lege mich flach auf den Boden, und schreibe beim Schein einer Kerze weiter, bis zum Morgen.

EJID, p. 159.

4. In another letter from prison to Theodor Lessing Toller wrote:

> *Masse Mensch* war nach Erlebnissen, deren Wucht der Mensch vielleicht nur einmal ertragen kann, ohne zu zerbrechen, Befreiung von seelischer Not, Befreiung, die den Zwiespalt nicht selbsttrügerisch durch irgend eine Formel aus der Welt verbannt, sondern zum Zwiespalt "ja" und "Schicksal" sagte.

Letter dated only 1920 in *GW*, V, 36. Similarly, in his autobiography, he wrote:

> Die sinnliche Fülle der Erlebnisse war so stark, daß ich nur Herr werden konnte durch Abstraktion, durch die dramatische Auflichtung jener Linien, die den Grund der Dinge bestimmen.

EJID, p. 158-59.

5. Toller's letter to Fehling, slightly altered, is reprinted in *GW*, V, 37-39 (p. 38). Fehling's Berlin production opened on 29 September 1921.

6. *EJID*, p. 158.

7. 'Die Frau', who carries the name Sonja Irene L., is based, in part, on the real-life figure of Sarah Sonja Lerch, the Russian-born wife of a university Professor in Munich and a participant in the Russian Revolution of 1905. She became involved in the strike movement in Munich, was arrested, jailed and eventually committed suicide in Stadelheim prison in March 1918. See *EJID*, p. 65. See also Wolfgang Rothe, *Ernst Toller. In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983), p. 128.

8. Reinforcing a point made by Altenhofer, namely, that 'Der Namenlose' *is* meant to be interpreted as a Communist, and not, as some critics had previously suggested, the voice of the anonymous masses, Cecil Davies also argues that it would be wrong to see this figure as a simple portrait of Leviné. 'Leviné', he writes, 'was for Toller a person, known individually in all his complexity. *Der Namenlose* is not an individual at all'. Even if one accepts this argument, it does not make any fundamental difference to the nature of the debate in which the two main figures are engaged. See Rosemarie Altenhofer, 'Ernst Tollers politische Dramatik' (unpublished dissertation, Washington University, 1976), p. 57. and Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller,* p. 88.

9. Whether or not Toller himself ever came to the opinion that his depiction of the moral conflict in *Masse Mensch* was somewhat one-sided is difficult to say. It is interesting, however, that in his letter to Jürgen Fehling he expresses the view that at the time he wrote the play he lacked the necessary distance to the events he deals with in order to give them proper artistic expression:

> Ich stehe dem Stück *Masse Mensch* heute kritischer gegenüber, ich habe die Bedingtheit der Form erkannt, die herrührt von einer trotz allem! inneren Gehemmtheit jener Tage, einer menschlichen Scham, die künstlerischer Formung persönlichen Erlebens, nackter Konfession, scheu auswich, und die doch nicht den Willen zu reiner künstlerischer Objektifikation aufbringen konnte.

'Brief an einen schöpferischen Mittler', foreword to the second edition of *Masse-Mensch*. reprinted in *GW*, II, 352-54 (p. 353). In *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis*, this letter continues as follows after the word 'Scham':

> Das Ungeheure der Revolutionstage war noch nicht Bild der Revolutionstage geworden, es war irgendwie noch schmerzende, qualvolle "Seelensubstanz".

'An Regisseur Jürgen Fehling', letter dated only 1920, in *GW*, V, 37-39 (p.38). On the differences between the two versions of this letter see Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller*, pp. 93-94 and p. 472.

10. Max Weber 'Politik als Beruf' a speech given at the University of Munich in November 1918. Reprinted in *Gesammelte politische Schriften* (Munich: Drei Masken, 1921), pp. 397-451.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 447.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 448.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 451.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 451.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

18. Much earlier than this, in 1920, in a letter from prison to 'Tessa', Netty Katzenstein, Toller had presented this ethical dilemma in much the same terms:

> Der ethische Mensch: Ausschließlich Erfüller seines inneren Gesetzes.
> Der Politische Mensch: Kämpfer für soziale Formen, die den anderen Voraussetzungen zu höherer Lebenshaltung sein können. Kämpfer, auch wenn er gegen sein inneres Gesetz verstößt.
> Wird der ethische Mensch politischer Mensch, welcher tragische Weg bleibt ihm erspart?

Letter to Tessa, 12.11.20, in *GW*, V, 50. On Toller's relationship with Katzenstein and her husband, Erich, see Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller*, p. 138.

19. 'Arbeiten', in *GW*, I, 135-49 (p. 139).

20. Later on, of course, Toller did come to terms with the reality of the class struggle. In his autobiography he shows that he now understands that it is not possible to remain ethically pure in spirit while fighting for a better world. There is, however, a distinct tone of resignation in his words and it is clear that they are intended not so much to convince the reader as to convince himself:

> Wer heute auf der Ebene der Politik, im Miteinander ökonomischer und menschlicher Interessen, kämpfen will, muß klar wissen, daß Gesetz und Folgen seines Kampfes von anderen Mächten bestimmt werden als seinen guten Absichten, daß ihm oft Art der Wehr und Gegenwehr aufgezwungen werden, die er als tragisch empfinden muß, an denen er, im tiefsten Sinn des Wortes, verbluten kann.

EJID, p. 100.

21. Toller versucht, gerade durch das Aufdecken des eigenen seelischen Zwiespalts und seine Projektion in die Gestalten der Sonja Irene L. und des Namenlosen ein objektives Bild der politischen Differenzen in den revolutionären Lagern der Kommunisten und der libertären Sozialisten zu

> geben und darüber hinaus die Unaufgeklärtheit und Entschlußlosigkeit der Masse zu zeigen, die unfähig war, eine Revolution zu tragen. Er stellt in *Masse Mensch* der kommunistischen Doktrin "Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel" seine — vor allem von Gustav Landauers Anarchismus-Konzeption beinflußte — Auffassung entgegen, daß die Humanität auch im revolutionären Kampf nicht bloßes Ziel sein dürfe, sondern bei der Wahl der Mittel entscheidendes Kriterium bleiben müsse.

Rosemarie Altenhofer 'Nachwort' in *Masse Mensch. Ein Stück aus der sozialen Revolution des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1978), pp. 57-77 (pp. 61-62).

22. The Jesuit Priest, Hermann Busenbaum, first formulated this idea in his work *Medulla theologiae moralis*, first published in 1650, writing there 'Cum finis est licitus, etiam media sunt licita' and later 'Cum licitus est finis, etiam licent media'. Busenbaum saw nothing immoral or unethical in such a formulation, for what he was saying was *not* that all means were permissible in achieving the goal, but that the justification for the means could only come from the end itself. Immoral means, in other words, could not be used to justify a moral end. *Medulla theologiae moralis* (Antwerp: Apud Ioan Bapi Verduissen, 1678), p. 304 and pp. 356-57.

23. For a clear and concise account of the classical Marxist position on the question of morality see Leon Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours. The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism* (New York: New Park, 1968). First published by Pioneer, New York, 1942.

24. Toller claimed that, while the critics and party dogmatists were unable to understand this point, the ordinary workers and peasants to whom he read the play in prison grasped it intuitively:

> Ich habe einen der schwersten Konflikte unsere revolutionären Zeit, der immer wieder an den Menschen herantritt, der die Notwendigkeit des Umpflügens erkannt hat, zu gestalten versucht.
> Ich habe das Stück einigen Genossen, Bauern, Industriearbeitern, Tagelöhnern, auch verknöcherte Aufseher waren anwesend, vorgelesen — und mich erfüllte innige Freude, als ich sah, wie jeder das Stück verstand, wie jeder auf seine Art seelische mitlebte und kämpfte.
> Ein Arbeiter sagte, es werde die proletarische Leidenschaft "reinigen" und im Bürgertum eine winzige Ahnung von den schweren Kämpfen des Proletariats wecken.

Letter to 'Frau T.D.', *GW*, V, 36.

25. *GW*, I. 139.

26. The following quote from a letter to 'Tessa' reveals the intense inner struggle going on within Toller as he sought to come to terms with this dilemma:

> Nicht Angst haben, ich lasse mich nicht unterbekommen, ich zerbreche nicht. Diese Gewißheit habe ich längst: Gefängnismauern werden mich nicht zerbrechen.
> Draußen: Blut — Mord — Qual — Hunger — Not der Millionen. Das

drückt viel schwerer. Und die Ahnung um das Schicksal Europas in den nächsten Jahrzehnten.
Die unfaßbare Gewalt, die zu dem furchtbaren Weg führt. Könnte ich nur wie früher an Neugeburt, an reines Werden glauben.
Menschheit — immer hilflos, immer gekreuzigt.
Gerechtigkeit — ein bitterer Geschmack liegt auf meiner Zunge. Ich habe an die erlösende Kraft des Sozialismus geglaubt, vielleicht war das meine "Lebenslüge", vielleicht ...
Der Sozialismus. Das ist notwendige Wirtschaftsgestaltung. Ist das nicht genug! Ein gigantisches Werk. Und der Mensch? Und der Mensch? Wund bin ich und zerwühlt.
Diese Krise hätte ich überwinden müssen, sie ist keine "Schwäche", keine "Folge der Haft". —

Letter to 'Tessa', 1.9.20, in *GW*, V, 34-35 (p.35).

27. From his autobiography it is clear that, at last, Toller had come to see the oppressed masses as they were and not as he wished them to be:

> Die vertraute Nähe so vieler Menschen bereichert mein Wissen, ich erfahre mehr vom Arbeiter als tausend Bücher und Statistiken mir erzählen können. Ich lese die Briefe der Frauen und Kinder, die Antworten der Männer, ich beobachte ihre Nöte und ihre Freuden, ihre Schwächen und ihre Tugenden, wie herrliche Kräfte sind hier verschüttet [...] Das Klischeebild, das ich mir vom Proletarier gebildet hatte, zerfällt, ich beginne zu sehen, wie er ist, jenseits der politischen Demagogie.
> Der bewußte aktive Proletarier des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, den Maschine und Großstadt geschaffen, ist weder ein moralischer Heiliger noch ein Gott, er ist der historische Träger einer Idee, des Sozialismus, seine Art ist zeit- und klassengebunden, wenn der Sozialismus sich erfüllt und die Klassen aufhebt, wird auch der Proletarier untergehen.

EJID, p. 160.

28. See Gustav Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*.

29. See Chapter 2, note no. 54.

30. *Die Maschinenstürmer. Ein Drama aus der Zeit der Ludditenbewegung in England in fünf Akten und einem Vorspiel*, in *GW*, II, 113-90. First published by E. P. Tal, Leipzig, Vienna and Zurich, in 1922. The premiere of Toller's new play, on 30 June 1922 in the Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin in a production by Karlheinz Martin, took place in a highly charged atmosphere, following, as it did, the murder only a few days earlier by right-wing extremists of Germany's Foreign Minister, Walter Rathenau, a man who symbolised for these groups everything they hated about the Weimar Republic. In Toller's own words the stage became 'Tribüne der Zeit' when at the end of the play, after Jimmy Cobbett is slain by his own side, 5000 members of the audience rose to protest against Rathenau's murder. See *EJID*, p. 161.

31. For a good account of the rise of Luddism see Malcolm I. Thomis, *The Luddites. Machine-Breaking in Regency England* (Newton Abbot Devon: David and Charles, 1970).

32. Apart from Marx's *Kapital* and Engels's *Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, Toller seems to have relied heavily for his historical background on the works of Max Beer, in particular his *Allgemeine Geschichte des Sozialismus und der sozialen Kämpfe*, 5 vols. (Berlin: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 1919) and *Geschichte des Sozialismus in England* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1919). In a letter from prison to 'Tessa' Toller wrote:

> Las die "Geschichte der sozialen Kämpfe" von Beer. Wiederkehr der gleichen Kämpfe, der gleichen Ideen, des gleichen Widerstreits zwischen Realität und Idee, des gleichen Heroismus, der gleichen Sackgassen, der gleichen Verwechslungen zwischen Nöten der Massen und Nöten der Intellektuellen — von Revolution zu Reaktion, von Reaktion zu Revolution, der gleiche Kreislauf.
> Wozu? Wohin? Ich habe ein tiefes, tiefes Heimweh. Und das Heim heißt: Nichts.

GW, V, 98-99. The depression and sense of futility which his reading invoked in him initially seems to have lifted somewhat after he carried on with his studies. His letter on this to Max Beer is worth quoting extensively:

> Ihre fünf Bände der allgemeinen Geschichte sozialer Kämpfe hab ich mit fanatischem Interesse gelesen. Ich muß Ihnen von meinem ersten Eindruck berichten, als ich vier Bände beendet hatte. Ich geriet in einen Zustand eigentümlicher Depression. Was hatte ich gelesen? Eine Geschichte sozialer Kämpfe? Eine Geschichte niedergeschlagener Massenaufstände! Eine Geschichte unendlichen Leidens jahrtausendwährender Bedrückung und Ausbeutung, eine Geschichte der Empörung gegen unerträgliche Not und der Niederlagen. Keine Revolution, in der die Revolutionäre ihre Ziele verwirklichen konnten. Und die eine, die gesiegt hat, die Revolution des Christentums, siegt, weil sie ihre eigenen Ideen verriet und aus einer staatsfeindlichen, kommunistischen, zu einer staatserhaltenden Macht wurde. Und dieser Eindruck ließ mich wochenlang nicht los.
> Erst allmählich wuchs mir wieder Kraft einzusehen, warum die moderne soziale Bewegung ein anderes Schicksal haben muß.—
> Ihr Werk unterscheidet sich bedeutsam von anderen, die entweder das Ökonomische oder das Politische oder das Geistige herausarbeiten, die aber, wenn sie das Eine behandeln, das Andere kaum beachten. Mit welcher Eindringlichkeit, mit welcher bitteren Satire haben Sie etwa bei der Behandlung der Taboriten die Parallele zu dem Kampf der deutschen Revolutionäre gezeigt. Immer wurde der aktive Flügel isoliert und niedergeworfen von jenen, die ihre revolutionären Talente am Sonntag in Festartikeln manifestieren, die sich aber am Alltag verbünden mit der Klasse, die sie zu bekämpfen vorgeben. Immer wurden die Reformen, die die Sonntags-Revolutionäre zu erhalten und auszubeuten erstrebt sind, mit einem Federzug von der Klasse gestrichen, die nur mit Hilfe der Sonntags-Revolutionäre in den Sattel gehoben wurde.

GW, V, 157-59 (p. 158).

33. Letter to Gustav Mayer, 7.2.1921, in *GW*, V, 60-61. Toller made extensive use of his historical sources in the play, with some of the speeches by Ure and Cobbett, for

instance, being taken almost word for word from Engels's *Lage der arbeitenden Klasse*. It is in the 'Vorspiel', however, where the use Toller made of his material is most prominent. This is set in the British House of Lords and shows Lord Byron attack Lord Castlereagh over the government's brutal treatment of the weavers. Byron and Castlereagh never actually clashed in parliament over this issue, but the inspiration for Byron's words in the play was a speech he gave in the course of a debate on the Second Reading of the Frame-Work Bill on 27 February 1812. See the 'Appendix' in, Ernst Toller, *The Machine Wreckers*, trans by Ashley Dukes (London: Hern, 1995), pp. 78-82. First published in Great Britain in London by Benn Brothers in 1923. For Toller's connections with both the British labour movement and theatre during his time in prison see Richard Dove 'Ernst Toller, Wilfred Wellock and Ashley Dukes: Some Historical Connections', *German Life and Letters*, 38 (1981/1982), 58-63, and N. A. Furness, 'Toller: *Die Maschinenstürmer* - The English Dimension', *German Life and Letters*, 33 (1979/1980), 147-57.

34. Letter to 'Elsbeth B', in, *GW*, V, 160.

35. *GW*, V, 60-61 (p. 60).

36. See *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, p. 158.

37. In another letter from prison to Gustav Meyer, Toller characterised Cobbett and Wible as follows:

> Führertypen sind zwei andere Gestalten: ein Chartist, der unverstanden von den Arbeitern erschlagen wird; ein anderer, Demagoge, Phraseur, Handelnder aus Ressentiment, subalterner Rebell um der Rebellion willen.

Quoted in Carel ter Haar, *Ernst Toller. Appell oder Resignation* (Munich: tuduv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1977), p. 216.

38. It is interesting to note that Toller seems to have been obsessed with the Wible-type of pseudo-revolutionary, the type who preached violence for the sake of violence, and detected their malign influence almost everywhere he went, even in prison. In a letter to 'Tessa' he wrote that such people were among the 'widerwärtigsten Erscheinungen' of any revolution, had not the least in common with revolutionary ideas and became involved simple out of 'Abenteuerlust, aus unklarer, nebuloser Stimmung, aus Freude an Bewegung, aus Sucht sich zu berauschen, aus Haltlosigkeit und aus vielen Motiven, deren "Schmutzigkeit" ich hier nicht darstellen möchte':

> In den Gefängnissen werden diese Leute gefährlich. Im Kreise der Genossen ist ihnen nichts "radikal" genug, und es ist schwer, gegen sie anzukämpfen, da naive, vertrauensselige Genossen ihnen sofort beispringen und sie unterstützen. Sie möchten am liebsten, daß an jedem Tag eine "Tat" geschähe, sie verdächtigen den Mäßigenden des Verrats. Der Verwaltung gegenüber nehmen sie eine andere Stellung ein: unterwürfig, kriecherisch versichern sie, daß nur ein unglückseliger, unbegreiflicher Zufall sie in eine Sippe verschlug. Sie sind bereit, über alle Vorkommnisse unter den Festungsgenossen Auskunft zu erteilen. Ja, wenn irgendeine, nach den Vorschriften nicht ganz erlaubte Handlung geschiet, wird sie von diesen Burschen sofort der Verwaltung, die nach

> meiner Meinung vor ihnen keine Hochachtung empfinden kann, verzerrt und vergröbert hintergebracht
> Draußen aber, nach der Entlassung? Mit wehenden Fahnen schwenken sie ins Lager der dunkelsten Reaktion. Mit entsprechender Pose, für die sich irgendein Blättchen bereitwillig zur Verfügung stellt.

GW, V, 53-55 (pp. 54-55). There is no doubt, of course, that such elements did play a part in the revolution, but they must have comprised only a very small, insignificant percentage of the total involved. For the purposes of *Die Maschinenstürmer*, however, such a type not only has to be involved in the workers' struggle but has to lead it. Yet Toller had no historical evidence for the existence of a John Wible-type, nor, for that matter, could he point to a Communist leader who would have fitted the above description.

39. Letter to 'Tessa' in *GW*, V, 63-64 (p. 64). The events Toller refers to here culminated in the so-called *März Aktion* of 1921, during which time Saxony and Thüringen stood on the verge of civil-war. Max Hölz, one of the Communist leaders in the Vogtland, set up a Red Army there and proclaimed a *Räterepublik*. Sentenced to life imprisonment for his part in the *März Aktion*, being accused of the murder of a certain Heß, a local landowner, Hölz subsequently became friends with Toller after the latter wrote to him in prison and took up a campaign for his release, claiming his case had been a miscarriage of justice. See Toller's articles 'Max Hölz', *Die Weltbühne*, 23, no. 5 (1 February 1927), 172-75, reprinted in *GW*, I, 86-90; and 'Die Erschießung des Gutsbesitzers Heß', in *Die Weltbühne*, 23 no. 18 (3 May 1927) 696-97. For one of Hölz's letters to Toller see Spalek and Frühwald, *Der Fall Toller*, pp. 172-77.

40. *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, p. 161. In a letter from prison to 'Tessa' in which he writes of what seems to be his studies preparatory to writing *Die Maschinenstürmer*, Toller also described how his political views were beginning to mature:

> Seit Monaten arbeite ich wieder intensiv an "Realem", beschäftige mich mit nationalökonomischen, politischen, soziologischen Werken. Weil ich immer deutlicher erkenne, daß Politik mehr verlangt als "Gesinnung", seelische Grundstimmung, "Ethos", und gründliche sachliche Kenntnisse notwendig sind, um die Gesetze des politischen Handelns beherrschen zu können. Allerdings fallen, soweit es um nacktes Geschehen handelt, manche Illusionen, "Wirklichkeiten" und "Ideologien" werden erkennbar — vielleicht werde ich bei aller Treue noch einmal ein "kühler Realpolitiker"

GW, V, 31.

41. For an interesting discussion of Toller's use of historical sources see N. A. Furness 'Toller and the Luddites: Fact and Symbol in *Die Maschinenstürmer*', *Modern Language Review*, 73 (1978), 847-58.

42. On the origins of the name Ned Ludd, see Thomis, *The Luddites*, pp. 11-12.

43. Toller wrote in a letter from prison to Gustav Meyer:

> Ihre Auskünfte über die Persönlichkeit Ned Luds haben mich sehr

> befriedigt. Ned Lud ist auch in meinem Drama nicht "Führer". Er trägt das Antlitz eines geraden, mutigen Arbeiters, der keinerlei "Führerqualitäten" besitzt, keine eigenen politischen und wirtschaftlichen Erkenntnisse erringt, sich treiben läßt, aber da, wo er glaubt richtig zu handeln, immer als erster handelt. (Als erster auch auf die Maschine einschlägt.)

In ter Haar, *Appell oder Resignation*, p. 216.

44. The prominent British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, maintains it was wrong to categorise the Luddites as reactionary and backward-looking, arguing that they were not opposed to the machine *per se*, but used machine-wrecking, in the main, as a way of bringing pressure to bear on employers during industrial conflicts. In his view, therefore, there was nothing irrational about it, it being simply a technique of primitive trades unionism, what he calls 'collective bargaining by riot'. Moreover, it was part of a long tradition of industrial conflict, for before the advent of machinery violence had been directed against raw materials, finished goods, and even the private property of the owners themselves. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 5-17.

45. It is usual to take the starting-point of Chartism as being the foundation in 1836 of the London Working Men's Association (LWMA), led initially by William Lovett and Francis Place. After a meeting of the LWMA with some Radical M.P.s in 1937, the charter for parliamentary reform from which the latter movement took its name was drawn up. Support for the Charter, which grew quickly, was initially overwhelmingly working class, among the most consistent and reliable members being craftsmen such as northern hand-loom weavers and Black Country nail-makers who were being forced out of business by new machinery. See G. D. H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London: Cassell, 1975) and David Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (London: Allen Lane, 1965).

46. See Chapter 5.

47. Toller's frustration at this is evident still in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, written some 13 years after the November Revolution. See in particular chapter 16.

48. The central organ of the SPD, *Vorwärts*, could not contain its glee at the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht and a few days after the event, on January 13 1919, published a poem mocking the two dead leaders as well as the hundreds of ordinary workers who had lost their lives to Noske's *Freikorps*.

49. Compare, for instance, the following passage from Weber's speech in which he warns the *Gesinnungsethiker* of the nature of the human forces on which his new society would rest should it ever be achieved:

> Von den Funktionieren dieses seines Apparates ist der Führer in seinem Erfolg völlig abhängig. Daher auch von dessen, — nicht von seinen eigenen — Motiven. Davon also, daß der Gefolgschaft, der roten Garde, den Spitzeln, den Agitatoren, deren er bedarf, jene Prämien *dauernd* gewährt werden können. Was er unter solchen Bedingungen seines Wirkens tatsächlich erreicht, steht daher nicht in seiner Hand, sondern ist ihm vorgeschrieben durch jene ethisch überwiegend gemeinen Motive des

> Handelns seiner Gefolgschaft, die nur im Zaum gehalten werden, solange ehrlicher Glaube an seine Person und seine Sache wenigstens einen Teil der Genossenschaft — wohl nie auf Erden auch nur die Mehrzahl — beseelt.

Anyone who wanted to be regarded as a 'Verantwortungsethiker' in politics, Weber went on, should not count on the 'Güte und Vollkommenheit' of those he was appealing to, but had to take account of the 'durchschnittlichen Defekten der Menschen'. Max Weber, 'Politik als Beruf', in *Gesammelte politische Schriften*, pp. 438-47 and 449.

50. *Der deutsche Hinkemann. Eine Tragödie in drei Akten*, in *GW*, II, 191-247. First published in Potsdam by Gustav Kiepenheuer in 1922. Subsequent references are to the version in *GW* and are given after quotations in the text. A few scenes bearing the title *Die Hinkemanns. Eine proletarische Tragödie in 3 Aufzügen*, were printed in the *Volksbühne. Zeitschrift für soziale Kunstpflege*, II, no. 3 (January/February 1922). It is possible to date Toller's completion of the first draft by reference to a letter he sent from prison to the publisher Kurt Wolff saying he has posted the manuscript which, apart from a few minor alterations, he intended to leave unchanged. See Kurt Wolff, *Briefwechsel eines Verlegers 1911-1963* (Frankfurt am Main: Scheffler, 1966), pp. 328-29.

51. See Wolfgang Frühwald and John Spalek, eds., *Der Fall Toller*, p. 17.

52. Letter to Stefan Zweig, 13.6.1923, in *GW*, V, 152-53 (p. 152).

53. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

55. *GW*, I, 139-40.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 140. In his perceptive discussion of *Hinkemann*, Thomas Bütow has drawn attention to the discrepancy between Toller's interpretation of the play in this letter to Zweig and the reality of the text itself:

> In diesem Brief fällt Toller weit hinter die Position zurück, die er im *Hinkemann* eingenommen hatte. Der Brief ist wieder ein Beispiel dafür, daß Tollers Eigeninterpretationen seiner Dramen nicht zulänglich erklären, weil der Interpret Toller von ganz anderen Gesichtspunkten ausgeht als der Dichter. [...]
> In seinem Brief an Stefan Zweig relativiert Toller das Weltbild des *Hinkemann*, wenn er es als Ausdruck einer "Zeit" darstellt, denn eine Zeit geht vorüber. Die gleiche Relativierung liegt dem Wort von der "Grenze" zugrunde. Jenseits dieser Grenze, so Toller, beginne die "Natur", die durch menschliches Handeln nicht zu verändern sei. Diesseits dieser Grenze aber haben demnach "menschliches Einzelwollen" und "gesellschaftliches Wollen" durchaus ihren Platz. Toller macht damit eben jene Unterscheidung von metaphysich begründetem Leiden und gesellschaftlich verschuldetem Elend, deren Fehlen den grenzenlosen Pessimismus des *Hinkemann*-Weltbildes erst ermöglicht. Den eigenartigen

> Begriff von "Natur" den Toller hier zugrundelegt, findet man auch im Drama selbst, wo Hinkemann am Schluß sagt: "Die lebendige Natur vom Menschen ist stärker als sein Verstand." Nur steht im Brief an Stefan Zweig der Natur eine Gesellschaft gegenüber, in der gesellschaftliches Handlen notwendig ist. Im Weltbild Hinkemanns ist die Natur dagegen ein Prinzip, das alles beherrscht, sie ist "stärker" als der "Verstand".

Thomas Bütow, *Der Konflikt zwischen Revolution und Pazifismus im Werk Ernst Tollers* (Hamburg: Lüdke, 1975), pp. 270-71.

58. On the evidence of the text alone, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion but that Toller was in a state of pessimism when he wrote *Hinkemann*. His subsequent comments on the play, therefore, do indeed seem like an attempt to rewrite the past. But this verdict too is difficult to reconcile with the views Toller expressed on the question of his faith in socialism in a letter from prison to Kurt Wolff in January 1921, at the very time, that is, in which he was working on *Hinkemann*:

> Ich war, wozu es leugnen, in qualvolen Wochen erfüllt von tiefstem Skeptizisimus. Wo früher Glaube war, wuchs höhnischer, selbstzerfasernder Zweifel. — Ich glaube auch diese Periode heute überwunden zu haben.
> Freudige Bejahung des Schicksalnotwendigen — und der Sozialismus ist für mich eine soziale Schicksalsnotwendigkeit. Was kommt es darauf an, ob er Paradies bedeutet oder nicht! Nur Schwächlinge brauchen Glauben an ein Paradies auf Erden.

The optimism expressed here contrasts sharply with the pessimism of *Hinkemann*. Perhaps Toller had not entirely overcome his doubts about socialism, or perhaps he felt the ideal itself was so strong that it could stand up to the severe test to which it is subjected in this play. See Kurt Wolff, *Briefe eines Verlegers*, pp. 325-26 (p. 326).

59. Perhaps under the influence of Marxist critics, who found the play too pessimistic, Toller omitted from the second edition the reference to Hinkemann making a noose for himself in the final scene. (The revised second version, also published by Kiepenheuer in 1924, was reprinted in Stuttgart by Reclam in 1971). Ultimately, however, this change does not affect the play's overall tone, which remains pessimistic. For a detailed discussion of this and other changes in the various versions see Cecil Davies, *A Revaluation*, pp. 265-82.

60. Martin Reso, 'Der gesellschaftlich-ethische Protest im dichterischen Werk Ernst Tollers' (unpublished dissertation, Jena, 1957), p. 103.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-06.

63. Hans Marnette, 'Untersuchung zum Inhalt-Form-Problem in Ernst Tollers Dramen' (unpublished dissertation, Potsdam, 1963), p. 252. However, even Marnette is not completely disparaging of Toller's efforts and writes:

> Toller gestaltete mit seinem Eugen Hinkemann zum ersten Mal einen

Arbeiter aus seiner unmittelbaren Gegenwart als zentrale Figur. Diese Heldenwahl unseres Autors stellte für ihn zweifellos einen Fortschritt dar. Die Verwundung Hinkemanns nutzte Toller, wenn auch nur unzureichend, um den Krieg anzuklagen und in der Gestalt des Budenbesitzers die unmenschliche Profitgier, die selbst die Verrohung der Massen noch als Geschäft aufzieht, scharf zu kritisieren. Darin offenbaren sich erneut Tollers Sympathien für die Unterdrückten sowie seine Frontstellung gegen den Militarismus und die Anarchie des kapitalistischen Systems. Diese positiven Seiten des Werkes waren es, die die Faschisten veranlaßten, Theaterkrawalle gegen seine Aufführung zu inszenieren, die in Dresden sogar zur Absetzung des Stückes vom Spielplan führten.

Ibid., p. 278-79.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80. Marnette's view is shared by Richard Dove who writes:

> *Der deutsche Hinkemann* therefore fails to confirm the steps towards a materialist interpretation of history which was evident in *Die Maschinenstürmer*. The play not only satirises the application of dialectical materialism by dogmatic Marxists, but contains an implicit critique of dialectical materialism itself. Hinkemann's loss of will-power, his despair of the constructive power of reason, his submission to a capricious and arbitrary Fate, are a measure of the distance which divides the play's ideology from Marxism.

Richard Dove, Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism in the Work of Ernst Toller* (New York, Berne and Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 243. Thomas Bütow takes much the same line writing:

> *Hinkemann* scheint zunächst mit den früheren Dramen keine Berührungspunkte zu haben. Es enthält keine revolutionäre Handlung, die marxistischen Ansätze der *Maschinenstürmer* werden, bis auf unbedeutende Spuren, nicht fortgeführt, und auch in formaler Hinsicht stellt *Hinkemann* etwas durchaus eigenes dar. Bei genauerem Hinsehen stellt man jedoch fest, daß hier die Skepsis gegenüber der 'anderen' Realität, die in *Masse-Mensch* schon eingesetzt hatte, konsequent fortgeführt und zu einem allesbeherrschenden Pessimismus wird, der auch die formalen Besonderheiten des Dramas — Realismus und Groteske erklärt.

Thomas Bütow, *Der Konflikt zwischen Pazifismus und Realismus*, pp. 264-65.

65. 'Arbeiten', in *GW*, I, pp. 135-49 (p. 140).

66. Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism*, pp. 196 and 243.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 243. As Dove points out, Toller did subsequently come to the view that *Hinkemann* was a play which did lend itself to a pessimistic interpretation, writing a revealing letter to Ernst Niekisch on his own mixed views on this:

> Wie weit ich im *Hinkemann* gekommen war, weiß ich nur zu gut. Darum hat mich Dein Brief über die Kriegs-Krüppel-Tragödie befremdet. Es überraschte mich, daß Du gleich den Zeitungskritikern, Rankenwerk sahst und nicht den Kern. Die großstädtischen Kritiker haben den Sinn für komplizierte Begriffsproblematik, ihnen fehlt aber der Sinn für einfache, tiefe Lebensproblematik. Die dünkt sie banal.
> Warst Du es nicht, zu dem ich einmal sagte: *Hinkemann* ist ein Werk, das erst verstanden wird nach dem Sieg des Sozialismus? Der Politiker in mir spricht: Du tust nicht Zweckvolles, daß Du *Hinkemann* zur Aufführung freigibst.
> Aber: wie dem religiösen Gefühl das Heil der Seele wichtiger dünkt als das Glück der Welt, macht das Künstlerische nicht Halt vor den Illusionen, die ihn zuweilen Kraft und Impuls geben. Aus tiefer Notwendigkeit treibt es ihn, die Illusionen des Menschen zu zerstören. Doch muß das Erlebnis vorangehen, das Erlebnis der Erkenntnis.
> Politiker und Künstler, Politiker und Religiöser, Politiker und Ethiker — ich bin mir endlich klar geworden, was sie im Wesen scheidet. Kein Beschönigen, kein Verkleistern hilft ...

Letter dated 28.2.1924, in *GW*, V, 180-81.

69. A performance at the *Staatstheater* in Dresden on 17 January 1924, for instance, was seriously disrupted by protests organised by nationalist and *völkische* groups, while the premiere of the play in Vienna required a heavy police presence to prevent violence. See Frühwald and Spalek eds., *Der Fall Toller*, p. 17. For Toller's account of the chaotic scenes in Dresden during which a man died of a heart-attack, see *EJID*, p. 161.

70. Malcolm Pittock, *Ernst Toller* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 101. Toller denied that his fictional creation was intended as a simple allegory of Germany post-war and post-revolution, and in a letter to the director of the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin where the play was being performed, wrote:

> Sehr verehrter Herr Doktor,
> Der Titel *Der deutsche Hinkemann* (noch dazu durch falsches Schreiben [i.e. *Der Deutsche Hinkemann* J.F.] zur Allegorie gestempelt) hat solche Verwirrungen angerichtet, daß ich Sie, in der Erkenntnis, daß der Titel wirklich irreführt, bitten muß, das Werk unter dem Titel *Hinkemann* aufzuführen.
> Da lese ich in einer Besprechung, der *Deutsche Hinkemann* solle das Drama der "kriegsbeschädigten deutschen Seele" sein. Sei es aber leider nicht.
> Es wäre gut, wenn im Programmheft ausdrücklich auf den Grund der Änderung hingewiesen würde.

Undated letter in *GW*, V, 152. Pittock, however, writes that:

> [...] despite Toller's denials, there are passages in the text that would appear, at first sight, to support this interpretation [that which sees him as a symbol of Germany J.F.]. Thus the *Budenbesitzer* announces Hinkemann

> as "*The* German bear man: *the* German knockout: German power: *the* darling of fashionable women".

Pittock, *Ernst Toller*, p. 101.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

72. *GW*, I, 143.

73. Toller's exasperation with the sectarianism and lack of insight which bedeviled the workers' movement is clear from a letter to 'Tessa':

> Der Kampf untereinander hat nachgelassen, aus Müdigkeit, aus Resignation, aus Behäbigkeit. Ich wage nicht zu sagen, aus Vernunft. Sekteriertum, dünkelhafte Intoleranz sind nach wie vor stark.

Letter dated 30.1.1922, in *GW*, V, p. 90-91 (p. 90).

74. *GW*, I, 139.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

76. The following extracts from two letters from prison, written at the same time as he was revising *Hinkemann*, reveal just how quickly his mood turned from one of utter despair to optimism and a willingness to fight even in the face of immense difficulties. To the publisher, E. P. Tal he wrote:

> Ich empfinde mein Schicksal nicht als persönliches Mißgeschick, es ist Ausdruck politischer Machtverhältnisse. Ich habe für eine Idee gekämpft, in der Überzeugung, daß diese Idee mir jedes Opfer, ausgenommen das Opfer meines Gewissens und meines Intellekts verlangen kann. Ich bin heute, nach fast dreijähriger Haft, stark genug, um ein mir auferlegtes Schicksal aus eigenem freien Mut zu wollen. Und so besitze ich jene Freiheit, die kein Paragraph, keine Mauern und Gitter mir nehmen.

Letter dated 14.2.1922, in *GW*, V, 96-97 (p. 97). In a similar vein he wrote to Henri Barbusse:

> Heute ist die Revolution in Deutschland niedergeschlagen. Barbarei, moralische und geistige Verkommenheit, Lüge, Heuchelei und Schiebertum feiern Triumphe.
> Aber der Sozialismus ist nicht besiegt. Mann kann die Revolutionäre in Gefängnisse sperren, ist damit die Idee tot, für die sie kämpfen?

Undated letter of spring 1922, *ibid.*, p. 102.

CHAPTER 5

TOLLER AND THE RISE OF FASCISM

Der entfesselte Wotan

In commercial terms, *Der entfesselte Wotan*, Toller's final prison play, was the least successful of any of his works up to that point.[1] Written in the early part of 1923, it received its premiere not in Germany but in Russia, in a production directed by C.P. Chochlov in Moscow in 1924, being first performed on a German stage only in February 1926.[2] Wolfgang Rothe is probably right in his suggestion that the main reason the German theatre avoided *Der entfesselte Wotan* for so long was, or might have been, that it struck such a raw nerve with the typical theatre-goer.[3] For Toller's play satirises German nationalist and *völkisch* ideology, places a mirror, an only slightly distorting mirror, before the middle classes — or certain sections of them at least — and forces them to confront what was a quite disturbing self-image. These people, Toller was convinced, posed a huge threat to the democratic republic:

> Auf wen haue ich mit Keulen los? Auf jene Typen, die nach meiner tiefsten Überzeugung uns in den jammervollsten Dreck geführt haben und die das Volk, befreit es sich nicht von seinem Einfluß, weiter und weiter hineinstoßen. Das Deutsche an Goethe, an Hölderlin, an Büchner (um nur ein paar aus der Schar der großen zu nennen) was hat es gemeinsam mit dem Teutschen an Ruge etwa, an Theodor Fritsch, an Adolf Hitler.[4]

With their old certainties and self-confidence gone, their existence undermined by social and economic upheaval, the middle classes had begun to cast around in search for someone who could restore their sense of identity and worth, some leader, some messiah who knew how to put an end to the present chaos and uncertainty, a hangover, mainly, of the revolutionary period, and restore the social order they had once known.[5] In a letter from prison to 'B', written just a few months after he had completed *Der entfesselte Wotan*, Toller explained:

> Reaktion und Kleinbürgertum rufen heute mit der gleichen Inbrunst nach der Diktatur und meinen: einen Diktator mit unbeschränkter Machtfülle.

> Dieser Ruf ist Ausdruck einer seelischen Stimmung, die erschreckt, weil sie auch die Massen ergreift. (Man wartet in passiver Lethargie auf die Parole — ohne Parole wird weder gedacht noch gehandelt.) Der Wille zum Diktator ist der Wille zur Selbstentmannung, zur Knechtschaft, oder, wie man es heute gerne nennt, der Wille zur Gefolgschaft.[6]

In real life it was Hitler who eventually came to play the role of messiah; in *Der entfesselte Wotan* it was the down-at-heel barber, Wilhelm Dietrich Wotan.[7]

It is, of course, the fact that in Wotan Toller created a character who, in many ways, foreshadowed Hitler, which lends the play a good deal of its significance — a significance above and beyond that which it would merit on purely artistic grounds. Toller, however, was not, and did not pretend to be a clairvoyant and *Der entfesselte Wotan* is not a prophecy of the rise of National Socialism but a contemporary satire, a satire on German conditions circa 1923.[8] What seems like prophecy — Wotan's promise at the end of the play, for instance, that, when in jail, he shall write a book which will be a 'letzte Mahnung an Europa', the 'Rettung Europas vorm Untergang' — is simple parody, a caricature of already existing tendencies and currents of thought. Surprisingly, as Toller related some time later in an article in *Die Szene*, the source of inspiration for his parody — or for the play's main character at least — was to be found within the walls of Niederschönenfeld itself in the form of one of his fellow inmates a man also imprisoned for his part in the *Räterepublik*.[9] A former barber and aircraft-builder, like Wotan, he too came up with the bizarre idea of founding an 'Auswanderer-Gesellschaft', even going so far as to draw up statutes and programmes and, much to Toller's amusement, the rather bathetic motto "In Freud und Leid sind wir vereint".[10] Unfortunately, after making contact with some like-minded people in Switzerland — again something Toller used in the play — the 'Genossenschaftsdirektor' found his plans thwarted by the emigration office which informed him robustly of the possible legal consequences of his actions. In his paranoia, he railed for a time against the Bavarian

government for revealing his scheme — 'sie gönnt es mir nicht'[11] — but soon moved on to what Toller indicates were other equally grandiose ideas. What political or social significance Toller saw in this seemingly rather ridiculous figure he explained in the aforementioned article:

> Man wird in der Öffentlichkeit wahrscheinlich die ironische Behandlung der Figuren sehen (nicht die Selbstironie in der Sprache), Beiwerk stärker als Gehalt, Allegorien statt Gestalten. Aber die Gestalt des Wotan, obwohl in der teutschen Atmosphäre sich blähend, ist eine universale, zum mindesten eine europäisch-amerikanische. Das ist in der neuen Zeit aus Don Quichotte geworden: nicht mehr kräftig genug, um seinen Traum gläubig zu leben, und wiederum kein robuster Schieber, der kontinuierlich das, was er tut, durchschaut. Mischung von Idealist und Jämmerling. Eine Figur, die uns heiter macht. Doch es gibt zwei Arten von Heiterkeit: die aus Unwissen und die trotz Wissen. Bei der zweiten Art ist immer ein Stück Wahnsinn dabei.[12]

It is to Toller's credit and a good indication of his intuition, as well as of the growing maturity and sobriety of his political understanding, especially his understanding of the nature of fascism, that he is able not only to latch onto the tendencies embodied in the social type which inspired Wotan, but is able to point to the dangers such tendencies would pose to German democracy, indeed to the rest of Europe if left to develop unchecked. In early 1924, almost a full decade before Hitler's threat was revealed for all to see, Toller wrote from prison on the outcome of the Beer Hall Putsch trial:

> Will man Hitler durch Milde gewinnen? Er wird die Milde (mit Recht) als Schwäche deuten. Die Republik, die ihren gefährlichsten Gegner "nicht ernst" nimmt, beweist damit, daß sie sich selbst nicht ernst nimmt.[13]

It is important to emphasis Toller's prescience here, for it helps put into perspective the belief, cultivated in the main by his Communist opponents, that he was simply an Expressionist dreamer, an impractical idealist with little or no real understanding of politics. As this chapter demonstrates, Toller had a far better grasp of political reality

than many on the left — far better, at any rate, than the leading Communist theoreticians — as well as clear, precise and concrete ideas as to how fascism could be defeated, ideas which, had they found a wider echo, might have averted the catastrophe of January 1933. For all that, there is probably some degree of truth in the complaint levelled by some critics that *Der entfesselte Wotan* fails to convey adequately just *how* serious a threat the extreme right posed to the Weimar Republic, that Toller underplayed the dangers of reaction by depicting Wotan and his *völkisch* disciples as laughable figures rather than showing what powerful social forces they represented.[14] Yet such a line of criticism — one also directed against the depiction of Hitler in Brecht's *Arturo Ui* — if pushed to its logical conclusion would rule out the use of satire and comedy entirely. Naturally, it is impossible to quantify the effect, if any, drama or any other art form has on peoples' political outlook. Yet Toller himself believed in its potency and that he was performing a valuable service with this play by subjecting the enemy to ridicule.[15] In any case, to criticise him on these grounds is not only to miss the point somewhat but to distract attention from the more important and interesting fact that *Der entfesselte Wotan* captures many of the elements which constituted the essence of the *nationalist-völkisch* mentality.[16]

Wotan himself, named after the God of the old *Germanen*, has an abundance of all the prejudices which went to make up the beggar's bowl of *völkisch* ideology. Embittered by the fact that his business is going badly and by his general loss of social standing in the new republic, he lashes out at all those who he feels have slighted and misused him: at the patent office, for instance, which has expropriated his new inventions; the newspaper editors who have stolen his poems; the public officials who have appropriated his ideas for new monuments; the scientists who set the police on him after he tried to patent a 'Trank gegen den Tod'; (p. 260) most of all, he lashes out at

the Jews, the people at the root of all his troubles, those people who 'mit teuflischer Hinterlist ausbeuteten, was meinem Schöpferschoß göttlich sich entrang!':

> Die Juden stecken dahinter! Die dreihundert Weisen von Zion! Ich hätte europäische Mission, ich hätte eine Weltmission erfüllt — sie werden das Judenjoch pfeilern! Sie werden ihre krummen Nasen mit Gold umpanzern! Sie werden das blauäugige Heldenweib in ihr schmutziges Bett zerren! (p. 260)

It is significant, however, that while anti-semitism forms an essential part of Wotan's philosophical outlook, indeed, is one of the major points of its attraction, it is not *so* essential that it cannot be dropped whenever expediency demands. Wotan is quite prepared, for instance, to accept Karauschen, a Jewish banker, as a member of the organisation he has set up to colonise Brazil, for as Schleim, his second-in-command, reminds him, money is vital to the success of their grandiose scheme and all means of obtaining it, even dealings with Jews, are allowed. Karauschen may be a 'Dreckjude', but he is also a ready source of finance, 'eine Goldgrube'. (p. 279) 'Gefühl', therefore, as Schleim puts it, 'muß schweigen, wo Zukunft uns verpflichtet'. (p. 279) The reverse of this, of course, is that Karauschen himself must be prepared to overlook the anti-semitism which lies at the heart of Wotan's 'Genossenschaft'. To him, the dream which Wotan holds out, the dream of building a new civilisation, a new Europe in Brazil, is so enticing that he ignores that which he should be afraid of and assures Wotan of his support, telling him:

> Der Tag hat für mich zwei Seiten: Eine Debetseite, eine Kreditseite. Auf der Debetseite Ziffern, auf der Kreditseite Ziffern. Aber der Mensch lebt nicht allein von Ziffern. Der Mensch braucht einen Traum. Meiner heißt: Brasilien [...] Sie haben Ihren Traum, ich habe meine Ziffern. Verfügen Sie über meine Ziffern, ich erquick mich an Ihrem Traum. (p. 278)

While bearing in mind what was said above on this point, it is worth while drawing

attention to another of the remarkably prophetic aspects of this play. Toller's depiction of the relationship between Wotan and Karauschen, an anti-semite and a reactionary Jewish banker, might seem rather far-fetched, yet it foreshadowed the relationship which developed between certain groups of Jewish businessmen and the National Socialists in the period leading up to the dissolution of the Weimar Republic.[17] Regarding Hitler as a bulwark against Bolshevism, they, like Karauschen, were prepared to overlook his anti-semitic views and, in some cases, to provide financial support for the Nazis during a time when they were experiencing difficulty in meeting their expenses.[18] Of course, the relationship between Wotan and Karauschen is not depicted as being based exclusively on hostility towards the organised labour movement, yet it is significant that, even at this early stage, Toller was quite clearly aware of how, under certain circumstances, there could be some common ground at least between what were normally mortal enemies.[19]

Toller, then, does not so much underestimate the threat posed by anti-semitism in *Der entfesselte Wotan* as show the way in which *völkisch* groups exploited this and other prejudices for their own ends. In the scene after his first public appearance in which Wotan receives potential supporters, Schleim, a Svengali figure, the man who pulls all the strings, explains what he, Wotan, should do to win the backing of the masses:

> Jetzt Privataudienzen! Beherrschen Sie die Lage! Jeder wird Ihnen sein Herz ausschütten wollen [...] Zur Gräfin Gallig sprechen Sie religiös! Zum Herrn Bankier Karauschen materiell! Zum General Stahlfaust markig! Zum Gefängnisaufseher, wie ein Mann aus dem Volke! Bevor schlichtes Volk kommt, ziehen Sie die geflickte Jacke hier an. Sie verstehen! Wo Sie keine Antwort wissen, schweigen Sie. Machen Gesten! Da rede ich. Das Wichtigste: Zuhören! Hören Sie gut zu, und jeder glaubt, er habe den ersten Menschen gefunden, der ihn verstand. (p. 276)

Schleim's cynicism as regards ideology, the unscrupulous manner in which he exploits every idea to further the cause, is hammered home by Toller in the next scene in which he instructs Wotan in the tone he should adopt in a telegram to some groups in

Switzerland interested in founding a sister organisation. Wotan's romantic view of the Swiss stands in sharp contrast to Schleim's:

> *WOTAN*: Auch meine Seele gehört der Schweiz! Tellgestalten! Knorrig! Abhold Luxus und welschen Tand! Apfelschützen! Drahten Sie unsere Statuten nach der Schweiz, sie muß anbeißen!
> *SCHLEIM*: Wenn Sie diktieren wollen. Nur, meine ich, nicht religiös. Religion in Ehren. Religion fürs Volk. Bei guter Valuta tritt Religion in Hintergrund. (p. 283)

What Toller wanted to expose here and throughout the play was the fraudulence of a belief at the heart of *völkisch* ideology, the quasi-mystical notion that the German people, *das Volk* was some sort of entity, a *Gemeinschaft* united by common bonds of blood, language, culture, history and the like.[20] Toller understood that this was a crude myth, one aimed, among other things, at drawing a veil over divisions of social class, at creating the illusion that somehow there existed a harmony of interests between oppressors and oppressed, a sense of nationhood and communal loyalty which transcended traditional divisions. Wotan's ideal 'Gesellschaft', the pathetic delirium of a new Europe among the Brazilian rainforests, was to be a *völkisch* society, one without social distinctions, one in which all were equal, its motto, Wotan proudly proclaims, being 'In Arbeit, Freud und Leid sind wir vereint'. (p. 284) The reality, however, will be somewhat different, as Schleim lets slip during an interview with an American newspaper reporter who, suspecting Communist influence, has come to find out if Wotan's 'Genossenschaft' represents a threat to American imperial interests:

> *SCHLEIM (zum Reporter)*: Amerika möge beruhigt sein. Amerika möge sich überzeugen. Jedem Gelüste der Genossenschafter nach Kommunismus pariert der Arbeitsvertrag. Sie verstehen. Das Geschäftsgeheimnis verbietet uns Erläuterungen. Aber Amerika können Sie berichten, achtstündige Arbeitszeit würden wir nicht dulden. Selbstverwaltung ... Demokratie ... dafür haben wir taube Ohren. Wer nicht mitmacht drüben in Brasilien, fliegt. Lassen Sie uns erst drüben sein, Mister Senator, mehr sag ich nicht. (pp. 291-92)

For all the messianic talk about creating a new type of society, that envisioned by Wotan and his followers looks very much the same as the old one, at least from the workers' point of view. Even worse, in fact, since it is more repressive and undemocratic. This is something recognised instinctively by the only working-class character in the play, the young worker who turns up in Wotan's barber shop in the first scene to buy some soap. Having just conceived of his plan to buy land from the Brazilian government, Wotan, full of his own importance, turns to the young worker and says:

> *WOTAN*: Seife! Seife! Was habe ich mit Seife zu schaffen! Ich habe eine Mission zu erfüllen!
> Europa geht unter, da will er Seife! Junger Mann, auf dem Leichenfeld Europas fordern Sie Seife!
> *JUNGER ARBEITER*: Leichenfeld?
> *WOTAN*: Europa!
> *JUNGER ARBEITER*: Was liegt an *Eurem* Europa! Jedes Leichenfeld wird Brachfeld. Zum Brachfeld kommt der Pflüger ... Na, will mir woanders Seife kaufen. (p. 262)

When Wotan, then, echoing Wilhelm the Second, on whom his character is, in part, based, proclaims to his disciples, 'Ich werde sie herrlichen Zeiten entgegenführen', (p. 292) it is quite clear who the main beneficiaries of the 'herrlichen Zeiten' will be. For Wotan's movement, — and this is, perhaps, one of the most important points which Toller wanted to communicate — like its real-life counterparts, was based mainly on the disaffected middle classes, on those who had been scorched by the revolution and who, as indicated above, desired that society should be restored to its rightful order. Wotan recognises this and states it explicitly at the start of the play. When his wife, Mariechen, asks him who will be attracted to his emigration society he replies:

> Alle! Alle! Alle sag ich dir. Jeder Bürgersmann will dem Untergang entrinnen. Jeder Bürgersmann der Sintflut! Jeder Bürgersmann erschrickt vor der nächsten Stunde! Jedem Bürgersmann ward das Leben zum Alp! Alle werden sie mitkommen, die vom Zeitensturm aus dem Nest

> geworfen, verstoßen und verjagt wurden. Dem Offizier stiehlt man sein Recht auf Krieg. In Brasilien kann er Krieg führen gegen Eingeborene nach Herzenslust! Dem Rentner sein Recht auf Golddividende. Wo bekommt er sie? In Brasilien. Dem Beamten stiehlt man Titel und Orden. Dem Adel Ministerposten. Ehrwürdigen Jungfrauen die Judenmission. Der Jugend, der Jugend: Soldatenspiel und Heldenverehrung und Räuberlust. Ich werde Europa retten in Brasilien! (p. 261)

The class nature of these *völkisch-nationalist* groups, then, is well delineated in *Der entfesselte Wotan*. In the final scene, after Wotan's scheme has been exposed as a swindle, Toller makes clear that the ruling elites too were aware of this, aware that, despite their radicalism and subversive aims, despite their public contempt for law and parliament, these groups were basically conservative in nature and, therefore, on their side. That is why, at the end, the policeman, the representative of the state, is so sympathetic towards Wotan even as he arrests him. He does everything he can to reassure him that he is not in any real trouble, explaining to Wotan, who is hiding in fear under the table, 'Aber Sie haben nichts vom Gesetz zu fürchten, Herr Wotan. Kommen Sie ruhig ans Licht'. (p. 300) To the crowd, desperate to get their hands on Wotan to rip him to pieces for having deceived them, the policemen explains:

> Ruhe! Vollkommene Ruhe! Ich bin die Justiz! Ich breche jeden Widerstand! Herr Wotan untersteht von nun an mir! Ich dulde keine Beleidigungen! Ich verbiete Mißhandlungen! Herr Wotan ist der Behörde als ein Bürger von staatserhaltender Gesinnung bekannt ... Herr Wotan, Ihr Betrieb wird kraft polizeilicher Verordnung für geschlossen erklärt. Strafrechtlich nicht verantwortlich, werden Sie zu Ihrer eigenen Sicherheit für einige Tage in Schutzhaft genommen. (p. 300)

It is difficult to believe, yet it is true, that this play was written before the Munich Beer Hall Putsch and before the notorious trial where, despite being found guilty of high treason, Hitler was sentenced to the minimum of only 5 years in prison, eventually serving a mere 9 months.[21] To repeat the point, what this demonstrates is not Toller's clairvoyance but the fact that he was well-attuned to political developments inside the

Weimar Republic, aware of the strength of reaction and how firmly and deeply entrenched it was in the foundations of the state itself.

As indicated above, a feature of German society which Toller brings out well in *Der entfesselte Wotan*, a feature which, again, would not develop fully until later, was the deep desire among sections of the German population for a strong leader, a saviour, some messianic figure. There are, of course, a number of reasons, psychological ones included, for the development of such a desire.[22] However, it seems clear that it was, at least in part, a response to the severe social and political instability which characterised the Weimar period, particularly of the early post-war years and those leading up to Hitler's *Machtergreifung*. In his audience with Wotan, General von Stahlfaust expresses clearly the feeling that what Germany needed, what the new Brazilian colony will need, is a dictator, someone who will brook no opposition:

> *GENERAL VON STAHLFAUST*: Meine Hochachtung! Ein Mann! Ein ganzer Mann! Wir brauchen Männer! Auch im Urwald brauchen wir Männer. Auch im Urwald brauchen wir Ruhe und Ordnung! [...] Früher standen Regimente stramm vor mir, heute verhöhnt mich jeder Bube [...] Verlange vom Mann meines Vertrauens eiserne Faust! Keinem darf er Rechenschaft schulden für Tun und Treiben! Keinem Komitee! Keinem Parlament! Keinem Paragraphen! Verräter an Laternenpfahl! Diktator! Neues Geschlecht in Urwäldern Brasiliens! Soldatische Zucht! Und Haß! Urwald — Diktator! (p. 277)

The same idea, though couched in less martial language, is expressed by another of Wotan's supporters, Gräfin Gallin, when she describes Wotan as her 'großer Bruder', the 'Menschheitsmenschen', the 'Heiland'. 'Gott selber bricht ein in Menschenwelt', she exclaims, 'Das große Ich strahlt auf am Firmament!', pleading with him 'O nehmen Sie mich auf in ihrem Bund!' (p. 276) As previous studies have pointed out, there is a clear element of self-parody in all this, a parody, that is, of the Expressionist 'O-Mensch' pathos of Toller's previous plays, of the idea that mankind could be led into a newer and

better world by some 'neuer Mensch' who would win the masses to his vision by the power of his personality and his rhetoric.[23] Unlike 'die Frau', however, or Jimmy Cobbett, Wotan puts forward a *Vision* based not on enlightenment, but on ignorance, one which proclaims equality and human solidarity — for the Germans at least — but which actually aims to enslave the masses, make them the willing subjects of a brutal dictator. Moreover, while Wotan professes in public a love for the masses, at the end of the play, after he has been found out and the masses are baying for his head, he describes them contemptuously as 'Kanaille! Undankbare Kanaille!', 'Neidehunde! Schele Neidehunde!', (p. 299) adding:

> Undankbares Verrätervolk! Geopfert hab ich mich für dieses Volk! Geopfert! Geopfert! *(Mit großer Geste.)* So zeuge denn mein Kadaver. (p. 300)

It is interesting to note that, at the end of the Second World War, with his Thousand Year Reich crumbling around him, Hitler too expressed a similarly low opinion of his hitherto beloved *Volksgenossen*, apparently telling Speer that, if the war was to be lost, then it was better if the nation were to be destroyed with it, adding that those who remained were of little value anyway, the best of the nation having already fallen in battle.[24]

In the prologue to *Der entfesselte Wotan*, a few lines bearing the title 'Wotanisches Impromptu' and set in Valhalla just before the beginning of the whole 'Heldenfahrt', Gott Wotan, Wilhelm Dietrich's creator, addresses the theatre audience and reading public directly with the following words:

> O Publikum! Lach nicht zu früh!
> Einst lachtest du zu spät
> Und zahltest deine Blindheit mit lebend'gen Leibern.
> Lach nicht zu früh!
> Doch — lach zur rechten Zeit!

> Versteh es, wer verstehen mag. (p. 254)

Unfortunately, Toller's appeal, his warnings of the danger of resurgent reaction, went unheeded. In one sense his warnings came too late, for by the time *Der entfesselte Wotan* appeared in Germany the immediate post-war crisis had receded to be replaced by a period of relative stability, the so-called Golden Years of the Weimar Republic during which time the extreme right was able to make little headway. In another sense, however, the play came too early, having been virtually forgotten by the time most of what it had prophesied was actually coming to pass. Despite this, the play is important in that it marks a decisive stage in the development of his political outlook, marking, as Dove has argued, the end of the period of existential pessimism which had characterised *Hinkemann*,[25] and a return to an unambiguous commitment to revolutionary socialism, a commitment without illusions, one which allowed him to look reality square in the face and to say that he was prepared to carry on the struggle 'dennoch'. Surveying the contemporary situation in another prison letter written not long after he had complete *Wotan*, Toller explained:

> Was das Geschick uns in den nächsten Jahren bringt? Wer kann prophezeien?
> Die Lage Deutschlands ist verfahren. (Und verfahren bedeutet, daß die Kutscher, gleich ob sie weiße oder rötliche Livreen tragen, die Zügel nicht zu handhaben verstanden.) Das A und O ist die alte verruchte Kriegspolitik.
> Wir gehen einer chaotischen Epoche entgegen. Es wird nicht "schön und bequem" sein, in den nächsten fünfzig Jahren in Europa zu leben. Nicht müde werden, wach bleiben und sich bewahren und bereit sein.[26]

Der entfesselte Wotan, then, confirms the view that Toller was a man with an acute understanding of political reality, someone who was not only aware of the danger posed by fascism but who had a good understanding of the kind of social and political conditions in which it flourished. In the coming years, his years of freedom, having

deepened this understanding, he spent his time and energy calling on the German workers' movement to take the threat as seriously and pleading with them to form an *Einheitsfront*, the only way, he believed, to halt Hitler's march to power.[27]

Toller and the *Einheitsfront*

In retrospect, it might seem as if no great powers of political insight were required in order to perceive the immense threat which Hitler's movement posed, not just to the German workers' movement, but to the democratic system in general. Toller's appeals for an *Einheitsfront*, a defence block of workers' organisations, might be thought of, therefore, as obvious, indeed superfluous. Yet this was not the case, and what makes Toller so remarkable is that he was one of the very few on the left who did perceive the full extent of the threat of National Socialism, and, what is more, from a very early stage in its development. Yet the society to which he returned in 1924, was very different from the one he had left behind in 1919. Roughly speaking, this was the beginning of the so-called Golden Years of the Weimar Republic, a period lasting until about 1928 during which the extremist parties of both left and right found the going extremely difficult. Economic stability, despite its fragile nature, had taken the heat out of the political situation and made the broad masses that much less receptive to the slogans of the National Socialists and the Communists. Most commentators were agreed that, by about the middle of the 1920s, the ghost of the November Revolution had finally been laid to rest and that, at last, Germany could now look forward with a degree of optimism to a period of social peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, this optimism turned out to be misplaced. The country's dependence on foreign capital made it particularly sensitive to any unfavourable development on the world economy. As the Great Depression spread

over the globe and American investors began to demand the return of their loans, Germany's financial system collapsed, dragging the economy down with it and plunging the country into the social and political nightmare from which Hitler emerged. Unemployment, already on the increase before the on-set of the Depression, soared, with over 3 million out of work by January 1930 and almost 5 million the following year, before a peak was reached in February 1932 of 6.1 million.[28] While the working class was most directly affected, the impact on the middle classes was also considerable. Tens of thousands of small businesses went bankrupt, farmers were ruined, and white-collar workers, teachers, civil-servants and the like, if they managed to remain in a job, found their wages and conditions under attack as the government tried to deal with the situation by cutting public expenditure.[29] The social crisis was, of course, soon reflected in the political arena. Those hardest hit by the economic downturn, in particular the young and long-term unemployed, feeling abandoned and betrayed by the Social Democrats, began to look towards the Communist Party for a solution to their problems. The KPD saw its share of the vote increase from 10.6% in 1928 to reach a peak of 16.9% in November 1932, while in the same period the SPD vote fell from 29.8% to 20.4%.[30] The most spectacular increase in popularity, however, was registered on the opposite side of the political spectrum by the NSDAP. At the *Reichstag* elections of 14 September 1930, less than a year after the Wall Street Crash and before the depth of the crisis had been reached, the Nazis gained 18.3%, some 6.4 million votes, compared to only 2,6% in 1928, rising to 37.3%, almost 12 million votes, at the next election, on 31 July 1932.[31]

In *Hoppla, wir leben!*, a play written towards the end of the Golden Years but before the emergence of National Socialism as a serious political force, Toller drew attention to the resurgence of reaction and pointed to the potential danger this posed to the democratic system in general and the workers' movement in particular. At about the

same time, in February 1929, in a speech in memory of Kurt Eisner, he again expressed his deep concern at both the rising tide of fascism and the failure of the left to respond adequately to the threat.[32] 'Heute stehen wir vor einem Schutthaufen der Revolution', he told his audience, reminding them that fascism was in power 'in sieben europäischen Staaten' and warning that 'keiner von uns die Anziehungskraft dieses Sieges unterschätzen [darf]'. ('In Memoriam Kurt Eisner', *GW*, I, 168) Drawing attention to the stark contrast between the revolutionary period and the present, he complained that, thanks mainly to the 'leichtsinningen und geradezu verbrecherischen Fehler der sozialistischen und republikanischen Regierungen', reaction had been allowed to recover much of the ground it had been forced to concede. (*GW*, I, 168) In 1918, he said, the collapse of the 'Selbstvertrauen' of the bourgeoisie had gone hand in hand with a rise in the self-confidence of the workers but that now the tables had been turned and the forces of conservatism had regained what they had lacked at that time, their 'Selbstvertrauen, Organisation, Wille zur Macht, intellektuelle Kräfte'. (*GW*, I, 168) The working class, by contrast, was 'zersplittert und trotz zahlenmäßiger Organisationsstärke nicht kraftvoll genug' for the tasks in hand.(*GW*, I, 168) The main reason for this situation, he argued, was the failure of the revolutionary leadership. The socialist movement, not just in Germany but throughout the whole of middle and western Europe, had never recovered from the collapse it had suffered at the beginning of the First World War. Most workers' leaders had betrayed their socialist principles by lining up behind their own ruling class, giving their support to an imperialist war, a war for a re-division of the world, a war which they had long been pledged to oppose. Of those who had not succumbed to the mood of national chauvinism, many, like Eisner, had fallen in the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution which had taken place at the end of the war. 'Wie fehlt er uns heute', Toller said of Eisner, 'wie fehlen uns alle jene geistigen Führer, die der

Revolution vorangingen, wie fehlen uns Gustav Landauer, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg: Sozialisten, die im Taktischen geschieden, doch einig waren in ihrer großen und unbedingten Hingabe an die Idee und ihre Verwirklichung'.(*GW*, I, 167) The current leadership, he believed, did not have the same kind of devotion to the socialist idea and was, as a consequence, beginning to lose the confidence of the masses, something, he rightly feared, which could have disastrous consequences:

> Das Volk hat einen feinen Instinkt für Mut und Unbedingtheit, für Wahrheit und Glauben an die Sache. Wo es diese Kräfte nicht sieht, erlahmt es. Möge nicht der Tag kommen, da das Volk seinen Führern nicht mehr folgt, weil es ihnen nicht mehr glaubt.(*GW*, I, 168)

As it turned out, this was an exact prediction of what happened in 1933. The rank and file of the workers' movement, having waited in vain for a decisive lead in the struggle against the NSDAP, failed to respond to the half-hearted call to arms issued when Hitler was already in power and open resistance would have been futile.

Toller's prescience is the most outstanding feature of this speech, indeed, it is something which characterised all his writings and speeches on National Socialism. At a time when many in the labour movement, in the Communist and Socialist camps alike, were either unable or unwilling to perceive the extent of the threat posed by Hitler's party, Toller was issuing warning after warning such as this:

> Wie sich die Dinge in den nächsten Jahren in Deutschland entwickeln werden, ob in legalen oder illegalen Bahnen, wissen wir nicht. Aber eines wissen wir: wir stehen vor einer Herrschaftsperiode der Reaktion. Glaube keiner, die Periode eines noch so gemäßigten, noch so schlauen Faschismus werde eine kurze Übergangsperiode sein. Was jenes System an revolutionärer, sozialistischer, republikanischer Energie zerstört, ist kaum in Jahren wieder aufzubauen. ('In Memoriam Kurt Eisner', *GW*, I, 168)

This from the man often dismissed by his contemporaries as a *Gefühlsmensch*, an

impractical idealist with little or no understanding of politics; Toller actually had a far better understanding of political reality than most of his detractors inside the labour movement.[33] Interestingly, one of the few others to display the same degree of insight was the exiled leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Leon Trotsky, whose analysis of the rise of German fascism is widely regarded as a masterpiece of political insight.[34] Indeed, according to his biographer, Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky's attempt to alert the German working-class to the National Socialist threat was his greatest political deed in exile.[35] A brief look at some common features in Toller's and Trotsky's writings on this subject underlines just how acute Toller's political perception was and throws a sharp light on the development of his ideas at a particularly important historic juncture. What is, perhaps, the most striking similarity in Toller's and Trotsky's analysis was the strategy they advanced for stopping the spread of this most virulent of political diseases. Both were firm in the belief that only a united front, what Toller called an *Einheitsfront*, a coalition embracing all workers' organisations, could fulfil this task. In October 1930, just a few weeks after the Nazi Party had made its spectacular breakthrough at the elections to the *Reichstag*, Toller argued for the formation of an *Einheitsfront* in an article in *Die Weltbühne*:

> Es gibt eine einzige Macht, die noch ernsthaft mit dem Faschismus den Entscheidungskampf aufnehmen ... könnte, die Einheitsfront der freien Gewerkschaften. Aber heute fürchten ihre Führer um den aus Arbeitergroschen ersparten Millionenbesitz. Ist der Faschismus einmal stark genug, wird er auch vor den Gewerkschaften, die er in der ersten Zeit schonen mag, nicht haltmachen. Oder werden die Gewerkschaften wieder den Boden der Tatsachen betreten? Sieben Millionen organisierte Arbeiter haben das Wort.[36]

In an article which appeared in the same month in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, a journal which sought to rally those Communists opposed to Stalin, Trotsky noted that 'fascism in Germany has become a real danger' and argued that it was the duty of the

Communist Party to close ranks with the majority of the German working class, to form a 'united front with the Social Democratic and non-party workers'.[37]

Unfortunately, the leaders of the Trades Unions and even more of the SPD were not well disposed to this idea. First of all, the Socialists were deeply committed to parliamentary democracy and proud of the apparently solid foundation they had laid for the workers' movement within the framework of Weimar. More than any other party, the SPD had been instrumental in founding the Weimar Republic and was proud of the apparently solid foundation it had laid for the workers' movement within the framework of democratic state. It saw itself as the guardian of the constitution and was opposed in principle to the type of extra-parliamentary action advocated by Toller and Trotsky. During the crisis period leading up to the dissolution of the Weimar Republic, a period in which it was clear to almost everyone that the country's fate would be decided by force, the Socialist leaders counselled their members and supporters to oppose violence and to maintain their faith in peaceful, democratic methods of struggle.[38] Toller was only one of those who tried to warn the party of the likely consequences of this:

> Reichskanzler Hitler wird die Errungenschaften der Sozialdemokratie, auf die die Partei so stolz ist, mit einem Federstrich beseitigen. Über Nacht werden alle republikanischen sozialistischen Beamten, Richter und Schupos ihrer Funktionen enthoben sein, an ihre Stelle werden faschistische zuverlässige Kaders treten. ('Reichskanzler Hitler', *GW*, I, 71)

If Hitler were allowed to come to power, Toller warned, and to take control of the levers of the state, the civil-service, the army and police, he would smash the workers organisations and use the constitution to abolish the final remnants of the constitution itself.[39] Trotsky made a similar point in an article published in November 1931 when he wrote that 'the coming to power of the National Socialists would mean first of all the destruction of the flower of the German proletariat, the destruction of its organisations,

the eradication of the belief in itself and its future'.[40] Given the far greater depth of the social and economic crisis facing Germany, he added, Italian fascism would appear as a 'pale and almost humane experiment in comparison with the work of the German National Socialists'.[41] Unfortunately, such warnings made no impact on the leaders of the SPD who refused to work together with the Communists and to the bitter end continued to believe in the impartial nature of a state apparatus which as long ago as 1919, during the Kapp Putsch, had demonstrated where its sympathies lay.

A related difficulty faced by the likes of Toller and Trotsky was that there were many in the labour movement, including the Communists, who took a rather sanguine view of the threat posed by National Socialism, believing that the most effective way to deal with Hitler would be to let him come to power through the ballot box, for then his inability to deal with the country's economic crisis would be exposed before the German people.[42] Toller could see that this was sheer madness, a piece of self deception on the part of a leadership which had completely lost its political orientation:

> Es ist an der Zeit, gefährliche Illusionen zu zerstören. Nicht nur Demokraten, auch Sozialisten und Kommunisten neigen zu der Ansicht, man solle Hitler regieren lassen, dann werde er am ehesten 'abwirtschaften'. Dabei vergessen sie, daß die Nationalsozialistische Partei gekennzeichnet ist durch ihren Willen zur Macht und zur Machtbehauptung. Sie wird es sich wohl gefallen lassen, auf demokratische Weise zur Macht zu kommen, aber keinesfalls auf Geheiß der Demokratie sie wieder abgeben. ('Reichskanzler Hitler', *GW*, I, 70-1)

This was a point echoed by Trotsky who turned the full force of his sarcasm on the KPD for what he described as its 'panicky retreat' before the fascist onslaught:

> The victory of the fascists, considered unthinkable the year before, is looked upon as certain today. Some Kuusinen or other, inspired behind the scenes by some Radek or other, is already preparing for Stalin the brilliant strategic formula: retreat in good time, lead the revolutionary troops out of the line of fire, and lay a trap for fascism in the form of ... state power.[43]

Both Toller and Trotsky recognised that it was vital for the workers' movement to take decisive action now, arguing that to postpone a struggle until after a fascist victory would be to invite certain disaster. Toller wrote:

> Die Arbeiterschaft, ihrer einzigen starken zusammenfassenden Organisation beraubt, werden sich in Verzweiflungskämpfen aufreiben. Die Zeiten, in denen vereinzelte Barrikadenkämpfe und Rebellionen Aussicht auf Erfolg hatten, sind vorüber, nur Revolutionsromantiker können darauf ihre Hoffnung setzen. Mit Giftgas, Maschinengewehren und Tanks, von einigen hundert Soldaten bedient, sind zehntausende von Arbeitern in Schach zu halten. Wir sind so weit, daß der Gegner den Zeitpunkt der Entscheidung bestimmt. ('Zur deutschen Situation', *GW*, I, 75)

Trotsky repeated the same argument almost word for word, saying that the struggle against a fascist regime by a proletariat 'betrayed by its own leadership, taken by surprise, disorientated, despairing', would result in nothing other than a 'series of frightful, bloody and futile convulsions'.[44] Unfortunately, these warnings made no impact on the course of events and Hitler was able to come to power, as he later boasted, without breaking so much as a window pane. Moreover, contrary to what Toller and Trotsky believed, there was no movement on the part of the workers against the new regime, no 'Verzweiflungskämpfe', no 'bloody and futile convulsions'. In the end, the German labour movement, the most organised and disciplined in the world, was demolished by the mere stroke of a pen.

Yet not all the blame for the failure to create an *Einheitsfront* can be laid at the door of the SPD. Equally culpable were the Communists whose sectarian, ultra-left attitude towards the Socialists made joint work impossible. In 1928 the KPD, like every other Communist Party, was forced to adopt the theory of the so-called 'Third Stage of Capitalist Development', proclaimed that same year in Moscow at the 6th Congress of the Communist International.[45] Central to this theory was the notion that capitalism,

having gone through a 'First Period' of crisis (1917-1924) and a 'Second Period' of relative stability (1925-1928), was about to embark upon a 'Third Period' of upheaval and revolution, a period in which the struggle for power by the proletariat of the advanced countries was the order of the day.[46] As an analysis of reality, the theory of the 'Third Period' was worthless, it being a matter of pure coincidence that it predicted a final crisis in the capitalist system just prior to the onset of the Great Depression. Yet despite this, the theory was of immense historic significance. After having burned its fingers in its attempts to build a united front with non-Communist parties and organisations, in particular, with the British TUC during the General Strike and even more disastrously with the nationalist *Koumintang* in China prior to 1926, Moscow recoiled to a position where it rejected every form of cross-party co-operation.[47] In the coming revolutionary struggle, the Comintern now proclaimed, the proletariat would have to rely on its own strength. Not only that, but before it could triumph, it would first of all have to defeat what were termed the Social Fascists, in other words, the various Social Democrat Parties which were described as the main social support for the bourgeois system and the primary enemy of the working-class.[48]

Nowhere was this policy pursued with more vigour nor with more disastrous results than in Germany. Throughout the whole of the period of Hitler's rise to power, the KPD refused to have anything to do with the SPD, rejected as a betrayal of the working class the very idea of an *Einheitsfront*. Party leader, Ernst Thälmann, (later to discover for himself the very real difference between social fascism and genuine fascism, being murdered in Buchenwald) declared as late as February 1932, that the KPD would 'direct its main blows against Social Democracy' maintaining that the defeat of the SPD was 'equivalent to the conquest of the majority of the proletariat and the creation of the most important preconditions for the proletarian revolution'.[49] 'Mehr denn je', he wrote

in March 1932, with Hitler hammering on the doors of power 'galt es den Charakter der SPD als des gemäßigten Flügels des Faschismus und des Zwillingsbruders des Hitlerfaschismus klar zum Bewußtsein zu bringen'.[50] The only united front he was interested in was a 'united front from below', one, that is, which rejected co-operation with the SPD leadership and aimed at persuading Social Democratic, Christian and even National Socialist workers to abandon their own organisations and rally to the Communist Party. Pursued with only minor deviations right up to and even after Hitler's *Machtergreifung*, this policy led to the spectacle of the KPD participating in the Nazi inspired referendum — dubbed by Thälmann the Red Referendum — to remove the Social Democratic government in Prussia, even though it was clear that success would only bring Hitler one step closer to power. It also involved Communists collaborating with the National Socialists, joining them on picket lines, during the Berlin transport workers' strike in 1932, one of the key events in the gradual undermining of the fragile foundations of the democratic system.[51]

Trotsky, of course, flayed the Communist leadership for what he called its 'National Communism' and was particularly critical of Thälmann who opposed a united front with the SPD yet was quite prepared to enter into one with Hitler.[52] Toller too attacked the Communists for their attempt to combat National Socialism by, in effect, adopting its slogans and programme. 'Es hat keinen Sinn, he wrote, 'die Hitler-Bewegung zu bekämpfen, indem man ihre chauvinistischen Begriffe übernimmt', adding:

> Mit Begriffen hat es eine eigene Bewandtnis, ihre alten reaktionären Inhalte sind mit einer Art Vollzugsspannung geladen, die sich nicht in der Richtung ändert, auch wenn man ihnen mit Bauernschläue neue Inhalte unterschiebt. Der Endeffekt wird nicht sein, daß die nationalsozialistische Bewegung, die eine reaktionär-kleinkapitalistische ist, zum Kommunismus übergeht. ('Reichskanzler Hitler', *GW*, I, 72)

Again, Toller's prediction was proved correct. Unable to perceive a clear difference

between the KPD and the NSDAP, many workers gave their support to Hitler, a leader who at least gave the impression of knowing the way out of the crisis. Toller was also right when he said that it was foolish to speculate on the radicalising effect of increasing social misery — as many in the Communist Party did — declaring that this 'wirkt nur zu einem gewissen Grad als kämpferischer Antrieb':

> Wird er zur alltäglichen Massenerscheinung, wirkt er retardierend, schwächt den Kampfwillen der Alten und schafft die Bereitschaft zum Landesknechtstum beim jungen Arbeitslosen. ('Zur deutschen Situation', *GW*, I, 75)

This was a point he had made in *Hoppla, wir leben!* when Albert Kroll, warning Karl Thomas against the belief that high unemployment would lead the workers to revolutionary conclusions, said 'Schleicht sich Hunger zu einer Tür rein, schleicht Verstand zur anderen Tür raus'.[53] It is significant, however, that Toller's criticism of the role played by the Communist Party in the rise of Hitler is indirect and quite mild, at least in comparison to what he had to say about the Social Democrats. There is no record of his having publicly attacked the policy of social fascism, either before or after 1933, and only once, in February 1930, in a letter to Ludwig Lore, did he express any private reservations, when he complained that 'Unsere KP scheint sich in eine Taktik hineingerannt zu haben, aus der sie sich selbst nicht mehr den Weg heraus weiß'.[54] Toller's indulgence towards the KPD, an indulgence which might seem surprising given the troubled history of his relationship to this party, was in large measure a consequence of his support for the Soviet Union and his desire not to upset the developing *Volksfront*. Before considering this in detail, however, and in order to grasp the nature of the change his support for the *Volksfront* brought about, it is necessary to put into context his views on National Socialism by examining his attitude towards democracy in the years before he went into exile.

Until about 1933, Toller had always taken great care with the word democracy, making sure to draw a distinction between this and capitalism. Democracy to him was a term used to describe the political superstructure of a given state and capitalism as one which described a certain set of economic relations.[55] This was a point he made in a radio debate with Alfred Mühr, editor of the National Socialist *Deutsche Zeitung*, about the 'Kulturbankrott des Bürgertums'.[56] Bourgeois democracy, he told Mühr, was not true democracy for it must always lead to 'sozialer Ungerechtigkeit, zu kulturellen Hemmungen, zu sittlicher Heuchelei'(*Nationalsozialismus*, p. 30), for 'die bürgerliche Gesellschaft', he asserted, 'basiert darauf, daß die großen Massen ihre Arbeitskraft verkaufen, eine kleine Schicht vom Ertrag dieser Arbeitskraft lebt und immer reicher wird'. (*Nationalsozialismus*, p. 27) Political democracy without economic democracy, he strongly believed, had no real meaning, since the capitalist class exploited democracy 'um die große Masse des werktätigen Volkes von materiellen und geistigen Gütern auszuschließen'. (*Nationalsozialismus*, p. 15) It must be emphasised, however, that, unlike the Communists, Toller's understanding of the nature of bourgeois democracy did not lead him to reject the idea completely. He recognised that, given the threat posed by fascism, the working class could not afford to be neutral, that it was compelled to defend democracy, though using its own methods, the *Einheitsfront*, and with its own goals in mind. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that when Toller advocated the defence of democracy he was not advocating the defence of capitalism. Even in the face of the rise of Hitler he was not prepared to abandon the fight against this hated system. Capitalist society, he explained to Mühr, was above all a class society — 'Wir haben in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft kein Volk, wir haben Klassen, das Volk ist Ziel' (*Nationalsozialismus*, p. 21) — and the struggle against it a struggle not for 'kleinbürgerliche Reformen', but for 'eine völlige Wandlung des politischen,

ökonomischen und kulturellen Fundaments unserer Gesellschaft'. (*Nationalsozialismus*, p. 28) 'Wir bekämpfen den Kapitalismus', he added, 'in Frankreich, in England, ebenso wie in Deutschland'. (*Nationalsozialismus*, p. 29.)

The clearest expression of Toller's attitude towards the bourgeois democratic states came in the course of a speech he gave in 1927 at the first congress of the 'League against Imperialism', an event organised by his old friend, the former KPD *Reichstag* deputy now chief propagandist for the Comintern, Willi Muenzenberg.[57] In this speech Toller denounced imperialism, 'Yankee-Imperialismus, französischer Imperialismus, englischer Imperialismus', calling it barbaric, a system which treats its subject peoples like goods which it 'verschleißt und wegwirft'. (*Quer Durch*, p. 237) Mocking those who claimed that the imperialist powers had at least brought the benefits of civilisation to their colonial possessions, Toller said:

> Auch die Blindesten begreifen, was die Zivilisation den kolonialen Völkern gebracht hat, was sie für sie bedeutet. Die Zivilisation hat ihnen Maschinengewehre und Syphilis, Alkohol und Giftgas geschenkt.
>
> In den Händen der Mächtigen wurde die Zivilisation zum barbarischsten aller Götzen, dem man Hekatomben von Menschenleibern opfert. Im Namen der Zivilisation wird ein neuer Krieg vorbereitet, ein Verbrechen, noch furchtbarer als das Verbrechen des Weltkrieges. (*Quer Durch*, p. 237)

In a subsequent article Toller described this Congress as an event of immense significance, one which had laid the foundations for the 'organistorische Zusammenfasssung aller rebellierenden Kräfte des Orients, des Okzidents und Europas gegen die Suprematie der europäisch-amerikanischen herrschenden Schicht'.[58] Intoxicated by the atmosphere the congress had generated he wrote:

> Die Delegierten haben diesmal nicht beim Quai d'Orsay und in der Downing Street angefragt, ob sie reden dürften. Sie haben gesprochen. Mit einer Stimme, die das Gewicht der Klage und des Aufruhrs von einer Milliarde Menschen trug, mit einer Stimme, die den Herren Chamberlain

> und Poincaré, den Herren Mussolini und Primo de Rivera nicht angenehm geklungen und ihrem Schlaf manche traumschwere Belastung gegeben haben mag. (*GW*, I, p. 64)

Toller's hopes for this organisation proved to be false but this does not in any way diminish the sincerity of the views he expressed. The key point, however, is his attitude towards the major capitalist powers, which he refers to not as democracies but as 'imperialistische Räuber', countries for whom the word democracy was a convenient facade behind which they operated a ruthless system of colonial exploitation. What makes such views so interesting is that they provide a sharp contrast with those Toller expressed in exile. From about the middle of the 1930s, he spent most of his time appealing to the capitalist democracies to become part of the *Volksfront*, to join the USSR in the fight against fascism; at this stage, however, he saw fascism and capitalism as merely two sides of the same coin. Fascism, he believed, was an expression of the crisis in the capitalist-imperialist system, an extreme and brutal one perhaps, but one whose primary aim was the defence of the existing set of property relations. Whether or not Toller's analysis of National Socialism was correct, is of no concern here. What is important is that he believed it to be correct and based his concept of the *Einheitsfront* on it. A National Socialist government, he predicted, would aim its first blows against the trades unions, would use 'nackter, brutaler Terror gegen Sozialisten, Kommunisten, Pazifisten und die paar überlebenden Demokraten',[59] using as a battering ram 'das kopflose, unwissende Kleinbürgertum' which saw in fascism 'seine letzte Hoffnung', saw it, in other words, as a bulwark against Bolshevism.[60] The working class, therefore, was not only the only grouping in society which could defeat fascism, it was the only one which had a material interest in doing so. It is important to emphasise this point, for, as already indicated, it was on precisely this question that the change in Toller's views brought about by his support for the *Volksfront* is most evident. In exile, he abandoned his class

analysis of fascism, dropped the idea of an *Einheitsfront* and argued instead that Hitler could be stopped only by a broad coalition of progressive opinion irrespective of class or party. Like anyone else, of course, Toller was entitled to change his mind. The fact that he did change his mind, however, and the consequences of it have to be recognised and not, as is so often the case, ignored. Before we can consider Toller's exile period, however, and the changes which took place in his political outlook, it is necessary to consider two of his most important plays, *Hoppla, wir leben!*, a satirical review of the Weimar Republic at the height of the Golden Years, and *Feuer aus den Kesseln*, a play in which, for the last time, Toller looks back to the November Revolution and in which he seeks to remind the German workers' movement of what it had the potential to achieve if it could rekindle the spirit of unity in action.

1 *Der entfesselte Wotan. Eine Komödie* (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1923) Reprinted in *GW*, II, 249-302.

2 See Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), p. 298. For Max Brod's review of the Prague production see Frühwald and Spalek, *Der Fall Toller*, pp. 166-68.

3 Although Wolfgang Rothe is generally critical of *Wotan*, in particular what he sees as its failure to take seriously the threat posed by Hitler and his followers, he also writes:

> Scheute das deutsche Theater, mit Lustspielen nicht übermäßig gesegnet und billige Boulevardstücke importierend, vor dem *Entfesselten Wotan* vielleicht zurück, weil Toller — wie sich zehn Jahre später zeigen sollte — einen empfindlichen Nerv getroffen hatte?

Wolfgang Rothe, *Ernst Toller. In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983), p. 92.

4 In the section of the letter immediately prior to this Toller writes revealingly of how he hoped that *Wotan* could, perhaps, help lead the German workers' movement — and himself too — out of the 'Taumel der Dumpfheit' it had been in since the collapse of the revolution:

> Mit welcher furchtbaren Klarheit ich ein Schicksal schon vor zwei Jahren geschaut habe, das jetzt in Deutschland entsteht — das mögen Sie aus dem *Hinkemann* sehen, den ich Ihnen mit diesem Brief schicke. Das Gesicht der Verzweiflung, der Not, der Hilfslosigkeit, das Zerreißen aller Bindungen, — damals schon habe ichs mitleidend erlebt. Daß wir aber aus diesem Taumel der Dumpfheit herausfinden, dazu soll der *Wotan* mithelfen.

Letter to Pallenberg dated 20.6.1923 in *GW*, V, 154.

5 In his classic study of the development of National Socialism, Ernst Nolte defines quite precisely which sections of Germany's middle classes were most attracted to Hitler's programme:

> Schon die ersten Erfahrungen zeigten [...], daß Hitler in unvergleicher Weise das "Volk" anzusprechen vermochte, weil er jetzt nichts anderes war als der radikalste Ausdruck der Sehnsüchten, Hoffnungen und Ängste dieses Volks. Aber um was für ein 'Volk' handelte es sich?
> Es waren nicht die 'marxistisch verseuchten' Massen, die der Redner Hitler zu 'nationalisieren' verstand. Bis zu seiner Machtergreifung blieb der Stimmanteil der 'Marxisten' im wesentlichen konstant. Es war auch nicht das katholische Bürgertum Münchens und später Deutschlands, das ihm Gefolgschaft leistete, wenngleich es seinen Weg eine Zeitlang nicht ohne Sympathie verfolgte. [...] Nicht das Kleinbürgertum schlechthin sprach Hitler an, sondern seine politisch bis dahin noch jungfräulichen Teile, die am Kampf um Bürgerfreiheit keinen Anteil genommen hatten oder mit seinen Traditionen nicht vertraut waren. Nahe benachbart waren ihnen die jüngeren Offiziere und Soldaten, für die den Krieg die Welt

> gewesen war, und jene 'deutschen' Intellektuellen, als deren Sprecher kurz zuvor Thomas Mann aufgetreten war. Hitler gehörte in gewisser Hinsicht allen drei Gruppen an.

Ernst Nolte, *Der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Piper, 1963) pp. 44-46. Interesting though Nolte's analysis is, it does not add anything essential to that made by Trotsky only a matter of months after Hitler came to power. Compare, for instance, the above-quoted passage with Trotsky's article 'What is National Socialism?', first published in *The Modern Thinker*, October 1933. Reprinted in Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder, 1971), pp. 399-407.

6 Letter to 'B', dated 28.6.1923, in *GW*, V, 155-56 (p. 155).

7 Manfred Durzak writes:

> Er [Toller] hat die Zeichen der Zeit, die Ausbreitung des Nationalsozialismus zu einem politischen Sog ohnegleichen, durchaus richtig gedeutet, ja die Entwicklung der kommenden Jahre mit erstaunlicher Hellsicht antizipiert. Hinter dem politischen Größenwahn seines Friseurs taucht bereits der Schatten von Hitler auf.

'Zur Posse gewordene Politik: *Der entfesselte Wotan*', in *Zu Ernst Toller. Drama und Engagement*, ed. by Jost Hermand (Stuttgart: Klett, 1981), pp. 142-47 (p. 143).

8 This is a point made by both Rothe in *Toller*, p. 92. and Richard Dove in *Revolutionary Socialism in the Works of Ernst Toller* (New York, Berne, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 252.

9 See article entitled 'Dichter über ihre neuen Werke. Ernst Toller: *Der entfesselte Wotan*', first published in *Die Szene*, 16, no. 1 (January 1926), 26-27. Reprinted in GW, II, 363-65.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 363. Wotan's motto in the play itself is 'In Arbeit, Freud und Leid sind wir vereint'. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 364.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 364-65.

13 Letter to 'B' dated 2.1.1924 in *GW*, V, 172-74 (p. 174).

14 Cecil Davies quotes a number of critics who took this view, as indicated above, one shared by Wolfgang Rothe. See Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller*, pp. 301 and 539.

15 See, for instance, Toller's aforementioned letter to Max Pallenberg of 20.6.1923 in *GW*, V, 154.

16 For an excellent account of the rise of National Socialism, including its roots in *völksich* ideology, see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

17 On this, see Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York, Oxford: OUP, 1985) and Eberhard Czichon, *Wer verhalf Hitler zur Macht? Zum Anteil der deutschen Industrie an der Zerstörung der Weimar Republik* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1989).

18 In the main it was Jewish businessmen in the banking and financial sector who provided funds for the NSDAP, though there was at least one prominent exception from heavy industry in the shape of Paul Silverberg. Chairman of the board of directors of Germany's biggest lignite mining company, Rhenisch A.G, and a prominent member of the DVP (*Deutsche Volkspartei*), Silverberg was part of the so-called *Ruhrlade*, a group comprising coal and steel producers from the Ruhr and Berlin bankers which distributed money among various right-wing political parties, including the NSDAP, from its founding in 1928. On the history of the *Ruhrlade* see Henry Ashby Turner Jr., 'The *Ruhrlade*, Secret Cabinet of Heavy Industry in the Weimar Republic', *Central European History*, 3 (1970), 195-228. Reinhard Neebe argues convincingly that Silverberg advocated installing Hitler as *Reichskanzler* during the crisis of summer 1932, though this is disputed by Turner. See Neebe, *Großindustrie, Staat und NSDAP 1930-1933: Paul Silverberg und der Reichsverband der deutschen Industrie in der Krise der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981), pp. 153-68 and Turner, *German Big Business*, pp. 298-300. There is no doubt, however, that, in common with so many reactionary businessmen, Silverberg saw Hitler as the most effective bulwark against Communism. He was prepared, therefore, to overlook his anti-semitism, managing to convince himself that this, like the NSDAP's socialism, was a mere tactic to gain the support of the broad masses. Unfortunately, he was right about the socialism but wrong about the anti-semitism. On this, see James and Suzanne Pool, *Who Financed Hitler? The Secret Funding of Hitler's Rise to Power 1919-1933* (London: McDonald and Janes, 1979), pp. 379-82.

19 It is interesting to compare Toller's views on some of the German Jews and other exiles from Hitler expressed in a letter to Emil Ludwig at the beginning of his exile:

> Ich habe zuweilen gedacht, die Emigration zu sammeln, mit der strengen Disziplin einer Legion - es wäre ein vergebliches Beginnen. Die Emigration von 1933 ist ein wüster Haufe aus zufällig Verstoßenen, darunter vielen jüdischen verhinderten Nazis, aus Schwächlingen mit vagen Ideen, aus Tugendbolden, die Hitler verhindert Schweine zu sein, und nur wenigen Männern mit Überzeugungen. Deutsche, allzu Deutsche.

Unpublished letter, 11 January 1934, *Sammlung Ernst Toller, Deutsches Literatur Archiv*, Marbach.

20 See George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*.

21 For what is still probably the best account of Hitler's attempted coup and his farcical trial see *Der Hitler Putsch: Bayerische Dokumente zum 8./9. November 1923*, edited by Ernst Deuerlein (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1962).

22 Commenting on the readiness of certain sections of the German population to put their fate entirely in the hands of some messiah, Toller wrote:

> Ist dieses Phänomen eine Folge des Krieges? Erst lehrte man den Soldaten,

> nicht selbst zu denken, nicht selbst einen Entschluß zu fassen, am Ende war er damit zufrieden. Ein Führer trägt die Verantwortung, gibt die großen und kleinen Befehle, und alles geht seinen Gang. Es ist bequem, verantwortungslos zu leben, ja sogar sehr bequem, verantwortungslos zu sterben. Wahre Demokratie ist unbequem, sie bedeutet intensive Teilnahme des Volkes am öffentlichen Leben, Selbstverwaltung, Verantwortungsfreudigkeit jedes einzelnen. Wahre Demokratie ist die Form, in der das Individuum sich aufs reichste entfalten kann.

Letter to 'B', dated 28.6.1923, in *GW*, V, 155-56 (p. 156).

23 See Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism*, p. 255. and Dorothy Klein, 'Der Wandel der dramaturgischen Darstellungsform im Werk Ernst Tollers (1919-1933)', (unpublished dissertation, University of Bochum, 1968) p. 116.

24 Speer told of Hitler's views on this subject during the course of his evidence at the Nuremberg tribunal. See Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1962), pp. 774-75.

25 Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism*, p. 256.

26 Letter to 'B' dated 19.7.1923, in *GW*, V, 160.

27 Toller was released from prison, Niederschönenfeld, on 15 July 1924, having served all but one day of his 5-year prison sentence. Apparently, the authorities decide to let his out one day early so as to avoid any embarrassing public displays of support. Once he was out, they then deported him, illegally, from Bavaria, putting him on the first available train which took him to Thüringen. See Wolfgang Rothe *Ernst Toller. In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983), p. 136. For details of Toller's activities in the following period see Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), pp. 136-61 and John M. Spalek and Wolfgang Frühwald eds. *Der Fall Toller. Kommentar und Materialien* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1979), pp. 17-21.

28 Walter Tormin, *Die Weimarer Republik*, (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschichte, 1970), p. 281.

29 See Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie 1918-1933* (Munich: Beck, 1994), pp. 408-09.

30 Tormin, *Die Weimarer Republik*, p. 274.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

32 'In Memoriam Kurt Eisner' a speech given by Toller in the *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm*, Berlin, 24 February 1929. First published in *Quer Durch. Reisebilder und Reden* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch), 1930. Reprinted in *GW*, I, 165-8.

33 Alfred Klein, for instance, though not willing to even mention the disastrous policies pursued by the KPD during the Weimar period and beyond, writes condescendingly that, politicians of the Toller type 'auf Grund ihrer weltanschaulichen Schwächen und praktischen Unerfahrenheit nicht immer eine glückliche Rolle gespielt haben'. He adds:

> Der Typ des Dichter-Politikers, der in der ersten Phase der Münchner Räterepublik wenig mit der ihm übertragenen Verantwortung anzufangen wußte, hat manche Verwirrung gestiftet und gegenüber der Arbeiterklasse manche Schuld auf sich geladen.

Alfred Klein, 'Nachwort', in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1967), pp. 239-40

34 Trotsky's main articles on the rise of National Socialism are contained in his work *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971).

35 *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929-1940* (London: OUP, 1963), p. 129.

36 'Reichskanzler Hitler', first published in *Die Weltbühne*, 41 (7 October 1930), 537-9. Reprinted in *GW*, I, 69-73 (p. 72). In the light of Toller's oft-repeated call for an *Einheitsfront* it really is quite remarkable that Altenhofer can write:

> Es ist das Phänomen der Massenhypnose, das Toller interessiert, und bedenklich stimmt, das Mitmachen und Mitlaufen der unterschiedlichen Typen aus den verschiedensten sozialen Gruppen und Klassen. *Zudem stellt für ihn das Proletariat in seiner Zerstrittenheit, in seinem Auseinanderfallen in diverse, einander bekämpfende politische Gruppen [...] keine einheitliche, politische und soziale Kraft dar, also keine Gegenkraft zur faschistischen Gefahr.* (my emphasis)

Rosemarie Altenhofer, 'Ernst Tollers politische Dramatik' (unpublished dissertation, Washington University, 1976), p. 217.

37 L. Trotsky, 'The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany', in *The Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 55-74 (p. 60). First published in the Russian *Bulletin of the Opposition* (November-December 1930).

38 Julius Braunthal, *History of the International 1914-1943*, 2 vols (London: Nelson, 1967), I, 357

39 E. Toller, 'Zur deutschen Situation', *GW*, I, 73-76 (p. 73).

40 L. Trotsky, 'Germany, the Key to the International Situation', in *The Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 115-31 (p. 125). First published in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, (November-December 1931).

41 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

42 KPD Reichstag Deputy, Hermann Remmele, argued precisely this position in a debate in the newly convened Reichstag on 14 October 1930. 'We are not afraid of the fascists. They will shoot their bolt quicker than any other government'. Quoted in Robert Black, *Fascism in Germany: How Hitler Destroyed the World's Most Powerful Labour Movement*, 2 vols (London: Steyne, 1975), II, 640.

43 L. Trotsky, 'Germany, the Key to the International Situation', in *The Struggle against Fascism*, p. 124.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

45 See *The Communist International 1928-1943: Documents*, edited by Jane Degras, 3 vols (London: Cass, 1953), II, 455-520.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 471-95

47 For a good contemporary account of the Kremlin's disastrous policies in China see Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, translated by Ralph Mannheim (New York: Pathfinder, 1987), pp. 45-49.

48 The originator of this term 'Social Fascism' was Stalin who in 1924 had proclaimed that Social Democracy and fascism were 'not antipodes but twins' and described the Socialists as objectively speaking 'der gemäßigte Flügel des Faschismus'. Josef Stalin, 'Zur deutschen Lage', *Bolsheviki*, (20 September 1924). Reprinted in *Der deutsche Kommunismus: Dokumente 1915-1945*, edited by Hermann Weber, 3rd edn (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1973), pp. 180-81.

49 *Die Internationale*, 14 December 1931, p. 492.

50 *Die Rote Fahne*, 15 March, 1932.

51 See Winkler, *Weimar 1918-1933*, pp. 553-55.

52 L. Trotsky, 'Against National Communism! (Lessons of the "Red Referendum")', in *The Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 93-114.

53 *Hoppla, wir leben!*, in *GW*, III, 7-117 (p. 64).

54 Unpublished letter from Toller to Lotte Lore 5 Feb 1930, in the 'Akademie der Künste Berlin, Sammlung Ernst Toller'.

55 Toller expressed this view quite clearly in an article on the Treaty of Versailles. 'Bürgerlich-kapitalistische Demokratie, Parlamentarismus', he wrote 'haben Fiasko erlitten und bieten sich in schonungsloser Nacktheit als unwahr und Stützen der kapitalistischen Wirtschaftsordnung dar'. He added: 'Auch Wilsons Völkerbund hat sich als Trugbild und letzter Hort der Bourgeoisie entpuppt. Befreien von dem wirtschaftlichen Elend, von der Unkultur des Kapitalismus wird uns nur die Revolution des Weltproletariats'. 'Die Friedenskonferenz zu Versailles', *GW*, I, 37-45 (pp. 43-45). First published in the *Neue Zeitung*, Munich, 1 April 1919.

56 *Nationalsozialismus: Eine Diskussion über den Kulturbankrott des Bürgertums zwischen Ernst Toller und Alfred Mühr* (Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1930).

57 E. Toller, 'Gegen Kolonialimperialismus', a speech at the First Congress of the League Against Colonial Imperialism. Reprinted in *Quer Durch*, pp. 237-42.

58 E. Toller, 'Der Brüsseler Kolonial-Kongreß', *GW*, I, 63-8 (p. 64). First published in *Die Weltbühne*, 23 (1 March 1927) 325-28.

59 E. Toller, 'Reichskanzler Hitler', *GW*, I, 71.

60 E. Toller, 'Zur deutschen Situation', *GW*, I, 75. Some historians would dispute Toller's view of National Socialism as being mainly a movement of the middle classes but the figures on the social composition of both the party's voters and membership confirm his observation. See Reinhard Kühl, *Der deutsche Faschismus in Quellen und Dokumenten* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1980), pp. 94-99.

CHAPTER 6

HOPPLA, WIR LEBEN!

The first full-length stage play Toller completed following his release from prison and the last of his great successes in the German theatre, *Hoppla, wir leben!* has probably given rise to more controversy than any other of his dramatic works.[1] Some scholars have argued that this play demonstrates a new maturity in Toller's political thinking, not only affirming his faith in revolutionary socialism, but showing him to have come to a more realistic view as to how socialism could actually be realised.[2] Central to this interpretation is the view of Toller's attitude towards the play's main character, Karl Thomas, an Expressionist figure bearing similarities to the heroes of his earliest plays. Toller, this group of critics claims, shows Thomas in a negative light, while at the same time painting a positive picture of his comrades from the revolutionary period, Albert Kroll, Eva Berg and Mutter Meller.[3] Unlike Thomas, these people have adjusted well to the period in which they now find themselves, a period of political and social reaction, and understand the need to engage in 'revolutionäre Kleinarbeit' until such times as conditions create a more effective sounding board for their ideas.[4] Whereas Thomas continues to believe in the power of the exemplary individual, of the Expressionist 'neuer Mensch', to effect change, they know that a revolutionary situation cannot be conjured out of thin air, that it depends on concrete circumstances and cannot be made without the active participation of the broad masses. One of the most recent studies of *Hoppla, wir leben!*, however, has challenged the view that it provides proof or Toller's revolutionary optimism and realism.[5] Drawing on a previously unpublished text, which is, apparently, the earliest extant version of the play,[6] Karl Leydecker argues that *Hoppla* demonstrates that Toller had not abandoned the idealism of his youth, that he was, in fact, still very much in thrall to the ideas of Expressionism, both in an artistic and a political sense.[7] Leydecker views Karl Thomas as the vehicle for Toller's outlook, and maintains that he was sympathetic towards him and critical of the views expressed by Kroll, Berg and

Meller.[8] Moreover, Thomas — and hence Toller — did not, as Dove and other argue, come to a mature understanding of political reality, did not, that is, come to see the need for the patient day-to-day work, the 'revolutionäre Kleinarbeit' in which his ex-comrades are engaged.[9] Toller's alleged political insight is challenged in this interpretation too, with Leydecker arguing that it was only in the final version of the play, one heavily influenced by Erwin Piscator,[10] that there was anything like a coherent analysis of the political situation inside the Weimar Republic.[11]

Also basing itself on the 4-act version, since this seems to reflect most clearly Toller's original conception and not Piscator's, the present study takes issue with this analysis.[12] While it accepts that Piscator did indeed have a strong influence on the final version, in particular by helping to focus attention more sharply on the dangers to democracy posed by conservative nationalist circles,[13] it reasserts the view that Toller *had* come to a more mature understanding of socialism with *Hoppla, wir leben!*. It argues that the author did indeed invite the audience or reader to sympathise not with Karl Thomas, but with the small group of revolutionaries, and that it is their stance which is shown as being not only more realistic than Thomas's but the only one possible for the left in the given circumstances.[14]

Toller is deliberately vague about the time and setting for *Hoppla, wir leben!*, the title page stating merely that the events take place in 'vielen Ländern', 8 years after a 'niedergeworfenen Volksaufstand'. Its real setting, however, is obviously Germany during the so-called 'Golden Years' of the Weimar Republic, with the central theme being Karl Thomas's struggle to come to terms with the fact that his ideas, the ideas of revolutionary socialism, seem to have little or no relevance in this period of prosperity and social peace, and have been forgotten or abandoned in the past 8 years, years which he has spent locked up in a mental institution.[15] In scene 1, which begins with his release from

psychiatric care, Thomas is brought face to face with this new reality when he meets his former comrade, Wilhelm Kilman, a man with whom he had shared a condemned cell after the collapse of the revolution but who is now, after a remarkable change of fortune, Minister of the Interior. Initially, Thomas is under the impression that Kilman is still committed to the old ideas and that his governmental post is simply a tactical manoeuvre. Thomas asks Kilman if the 'Apparat', in other words, state power, will soon be in 'unseren Händen', in the hands of the revolutionary side. (p. 39) Kilman's reply comes as a shock to Thomas:

> *WILHELM KILMAN*: Du sprichst, als ob wir noch Revolutiönchen spielten.
> *KARL THOMAS*: Revolutiönchen?
> *WILHELM KILMAN*: Seitdem vergingen zehn Jahre. Die Illusionen flogen zum Teufel. Wo wir schnurgerade Wege sahen, kam die unerbittliche Wirklichkeit und bog sie krumm.
> *KARL THOMAS*: So nimmst du deine Arbeit ernst?
> *WILHELM KILMAN*: Freilich.
> *KARL THOMAS*: Und das Volk?
> *WILHELM KILMAN*: Ich diene ihm. (pp. 39-40)

An opportunist and a careerist, Kilman has lost whatever faith he might once have had in socialism and now identifies himself completely with the capitalist system. In order to justify his apostasy both to himself and to Thomas, Kilman argues that the time is not yet ripe for socialism and, moreover, that the working class lacks the necessary qualities which would allow it to run society itself. During the revolution, he explains, it had proved its inability to undertake positive and constructive work, and had been unable to do anything other than 'Sprüche klopfen and kaputtschlagen'. (p. 41) In a few decades, or centuries perhaps, once they have been educated and trained, then the workers might be ready for socialism. For the moment, however, they must learn to accept society as it is. Like the leaders of the SPD, whom he is supposed to represent, Kilman has managed to persuade himself that he can best serve the workers' interests by ensuring the

smooth running of the state machinery, and sees his main task as demonstrating that he and his colleagues are every bit as efficient in this task as the traditional ruling elite. 'Soll ich mich blamieren?', he replies to Thomas's criticism, 'Soll ich mich unfähiger zeigen als die alten Minster?': (p. 41)

> Wenn man die Verantwortung hat, lieber Freund, sehen die Dinge unten anders aus. Macht muß man reiten wie junges Vollblut. Man muß ihm die Sporen in die Weichen drücken oder die Schenkel lockern. Aber eher soll der Gaul das Genick brechen, als daß ich mich runterwerfen lasse — wenn ich mal oben sitze. (p. 40)

Thomas sees at once that Kilman is a victim — a willing victim — of self-deception and tries to make him understand that the power he thinks he possesses is an illusion, and that real power still lies in the hands of the old reactionary ruling classes. But Kilman is not to be persuaded, and tells Thomas that it is the revolutionary tactics *he* favours which would lead to a revival of the darkest forces of reaction. When Thomas replies that this would make no difference anyway since 'finstere Reaktion' seems to be already in power, (p. 42) Kilman makes the following interesting comment: 'Ihr habt wohl die Striemen vergessen, mit der die Reaktion Euch den Rücken bleute?' (p. 42) Although Kilman is a negative figure, the view he expresses here is one Toller himself expressed on more than one occasion. Unlike some on the left, most notably in the ranks of the KPD, Toller always felt it was important to make a careful distinction between democracy and dictatorship, not to lump the two together.[16] While highly critical of the Weimar Republic, he realised that an imperfect democracy was infinitely preferable to a dictatorship, particular to a fascist dictatorship, and believed that the workers' parties, if conditions were not favourable for a revolution, were obliged to defend democracy from its enemies on the extreme right.[17] That Toller should have given his own views on this subject to Kilman, a character whose views he otherwise rejected, underlines the

point that it is a mistake to interpret Karl Thomas as the author's mouthpiece in this play. In this scene, Thomas may be depicted as morally superior to Kilman, but that does not mean that Toller is in complete sympathy with the political ideas he advances in opposing Kilman. Quite the reverse. In his various confrontations with his other former comrades, Kroll, Berg and Meller, Thomas emerges as the clear loser each time, his political philosophy shown to be hopelessly out of date and utopian and he himself an impractical dreamer.

In scene two, Eva Berg, Thomas's lover during the time of the revolution, is no longer the somewhat naive and idealistic girl she was shown to be in the 'Vorspiel', but a mature, confident and independent young woman. Now a trades union official, she spends most of her time doing patient, routine, unspectacular 'Kleinarbeit', work which Thomas despises and considers to be a betrayal of revolutionary principle, but which she sees as a vital part of the revolutionary struggle. Depressed and demoralised after his confrontation with Kilman, Thomas wants to turn his back on politics completely and begs Eva to do the same, to go with him somewhere, to Greece, to India, to Africa or Bali, somewhere where the people know nothing of the class struggle, but where there are people who 'sind, nur sind. In deren Augen Sonne und Sterne kreisen, leuchtend'. (p. 49) However, Eva mocks his proposal as sheer romanticism and tells him that this is a hopeless attempt to flee from what she believes to be their fate:

> *EVA BERG*: Du betrügst dich. Schon morgen zernagte dich Ungeduld, Sehnsucht nach dem ... Schicksal
> *KARL THOMAS*: Schicksal?
> *EVA BERG*: Weil wir nicht loskommen. Weil wir nur atmen können in dieser Luft von Kampf und Fabriken und Städten. Weil wir eingingen sonst wie gefangene Tiere. Denk nach, Karl. (p. 49)

While Thomas recognises the truth of Eva's words he is unable to draw the same practical conclusions from them that she does, and continues to cling to the idea that it

is somehow possible to shut himself off from the affairs of the world by retreating into the private sphere. Having failed to persuade Eva to flee, he then tries to persuade her that all they need is each other, that love by itself can provide the answer to the problems they face. 'Du sollst mir Morgen sein und Traum der Zukunft', he tells her, 'Dich, dich will ich, nichts weiter'. (p. 49) Eva, however, not only dismisses the notion that she should abandon the struggle, but tells Karl quite bluntly that he can no longer consider her to be his lover and that he will have to find somewhere else to live. When he asks if she no longer belongs to him she replies:

> *EVA BERG*: Gehören? Das Wort ist abgestorben. Keiner gehört dem andern.
> *KARL THOMAS*: Verzeih, ich hab ein falsches Wort gewählt. Nahmst du mich nicht auf wie deinen Geliebten?
> *EVA BERG*: Ach, du meinst, weil ich mit dir geschlafen habe?
> *KARL THOMAS*: Bindet das nicht?
> EVA BERG: Ein Blick, den ich mit fremden Menschen tausche auf wehender Straße kann tiefer mich an ihn binden, als irgendeine vage Liebesnacht. Umarmung verpflichtet zu nichts. Mann nicht und Frau nicht. Umarmung kann Aufbruch sein und Begräbnis zugleich. Oder nur Laune, schönes Spiel. (p. 50)

Given that Karl is not only her former lover but a party comrade, Berg's lack of sympathy, a harshness verging on cruelty, is not only surprising but somewhat out of character. Quite clearly, what Toller sought to give voice to through this figure was his own deep misgivings, misgivings he never completely overcame, about *neue Sachlichkeit*, the literary trend which had replaced Expressionism, his feeling that the objectivity and detachment this movement strove for was often indistinguishable from callous indifference, both in the personal and the political sphere.[18] Yet despite this, it would be wrong to take Toller's implied criticism of Berg's aloofness here as indicating that he rejected her political philosophy too. She may be cold and distant but she has been forced to become so in order to survive, a lesson that Thomas too will have to learn if he wants to survive. He will have to recognise, as she has, that the individual is powerless to

change material reality and that the revolutionary who adapts his or her tactics to suit that reality is not a traitor but a pragmatist. When Thomas begins to wax lyrical about the revolution, and to lament the fact that the flame of revolution has been extinguished, Eva rebukes him for his lack of insight, telling him that he is mistaken, for the flame still glows only differently, 'unpathetischer'. Her advice to Thomas is go to the workers, to find a job and to try and overcome his fear 'vor dem Tag draußen', (p. 52) adding as a warning:

> Entweder du gewinnst Kraft zu neuem Beginn oder du gehst zugrunde.
> Aus Mitleid dich in falschen Träumen halten wäre Verbrechen. (p. 52)

Eva has a much firmer character than Thomas and does not allow herself to be daunted or frightened by reality, no matter how unfavourable, but manages to find within herself the strength to carry on the struggle 'dennoch'. Toller reinforces this point at the end of this scene when he has the two react in very different ways to the news that Eva has been sacked for having had the temerity to address a group of women workers currently locked out by their employer. Both Eva and Karl know that Kilman is behind this, his collusion with the bosses having been revealed in an earlier scene:

> *KARL THOMAS*: Dieser Kerl!
> *EVA BERG*: Es wundert dich? Wer mit Lehm patzt, muß kneten.
> *KARL THOMAS*: Bist du überzeugt nun, Eva? Komm. Hier liegt ein Kursbuch. Ich hab etwas Geld. Wir fahren noch heute Nacht. Fort! Nur fort, nur fort!
> *EVA BERG*: Du sprichst von uns beiden? Nichts hat sich geändert. Ich werde irgendwo Arbeit finden. Glaubst du im Ernst, ich würde die Kameraden im Stich lassen?
> *KARL THOMAS*: Verzeih.
> *EVA BERG*: Erzähl mir gelegentlich, wo du gelandet bist. (p. 59)

Again, Berg's final comment, another expression of her indifference towards Karl, should not be allowed to distract attention away from the more important fact that it is *her*

political arguments which carry the day while Thomas's standpoint is shown as being utterly pessimistic. Only if it is accepted that Toller himself was utterly pessimistic when he wrote the play — and there is no evidence to support such an assumption — would it be possible to identify him with Thomas.[19] In any case, the internal evidence of the following scene provides more than enough support for the view that it was not Thomas but his former comrades who Toller intended should be viewed in a positive light.

Set in a working-class tavern in the east end of a 'Großstadt', this scene takes place on the final day of a campaign to elect the country's new President,[20] its main function being to bring into sharp focus the political differences between Thomas and Albert Kroll, the revolutionary romantic and the hard-headed realist, to test the validity of the tactical approach each favours. Both men are, of course, delighted to see each other again, but quickly discover that they do not have as much in common as they might have imagined. While it is clear that both still desire the same end, socialism, there is a gulf separating them when it comes to the question of means. Like Eva Berg, Kroll too has adapted well to the new situation in which he finds himself and understands that the time is not ripe for revolutionary sloganising, that the task at the moment is to build the revolutionary party, to extend its support and influence, and to achieve this by whatever means are available. While holding firm to his revolutionary beliefs and refusing to succumb to any illusions about democracy, Kroll, together with his party comrades, has thrown himself wholeheartedly into the electoral campaign, fighting hard to ensure as many votes as possible for his candidate. As far as Thomas is concerned, however, participation in the democratic process is not only a waste of time but a betrayal of revolutionary principle. Whereas Kroll is indignant to learn that Kilman has manipulated the electoral system to deny the vote to 300 workers in a local chemical factory, Thomas reacts with indifference, replying to Kroll's suggestion that they elect a delegation to

lodge a complaint with the minister by saying simply 'Meinetwegen. Was liegt daran'. (p. 65) 'Was geht mich die Wahl an', Thomas exclaims, appealing to Kroll, 'Dein Glauben zeig mir, den alten, der Erde und Himmel und Sterne fortfegte', (p. 67) to which Kroll replies:

> *ALBERT KROLL*: Du meinst, den hab ich nicht mehr? Soll ich dir aufzählen, wie oft wir ausbrechen wollten aus den verfluchten Sielen? Soll ich dir die Namen nennen der alten Kameraden die ermordert wurden eingesperrt, gehetzt?
> *KARL THOMAS*: Nur der Glaube zählt.
> *ALBERT KROLL*: Wir wollen keine Seligkeit im Himmel. Man muß sehen lernen und sich dennoch nicht unterbekommen lassen. (p. 67)

Unlike Thomas, Kroll has learnt from the experience of the failure of the revolution. He knows that society cannot be changed by a tiny, isolated minority, but that revolutionary ideas can only succeed if they have the backing of a substantial section of the working class.[21] He and his comrades are still fighting, he tells Thomas, but admits that their numbers are still too few. 'Die meisten haben vergessen' he explains, 'wollen ihre Ruhe. Wir müssen Kameraden gewinnen'. (p. 66) When Thomas points to the hundreds of thousands of unemployed, implying thereby that these people at least should be open to revolutionary solutions, Kroll counters by making the following interesting point: 'Schleicht sich Hunger zur einen Tür rein, schleicht sich Verstand zur andern Tür raus'. (p. 66) Again, this argument was one Toller himself had been at pains to make in his writings on the rise of National Socialism. Whereas many Communist leaders had imagined that increasing social misery and mass unemployment would have a radicalising effect on the working class, that almost automatically it would cause large numbers to seek refuge in their party, Toller rightly suspected that the main beneficiaries would, in fact, be the Nazis.[22] It is important to draw attention to this point here, for, once more, it helps counter the argument that it is Thomas and Thomas alone who represents Toller's

standpoint in the play. However, this argument can be even more firmly countered by reference to Thomas's suggestion that what the workers need to rouse them from their lethargy is some sort of terrorist act. Having told Kroll that their whole strategy is false and that he is no longer willing to be part of it, Karl goes on to argue that something must happen, that 'Einer [...] ein Beispiel geben [muß]':

> Einer muß sich opfern. Dann werden die Lahmen rennen. Tage und Nächte habe ich die Fäuste gegen meinen Schädel getrommelt. Jetzt weiß ich, was ich zu tun habe. (p. 68)

When it is borne in mind that Toller always opposed violence expect in some clearly defined circumstances, it really is surprising that so many commentators should have interpreted Thomas as the standard bearer of the author's own view in this play.

The rest of the scene in the tavern-cum-polling station serves to reinforce the futility of Thomas's strategy and to undermine his political isolation. Kroll, of course, rejects his proposed solution and tells him that what is needed is not individual acts of terrorism but mass action, that the revolution is not accomplished by one man in one day but by 'Alle. Jeden Tag'. (p. 68) Kroll tells his friend that, with the views he holds, he is no use to the workers' movement, and tries to convince him that while elections and 'revolutionäre Kleinarbeit' may not be the 'Tat' he, Thomas, wants they are a 'Sprungbrett zu Taten', and that they are 'Gut zur Musterung, mehr nicht'. (p. 68) But Thomas is not to be persuaded and denounces Kroll and his comrades as cowards, telling them that he has reconsidered his plan, having no desire to help 'eine Herde feiger Wahlspießer'.(p. 69) Kroll's sober and sensible reply to these intemperate remarks shows again where Toller's own sympathies lay:

> Du möchtest, daß um deinetwegen die Welt ein ewiges Feuerwerk sei, mit Raketen und Leuchtkugeln und Schlachtgetöse. Du bist der Feigling, nicht ich. (p. 69)

At the end of the scene, however, Toller does indicate that, while there may be no viable alternative to the course advocated by Kroll, there are dangers in being too staunchly committed to peaceful and democratic means. Mutter Meller, last seen in the 'Vorspiel' where she had shared the death cell with Thomas, Kroll, Berg and Kilman, turns up at the tavern, or rather is carried in there, having been beaten unconscious while putting up election posters for her party's candidate. One of the workers present expresses his indignation at the brutal treatment meted out to Frau Meller, and reminds the others that the republic is governed by a constitution, proclaiming that those responsible will have to answer for their actions. However, another worker asks quite simply 'Vor wem? Vorm Gevatter Richter?', saying to him 'Mensch, bist du naiv'. (p. 76) What Toller wanted to establish here was that the left would be making a serious mistake if it believed in the impartiality of the bourgeois state, or if it imagined that the ruling class was guided in its actions not by self-interest but by a belief in democracy and a commitment to the rules of fair play.[23] Thomas too, of course, is enraged both by what has happened to Meller and what he sees as Kroll's inability or unwillingness to do anything about it. He becomes even more enraged when Kroll prevents him from shooting the man who committed the deed, Rand, their jailor in the 'Vorspiel', now an *agent provocateur* and a dangerous, reactionary anti-semite. 'Sollen wir alles schlucken?', Thomas screams at Kroll, asking him 'Warum bremst du?', to which Kroll replies 'Weil ich mit Volldampf fahren will, wenns Zeit ist. Es gehört Kraft dazu, sich zu gedulden'. (p. 79) What is interesting here is that the argument Kroll uses is similar to that which Kilman had used during his conversation with Thomas in act 2. Responding to Thomas's charge that he was governing against the interests of his natural supporters, Kilman had said 'Es gehört mitunter Mut dazu, gegen das Volk zu regieren. Mehr als auf die Barrikaden zu gehen'. (p. 40) In Thomas's eyes there is no difference between Kroll and Kilman, for both

preach the need for patience, both argue that socialism cannot triumph until conditions for it have matured. But what he refuses or is unable to recognise is that Kroll is sincere in this belief while Kilman uses it simply to disguise both from the masses and from himself his loss of faith. It could be argued, of course, that Toller himself saw no difference between the reformist renegade, Kilman, and the pragmatic revolutionary, Kroll.[24] However, this is not the general tone of this act which ends with Kroll telling Thomas he is a fool for his lack of understanding and Thomas himself accepting Kroll's advice that the only way to regain his political perspective is to get a job and to get back into the 'Alltag'. (p. 79)

Thomas's return to the 'Alltag' is as a waiter alongside Mutter Meller in the so-called 'Grand Hotel', which represents the Weimar Republic as Toller saw it, a place utterly lacking in decent values, full of greed and corruption, injustice and exploitation, a place which, as no-one apart from Thomas seems to be aware, is teetering on the very brink of disaster. In an upper chamber Kilman is busily entertaining some important guests, a banker and his son, two cynical representatives of the bosses class who flatter and bribe the Minister and his family in order to get the cheap state credits they desire. Kilman, of course, likes to pretend, or perhaps he really believes, that he is above any form of bribery and so refuses the expensive present the banker has offered his wife, reminding his guest of 'die bösen Zungen' and explaining that he cannot allow even the whiff of suspicion to surround him. (p. 83) Feigning innocence, the banker agrees to withdraw his present but succeeds in ensnaring Kilman with an offer of some free investment advice, flattering him by telling that 'die paar Batzen' he receives from the state are not really fit compensation for a man of his talents. (p. 90) Later on, as the banker seeks to reassure his son that their venture has been a success, Toller takes even more direct aim at what he felt were the irredeemably corrupt politicians of the SPD:

> *SOHN*: Was ich dir gesagt habe.
> *BANKIER*: Weil sie das Etui nicht nahmen?. Sahest du nicht, wie er einschnappte, als ich von der Anlage des Geldes sprach? Mein Lieber, man hört nicht jeden Tag Exzellenz hin und Exzellenz her. Ja, wenns noch Grafentitel und Orden gäbe ... Heute ist die einzige Fundierung Geld. Hat einer die ersten Hunderttausend, hängt er den Idealismus an den Hutständer. Beruhige dich, er bekommt sein Konto, und ich bekomme die billigen Staatskredite. (p. 94)

Meanwhile, downstairs among the serving class, Thomas is finding great difficulty in adjusting to the demands of the 'Alltag', in particular to the seeming indifference shown by his fellow workers to the gross inequalities and corruption which surround them. When, for instance, he inquires why the hotel 'Betriebsrat' has done nothing about the difference in quality of the food served to the guests and to the staff, one of his workmates, the 'Hausdiener', replies quite simply, 'Weil er in Ellenbogenfüllung bleiben muß mit dem Hoteldirektor' adding that he could not care less one way or the other, that he expects 'von niemand nichts' and that his kind are in any case always 'der Ausgeschmierte'. (p. 93) The same sort of resigned indifference is shown by the head waiter who, in response to an ironic comment by Thomas about the fine party being thrown by the Minister, tells him he has no idea what he is talking about, saying 'Wenn er mit dem Bankier speist, wird er wohl seine Gründe haben. Sonst wäre er kein Minister'. (p. 93) At the end of the scene, with his patience at an end, Thomas declares to Mutter Meller that he is unable to stay calm, cannot wait, as Kroll had asked him to, until events have altered the consciousness of the masses:

> Beruhigen? Nur ein Lump beruhigt sich. Sag jetzt Narr, wie Albert zu mir gesagt hat. Ich hab mir vorgenommen, mich zu gedulden. Einen halben Tag war ich hier. Ich hab den Alltag gesehen, im Frack und im Nachthemd. Ihr schlaft! Ihr schlaft! Aufwecken muß man euch. Ich pfeife auf eure Vernunft! Wenn die Klugen aussehen wie ihr, will ich den Narren spielen! (p. 95)

Act 4 opens with Thomas standing in the doorway of the hotel, its façade

transformed into that of a newspaper building, and as he stands there he comments on the news items which appear in 'Leuchtschrift' on the roof of the building opposite. News items such as Kilman having been elected honourary chairman of the press association, the same press, Thomas remarks, which 8 years previously had described him as a 'geisteskranker Narr' and depicted him with a 'blutbeflecktes Maul, Messer zwischen den Zähnen'. (p. 96) Then there comes the news that 20,000 miners have been made redundant without notice, news which causes him to declare:

> Recht so! Hunger muß euch an der Kandare zerren, daß ihr aufschreit. Noch tiefer müßt ihr leiden. Noch tiefer geknechtet werden. Vielleicht hilft das. (p. 96)

A report on the threat to Europe posed by 20 million armed Chinese brings forth much the same reaction, with Thomas almost relishing the prospect of a new war, saying 'Vielleicht zerfleischt sich alles im Untergang. Es wäre eine Lösung'. (p. 96) With his mental balance clearly affected by what he has experienced and unable to see any other way out, Thomas decides to murder Kilman, hoping that this act will rouse the masses from their apathy. Before he can do so, however, someone else makes an unsuccessful attempt on Kilman's life. Initially, Thomas calls out 'Bravo! Zuvorgekommen', but is forced to question his enthusiasm after he asks a man he meets by chance on the street why the attempt has taken place:

> *HERR*: Warum? Weil er unser Land an die Juden verkauft, weil er ein Revolutionär, weil er ein Bolschewik ist. (p. 98)

Thomas is amazed to learn that the man he considers a traitor to the workers' cause is regarded in right-wing circles as a dangerous subversive, a Bolshevik. Again, Toller's clear aim here was to warn of the dangers of ultra-radicalism, to remind the left that, however strongly they might disagree with the policies pursued by the Social Democrats

in government, there was a world of difference between them and the extreme right which itself made no distinction between the various shades of its opponents, and which like the 'Herr' quoted above, regarded even the most moderate of socialists as a threat to its own social and economic interests. Significantly, however, Thomas's insight into this does not lead him to draw any new political conclusions, does not, that is, give him the strength to return to the struggle, but merely upsets even further his already delicate mental state. Convinced that the whole world, himself included, has gone mad, he is about to shoot himself when he suddenly realises that the best place for him would be back in the asylum. At precisely this point, however, he is arrested on the suspicion of having been involved in the attack on Kilman, two policemen in search of the assassin having found on the grass the revolver he has just thrown away. Unable to convince either the policemen or the investigating magistrate that he had nothing to do with the affair, Thomas is sent back to the 'Irrenhaus', back to his old psychiatrist, Professor Lüdin, whose job it is to determine whether or not the suspect is mentally fit to stand trial.

The final scene does not advance the narrative in any meaningful way, its main purpose being to review what has gone on before and to allow Thomas to come to a clearer understanding of the nature of the society outside the walls of Lüdin's madhouse. Indeed, the central theme is that there is no barrier separating the madhouse from the world outside, that society has been transformed into a madhouse by the likes of Lüdin and the social class he represents. Lüdin himself is fully conscious of this. In act one, when Thomas was being prepared for release, he had explained that, by rights, most people should be in the lunatic asylum but that the state has no interest in keeping them there. On the contrary. 'Mit einem kleinen Schuß Verrücktheit', he says, 'werden die Menschen gute Ehemänner. Mit zwei Schuß Verrücktheit werden sie sozial', (p. 24) the

only exceptions to this rule, of course, being the 'Irrenärzte, die richtige Diagnosen stellen'. (p. 112) When Thomas, in an attempt to see things in perspective, begins to tell Lüdin what he has experienced on the outside, to explain to him how everyone he had met seemed mad, the Professor explains that, with one exception, all the people concerned, the guests, or rather inmates, of the 'Grand Hotel', are, in fact, quite normal. Significantly, the only exception, the only inmate Lüdin describes as abnormal is Albert Kroll. On his release from the asylum, Thomas explains, all he heard from Albert, a man who in the revolution had once driven back a whole company of White Guards armed only with a revolver, was 'Man muß warten können'. (p. 112) Lüdin describes this as normal until Thomas adds, 'Und der dabei schwur, er sei der Revolution treu geblieben'. (p. 113) This, Lüdin admits, is most definitely abnormal behaviour, declaring that it is probably due to 'leichte dementia praecox'. (p. 113) It is important to emphasise this point here, for it counters the argument that Toller intended Kroll and the other revolutionaries to be seen in a negative light. In this final scene Thomas actually comes to realise that it is Lüdin who is mad and that his former comrades are not only perfectly sane but the only ones whose ideas hold out any hope for the future. Lüdin, however, derides Thomas for having become involved in the mass struggle in the first place and, revealing himself to be a true Social Darwinist, describes the masses as a herd of swine which 'zum Kober [drängt], wenns zu fressen gibt' and which 'sich im Dreck [sühlt], wenn der Wanst vollgeschlagen ist'. (p. 114) Continuing to mock Thomas's idealism, Lüdin asks him what he hoped the masses would do even supposing that Kilman's murder could have roused them from their lethargy:

> Was versprachen Sie sich davon? Was sollten die Aufgeweckten tun? Die Welt ändern? Mein Lieber, wenn die Natur nicht gewollt hätte, daß etliche weniger essen, würde es wohl keine Armut geben. Wer was tüchtiges leistet, braucht nicht zu hungern. Mit Ihren Ideen würden die Menschen Schmarotzer und Faulpelze. Die Natur hat es schon wohltätig eingerichtet.

(p. 114)

It is Lüdin's behaviour and his inhumane arguments which help convince Thomas that his old ideas are still valid, and that it is not he but capitalist society which is irrational and insane. In the last few lines, his mind finally clear, even if only for a brief period, Thomas shows that he understands the need to return to the fray, and that he must rejoin his comrades in their day-to-day struggle to prepare the ground for the revolution:

> Ich sehe alles klar. In Zeiten wie damals marschierte man unter der Fahne des Paradieses. Heute muß man sich auf den irdischen Chausseen die Stiefel ablaufen. (p. 120)

To drive home the point that it is the position advocated by the likes of Berg and Kroll which is the only way forward, Toller has a huge crowd demonstrate for Thomas's release outside of the asylum where he is being held, a demonstration clearly intended as a reminder of the immense latent power of the mass movement and to convey the message that revolutionary sentiment was not dead, merely sleeping.

Karl Leydecker concedes that Thomas does come to some sort of political insight at the end of the play but insists that this is nebulous in kind, being at best 'a rejection of expressionist idealism in favour of an unspecified down-to-earth political activity'.[25] Moreover, even this message is compromised, he claims, since it is delivered not by a hard-headed and practical revolutionary, but by a man who at this point takes on the mantle of the messianic Expressionist leader familiar from Toller's earlier plays.[26] Thomas, in other words, does not come round to the position of Berg and Kroll, these having been portrayed in an entirely negative light throughout and their political stance rejected. Leydecker strengthens this argument by drawing attention to the apparent flaw in an interpretation of the play first advanced by Toller himself and subsequently taken up by Dove and others. Discussing the various endings he had considered for *Hoppla*,

Toller claimed that in his original version Thomas, having gained the new political insight described above, wanted to leave the asylum and return to his comrades but was forcibly restrained by Lüdin.[27] Leydecker points out, however, that in the first published text, Thomas makes no attempt to leave the asylum, that, recognising the madness of the world, he himself descends once more into madness, the clearest sign of which is that he breaks into the same sort of hysterical laughter which had signalled his mental breakdown in the 'Vorspiel'.[28] As the curtain comes down he is actually taken back to the isolation cell, having been categorised by Lüdin as 'verrückt' and 'lebensunfähig'. (p. 121) It is manifestly true that Thomas is not forcibly prevented from leaving the asylum and it is legitimate to ask why Toller felt it necessary to say he did. Was it because, as Leydecker argues, he wanted to suggest that at the time he wrote *Hoppla* he was less in thrall to the ideas of Expressionism, had a more sober view of political reality than was actually the case?[29] There can be no definitive answer to this question, only speculation. In any case, irrespective of what happens to Thomas, whether or not he does go mad at the end or not, this in not decisive in answering the question as to whose position Toller endorses in the play? To argue that, because Thomas goes mad, the position of Berg, Meller and Kroll is rejected, is to posit too close an identity between Thomas and Toller. Moreover, this claim stands up only if it is accepted that Berg, Kroll and Meller *are* to be viewed as negative figures. As has been shown here, however, this is most definitely not the case. Admittedly, Toller shows disdain for *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and for what he perceived was its political and social indifference, in the figure of Eva Berg. Yet this is perhaps the only negative thing he has to say about the group of characters to which she belongs. For the most part they are shown as dedicated revolutionaries who are doing their best in difficult circumstances to defend the immediate interests of the working class while never taking their eyes off the long-term goal. Though he too is honestly committed to the same

ideas, Thomas is out of step with the times and imagines that a revolutionary mood can be summoned up at will, and that the masses can be brought to the barricades by a stupid act of terrorism. In the final scene, he realises his mistake and understands, even if only vaguely, that he has to undertake not some 'unspecified down-to-earth political activity', but the kind of concrete revolutionary work in which Kroll and Berg are engaged.[30] To repeat, whether or not he does go mad at the end — and his laughter could be interpreted as a different kind of laughter from that heard in the 'Vorspiel', a laughter which expresses not insanity but clarity of insight — is not of decisive importance. More important is the general tone of the rest of the play which shows that Toller finally took leave of the idealism of his early Expressionist period and realised that social change, revolution, would be brought about by the masses themselves and not by any one individual, no matter how profound an inner transformation he had experienced.

1. *Hoppla, wir leben! Ein Vorspiel und fünf Akte* (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1927). This, the final published version, is reprinted in *GW*, III, pp. 8-117.

2. See, for instance, Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism in the Works of Ernst Toller* (New York, Berne, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 329-30; Cecil Davies *The Plays of Ernst Toller: A Revaluation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996) pp. 330-54. In her interpretation of the play Martha Gustavson Marks writes:

> In many ways one could interpret *Hoppla, wir leben!* and the characterisation of Karl Thomas as Toller's renunciation artistically of his earlier expressionistic style in his writing, in his demeanour and in his earlier political views.

Martha Gustavson Marks, 'Ernst Toller: His Fight Against Fascism' (Unpublished dissertation, Wisconsin, 1980), p. 185.

3. Gustavson Marks writes:

> It is this group of revolutionaries and not Karl Thomas which represent Toller's ideas. If Toller's original ending in which Karl recognises the necessity of their political approach had been used for the Piscator production and in the published play, Toller's intention would have been much clearer to his audience.

Martha Gustavson Marks, 'Ernst Toller: His Fight Against Fascism' (Unpublished dissertation, Wisconsin, 1980), p. 185-86. Jost Hermand too in a perceptive article on *Hoppla, wir leben!* writes:

> Die kleinen, mühsam arbeitenden Parteigenossen, wie Albert Kroll, Eva Berg und Mutter Meller in *Hoppla, wir leben!* [sind] durchaus positiv gesehen.

'Ernst Toller: *Hoppla wir leben!*', in *Unbequeme Literatur. Eine Beispielreihe*, edited by Jost Hermand, (Heidelberg: Stiehm, 1971), pp. 128-49. This view is one shared by Dorothy Klein, who also, however, makes the following important point:

> Der entscheidende Gesichtspunkt, unter dem man dies Drama betrachten muß, ist indessen, daß Karl Thomas, eindeutig die Hauptperson, nicht zugleich den Träger der Aussage von *Hoppla, wir leben!* darstellt, nicht 'Held' im Sinn der früheren Dramen ist. Dies bedeutet innerhalb von Tollers dramatischem Schaffen ein absolutes Novum. Wie stark sich Haltung und künstlerischer Formwille des Dichters gewandelt haben, läßt sich insbesondere an der Tatsache abschätzen, daß Karl Thomas in vielen wichtigen Eigenschaften und Gedanken eine Fortführung der früheren Dramenhelden Tollers ist. Deutlicher als durch ihr Erscheinen in verändertem Rahmen und unter negativen Vorzeichen hätte er die Absage an frühere Ansichten und einen grundlegenden Nauanfang wohl kaum ausdrücken können.

'Der Wandel der dramatischen Darstellungsform im Werk Ernst Tollers (1919-1930) (Unpublished dissertation, Bochum, 1968), p. 124.

4. See Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism*, p. 301.

5. Karl Leydecker, 'The Laughter of Karl Thomas: Madness and Politics in the First Version of Ernst Toller's *Hoppla, wir leben!*', in *The Modern Language Review*, 93 (1998), 121-32.

6. *Hoppla, wir leben! Ein Vorspiel und vier Akte* (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1927). This version was ready for publication but was withdrawn shortly after Erwin Piscator became involved in the revision process. Piscator's involvement came after it was agreed with Toller that *Hoppla, wir leben!* would open his *Piscatorbühne* in the *Theater am Nollendorfplatz*, Piscator having learnt that his first choice, Wilhelm Herzog's *Rings um den Staatsanwalt*, was not going to be completed in time. The first performance of the play there, on 3 September 1927, was intended as the premiere, but some technical difficulties, in particular with the revolving stage, delayed progress, so that the first production was that held in the *Kammerspiele* in Hamburg, on 1 September. For Piscator's account of his collaboration with Toller see his memoir, *Das politische Theater* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1963), pp. 146-59. I am indebted to Dr. Leydecker for providing me with a photocopy of this version of the play.

7. Leydecker, 'The Laughter of Karl Thomas', p. 123.

8. Penelope Willard, who has also studied in detail Toller's original version, also posits an identity between Toller and Thomas:

> Toller's scarcely concealed personal empathy with his hero and his interest in the tragic fate of the individual whose political ideas are out of step with the times, are even more evident in the four-act original. [...] In this version, particularly in the action surrounding the assassination and in the ending of the play, Thomas is clearly the focus of the play. His subjective view of the world provides the criteria by which the others are judged. The alternative positions to Thomas' extreme demands are presented in an unsympathetic or unimpressive light and interpreted as either opportunism or lethargy and resignation.

'"Gefühl und Erkenntnis": Ernst Toller's Revisions of His Dramas' (unpublished dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 1988), p. 142.

Interestingly, the East German critic Hans Marnette, though he did not have access to the 4-act original, also interprets Thomas as the sole carrier of Toller's ideas, indeed, he even sees Toller's own fate as being foreshadowed in that which befell his fictional creation:

> Karl Thomas ist mit Toller identisch [...], der sich im Laufe seines Lebens immer mehr von der Arbeiterklasse löste und schließlich in eine tödliche Isolierung geriet, die ebenso zum entscheidenden Grund für seinen Selbstmord wurde wie für den des Karl Thomas.

Hans Marnette, 'Untersuchung zum Inhalt-Form Problem in Ernst Tollers Dramen', (unpublished dissertation, Potsdam, 1963), p. 307.

Walter Sokel too sees *Hoppla, wir leben!* as an expression of Toller's pessimism. Like Leydecker, he also posits an absolute identity between Toller and Thomas and argues that the play shows the collapse of Toller's belief in the possibility of building a society based on 'menschlicher Solidarität':

> In *Hoppla, wir leben!* [...] siegt das unbedingte nein, der vollkommene

> Pessimismus und die Verzweiflung. Menschliche Solidarität ist auf die Dauer unmöglich, die Kluft zwischen Mensch und Mensch ist unüberbrückbar, der Irrsinn des Herzens, dem das Menschengeschlecht zum Opfer gefallen ist, unheilbar.

'Ernst Toller', in *Deutsche Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* edited by Otto Mann and Wolfgang Rothe (Berne-Munich: Francke, 1967), pp. 299-315 (pp. 313-14).

9. Leydecker, 'The Laughter of Karl Thomas', pp. 128-29.

10. For an interesting account of the version of *Hoppla, wir leben!* staged by Piscator see Sheila McAlpine, *Visual Aids in the Production of the First Piscator-Bühne: 1927-28*, Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 30, Theater-, Film- und Fernsehwissenschaften, vol. 40 (Frankfurt am Main, Berne, New York, Paris, Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 69-147. Drawing heavily on Piscator's prompt book for this production, this article reveals much about the nature and extent of his influence. The prompt-book is in the *Akadamie der Künste*, Berlin.

11. Leydecker, 'The Laughter of Karl Thomas', p. 123. Marks, by contrast, writes:

> Where else in German literature of the 1920s can one find so many clear warnings about the pending fate of the Weimar Republic?

Martha Gustavson Marks, 'Ernst Toller', p. 198.

12. There is little doubt that Toller really did favour the original 4-act version over the one he revised with Piscator. In September 1927, for instance, he wrote to Dr. Alwin Kronacher, theatre manager and director at the *Altes Theater* in Leipzig, where *Hoppla, wir leben!* was shortly to be staged, expressing the hope that this new production would be seen as a kind of *Uraufführung* since it was to be shorn of the amendments suggested by Piscator and included the original ending. One thing in particular Toller hoped to emphasise was the role of Albert Kroll, writing: 'Die Figur Krolls, die in Berlin viel zu wenig herausgekommen ist, ist doch recht wichtig'. See Toller's unpublished letter to Dr Kronacher, director of the *Altes Theater* in Leipzig, dated 19 September 1927, *Akademie der Künste*, *Sammlung Ernst Toller*, Berlin.

It should be noted too that Toller and Piscator quarrelled bitterly over almost every aspect of the play and production, the technical and artistic as well as the political. Toller recalled, for instance, entering the theatre one day during rehearsals to hear dialogue being spoken which was unfamiliar to him, leading him to think that *Hoppla* had been rejected. However, after hearing the actors using the names from his play he asked what was going on only to be told that Piscator had decided to insert a new scene which had been written by his theatre collective. See 'The German Theatre Today: Herr Ernst Toller and the Decline of Drama under the Nazis', in *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1934, p. 13. See also Toller's footnote to his article 'Arbeiten', *GW*, I, p. 147.

13. It was probably Piscator's influence that led Toller to give more weight in the revised version to the reactionary 'Bankier', to 'Graf Lande' and to the 'Kriegsminister', in particular to make a more explicit connection between them and the person who carried out the assassination attempt on Kilman. (In the 5-act version Kilman is actually shot dead). In Act 1 of the revised version, for instance, the following interesting exchange takes place:

> *KRIEGSMINISTER*: Es geht Ihnen gut?

> *GRAF LANDE*: Die Frontbünde warten.
> *KRIEGSMINISTER*: Nicht hitzköpfig werden, Graf. Keine Torheiten. Die Zeiten des Losschlagens sind vorüber. Was wir fürs Vaterland erreichen wollen, können wir legal erreichen.

GW, III, p. 31.

14. Communist critics welcomed *Hoppla, wir leben!* as representing a definite step forward in Toller's political development, but were still very far from satisfied with the play. Alexander Abusch, for instance, wrote:

> Er ist gestalterisch dem Proletariat näher gekommen. Er hat in die Arbeiterviertel hineingehorcht und einige lebendige Figuren nachgezeichnet, z.B. Mutter Meller, Albert Kroll, den Provokateur Rand. Neben der pathetischen Deklamation in seinen früheren Stücken sind in diesem Stück schon Ansätze proletarischer Realität sichtbar. Daß Toller die glänzende dichterische Idee, die revolutionäre Ungeduld eines seit 1919 gefangenen Arbeiters gegen die Zustände der "rationalisierten" kapitalistichen Gesellschaft von heute prallen zu lassen, *realistisch* nicht bewältigen konnte, war zu erwarten. Dazu hat er noch nicht genügend das Proletariat erlebt.

Rote Fahne, 7 September 1927. For a selection of reviews of this and Toller's other plays see *Die Rote Fahne. Kritik, Theorie, Feuilleton 1918-1933*, edited by Manfred Brauneck (Munich: Fink, 1973).

15. One of the most bold and innovative elements of the Piscator production, one, however, which in the view of some critics tended to detract from the play itself, was the use of film to augment what was being shown on stage. At the beginning of the play, and in the intervals between the acts, film of contemporary events and some from the recent past, events, that is, alluded to in the play, were projected onto a huge on-stage screen. For details of this and other technical innovations see Martin Kane, 'Erwin Piscator's production of *Hoppla, We're Alive*', in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama. Aspects of popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976*, edited by David Brady, Louis James and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), pp. 189-200.

16. In *EJID*, for instance, Toller wrote:

> Manche Sozialisten verspotten die Idee der Freiheit als eine bürgerliche Illusion, sie unterscheiden nicht zwischen Freiheit als Lebengefühl, als Gewissen, das dem Menschen Würde und Selbstachtung verleiht, und Freiheit als Lebensordnung, als Lebensform. Jede Form bedeutet Begrenzung. Jede politische und soziale Ordnung muß notwendig individuelle Freiheit einschränken. Arbeiter und Bauer haben dafür feineren Instinkt.

Ibid., p. 153.

17. In 1920, in a letter from prison, Toller was already writing of the importance of defending the gains of the revolutionary period, irrespective of how minimal these might be:

> Wir [here he is writing of himself as a member of the USPD] sind vorerst gezwungen, für die demokratische Republik einzutreten, in allen

> Verwaltungsfragen mitzuarbeiten, ja, wir werden vielleicht gezwungen sein, in absehbarer Zeit, unter völliger Wahrung unserer Selbständigkeit und bei allen Sicherungen, mit den Mehrheitssozialisten ein kleines Stück Zweckweg zusammenzugehen. Uns fällt die undankbare Aufgabe zu, auch die minimalen Errungenschaften zu verteidigen, wir können es nicht verantworten, mit großer Geste auf sie zu verzichten, weil wir "aufs Ganze" gehen. Die politische Entwicklung wird sprunghaft vor sich gehen, die wirtschaftliche nie. Der Wille der Arbeiter, die politische Macht zu erobern, muß gestählt werden, aber ebenso muß er die ökonomischen Gesetze erkennen lernen.

Undated letter to 'K', in *GW*, V, 49-50 (p. 49). It should be noted here too that Toller's call for an *Einheitsfront* of workers' organisations to defeat Hitler was, in essence, a call not to revolution — that would have to wait until the immediate danger had been defeated — but to defend what remained of Weimar democracy. He was bitterly critical of those, particularly the Communists, who claimed to see no difference between bourgeois democracy and fascist dictatorship. See *EJID*, p. 153.

18. Describing the development of German drama in the post-war period, Toller wrote with great insight about the social and psychological elements which had undermined Expressionism and fostered the growth of *neue Sachlichkeit* before going on to define his attitude towards this movement:

> Da der Geist [he means the *Geist* which informed much of Expressionist drama] nicht das Antlitz des Tages wandelte, da die alte Wirklichkeit mit der gleichen Abscheulichkeit, mit der gleichen Gier, mit der gleichen Raublust, mit den gleichen Gefahrenzonen aufs neue schaubar wurde, da der Friede, von allen ersehnt, sich in eine Fratze wandelte, hinter der der neue Krieg drohte, da der Geist wiederum zu Fassade und zum Gespött wurde, traten junge Dramatiker auf, die glaubten, die Idee habe im Kunstwerk überhaupt nichts zu suchen. Sie wollten "das Leben" gestalten, nichts als das "reine Leben". Sie übersahen, daß auch Ideenkämpfe Elemente des Lebens sind. "Das Leben" war für sie hemmungsloses Miteinander und Gegeneinander sexueller Triebe. Das chaotisch Sexuale wurde zum Mittelpunkt neuer Dramatik. Die Sprache wurde wieder naturalistisch, aber vom alten Naturalismus unterschied sie ein dynamisches Moment, das ihr einen eigentümlichen Rhythmus gab.
>
> Zweifellos übt auf die jüngsten deutschen Dramatiker Amerika Einfluß aus, aber der deutsche Amerikanismus stützt sich nicht auf die paar führenden, großen Meister Amerikas. Was übernommen wird, ist: Tempo, banaler Optimismus, Bezieungslosigkeit, kurz, jene "neue Sachlichkeit", die mit Nähe zu Menschen und Dingen wenig zu tun hat. Oft wird neue Sachlichkeit mit Reportage gleichgesetzt. Reportage hat ihre Bedeutung. Das Drama, wie alle Kunst, muß mehr sein, nämlich Verdichtung, Stufung und Gestalt. Erst daduch wird Reportage auch künstlerische Wahrheit.

'Bemerkungen zum deutschen Nachkriegsdrama' in *GW*, I, 126-30 (pp. 129-30). First published in, *Die literarische Welt*, 19 April 1929.

19. In February of 1927, just a few months before he began serious work on *Hoppla*, Toller attended the first congress of the 'Liga gegen die koloniale Unterdrückung' in Brussels. Though it may have overestimated the significance of this organisation, Toller's speech to

the congress displays not a trace of pessimism about the prospects for the revolutionary struggle against the capitalist-imperialist system. Quite the contrary:

> Wir sind keine Romantiker. Wir wissen genau — das hat uns die grausame Erfahrung des Krieges gezeigt —, daß der Geist blinden Gehorsams, der Geist der Knechtsseligkeit die Völker, daß im Rausche des Tages, im Taumel der Hetzlügen, die Menschen sich betäuben lassen und dem Rufe ihrer verbrecherischen Regierungen folgen und wahrscheinlich weiter folgen werden. Aber wie einst in Deutschland Karl Liebknecht, als er sein Stimme gegen den Krieg erhob, ein Einzelner war, den man verlachte, und dessen Stimme anwuchs zum drohenden Ruf und zur Tat der Millionen, so wird in einem neuen Krieg, wenn Ihr ihn wagt, Ihr Mächtigen der Erde, die Stimme der Wenigen, die sehend sind im Beginn, zur Stimme und Tat der Millionen werden und Euren Untergang um so rascher herbeiführen.

'Gegen Kolonialimperialismus', in *Quer Durch*, pp. 237-41 (p. 238).

20. The election contest alluded to here is that of April 1926 in which Hindenburg was elected *Reichspräsident*. Hindenburg's victory, one of enormous importance for the right wing, both in practical and symbolic terms, was due in part to the fact that the Communists decided to field their own candidate, Ernst Thälmann, who received 1.9 million votes, votes which, had they gone to Marx, the agreed candidate of the left and centre, would have handed victory to him.

21. Again, it is interesting to compare what Toller said on precisely this point in his article 'Weltrevolution', written as early as 1919. See *Quer Durch*, pp. 216-20 (p. 216).

22. In an article in which he described in great detail the ever increasing economic and social misery brought about by the Great Depression, Toller warned:

> Solches Elend wirkt nur bis zu einem gewissen Grad als kämpferischer Antrieb. Wird er zur alltäglichen Messenerscheinung, wirkt es retardierend, schwächt den Kampfwillen der Alten und schafft die Bereitschaft zum Landsknechtstum beim jungen Arbeitslosen.

'Zur deutschen Situation', in *GW*, I, 73-76 (p. 75). First published in *Information* (Zurich), June 1932, pp. 25-26.

23. Toller's whole experience since 1918 had, of course, taught him some valuable lessons about the alleged impartiality of the bourgeois state and the bourgeois system of justice. See his *Justiz. Erlebnisse* (Berlin: LitPol, 1979).

24. In his article 'Arbeiten' Toller wrote on this point:

> *Hoppla, wir leben!* heißt das erst Stück, das ich "in Freiheit" schrieb. Wieder war es der Zusammenprall des Menschen, der das Absolute unbedingt, noch heute verwirklichen will, mit den Kräften der Zeit und den Zeitgenossen, die die Verwirklichung aus Schwäche, Verrat, Feigheit aufgeben oder aus Kraft, Treue, Tapferkeit für spätere Tage vorbereiten. Karl Thomas versteht beide nicht, setzt ihre Motive und Taten gleich und geht unter.

GW, I, 135-49 (p. 145).

25. Leydecker, 'The Laughter of Karl Thomas', p. 130.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

27. In his *Politische Theater*, Piscator had claimed that one of the versions Toller had considered was that of Thomas's 'Freiwillige Rückkehr ins Gefängnis', *ibid.*, p. 148. Dismissing this idea as ridiculous, Toller wrote:

> Ich habe in der Zeit der Bearbeitung drei Schlüsse für möglich gehalten, niemals aber den der "Freiwilligen Rückkehr ins Gefängnis", der in dem Buch bedenkenlos mir unterschoben wird. In meiner ersten Fassung rennt Thomas, der die Welt von 1927 nicht verstand, ins Irrenhaus zum Psychiater, erkennt in der Unterredung mit dem Arzt, daß es zwei Arten von Narren gibt, die einen, die in Isolierzellen festgehalten werden, die anderen, die als Politiker und Militärs gegen die Menschheit lostoben. Da begreift er die alten Kameraden, die in zäher Alltagsarbeit, die Idee weiterführen, er will das Irrenhaus verlassen, aber, weil er begriffen, weil er zur Wirklichkeit die Beziehung des reifen Menschen gewonnen hat, läßt ihn der psychiatrische Beamte nicht mehr hinaus, jetzt erst sei er "staatsgefährlich" geworden, nicht vorher, da er ein unbequemer Träumer war.

'Arbeiten', *GW*, I, 147.

28. Leydecker, 'The Madness of Karl Thomas', p. 124. In the *Vorspiel*, after being told that the original death-sentence had been commuted to a prison sentence, Thomas breaks into hysterical laughter and is led off to the *Irrenhaus* where he spends the next 8 years. *GW*, *III*, 20-21.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 123 and 132.

30. Again, it is interesting to compare Toller's views on this question of *Kleinarbeit* as he expressed them as early as 1920:

> Man vergißt scheinbar, in welchem Stadium der Revolution wir uns befinden, daß uns nur zielklare, praktische Arbeit, vor allem praktische Kleinarbeit gegenwärtig übrigbleibt, ja, daß wir aus taktischen Gründen gezwungen sind, ein Arbeitsprogramm für die nächste Zeit aufzustellen, das als teilweises "Aufgeben" unserer revolutionären Ziele unklaren und böswilligen Köpfen erscheinen mag.

From a letter from prison an 'K', in *GW*, V, 49-50 (p. 49).

CHAPTER 7

FEUER AUS DEN KESSELN!

Subtitled *Ein Historisches Schauspiel*,[1] *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* examines the background to the unrest which broke out in the German fleet towards the end of the First World War,[2] the unrest which culminated in the November Revolution, and the judicial victimisation and execution for high treason of two of the seaman involved, Erwin Köbis and Alwin Reichpietsch.[3] By the time the play appeared in 1930, of course, these events already lay a long way in the past, and were, for most people, hardly more than a distant memory, one almost effaced by the difficulties Germany had experienced in the intervening years. Toller's interest in the Köbis-Reichpietsch affair, however, was not primarily a historical one. In his opinion the workers' movement could learn some valuable lessons from a study of the revolutionary period, and in particular he hoped it could learn the lesson of unity in action, a prominent feature of the revolutionary movement in its early stages, but something lacking in the struggle against emergent National Socialism. With *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* Toller sought to give dramatic form to the idea of workers' unity, to rekindle the idea of the *Einheitsfront* and so aid, if only in a small way, the anti-fascist cause.

In seeking to make his play into a vehicle for this idea, however, Toller was faced with a number of difficulties, not least of which was the fact that, in the final analysis, the November Revolution had acted not to unite the German workers' movement but to underline and intensify its existing divisions. Naturally, Toller knew this as well as most and realised that if his play were to succeed in inspiring its intended audience and in promoting the idea of workers' unity, it could not be a full and comprehensive account of the revolution but a necessarily selective and partial one. This was a view he had expressed as far back as 1928 when he first declared interest in the idea of a study of the November Revolution. In an article in *Die Welt am Montag* entitled 'Wer schafft den deutschen Revolutionsfilm?',[4] Toller argued that while it was important for the Left to make a film of the November Revolution, such a film should not put forward any

particular party line or interpretation, rather it must have a 'Gesicht [...], das das gesamte Proletariat als das seine erkennt'.[5] His film, indeed any film of the revolution, should focus on the positive aspects, should stress the unity and sense of common purpose of the initial phase of the movement, not its subsequent divisions. At the same time, however, it should also be historically accurate, should have the 'große historische Spannung des dokumentarischen Belegs' and not seek to avoid depicting the 'Zerklüftung des Proletariats',[6] in his view one of the major causes of the defeat of the revolution. He also warned, however, that the film would be endangered if 'diese Zerklüftung ins Zentrum erhoben würde' stating that the overall effect should be 'aufwühlend und anfeuernd', adding 'ich möchte den sehen, dem es nicht den Rücken strafft, wenn er sieht, was damals gläubig erhofft wurde und heute geblieben ist'.[7]

Plans for such a film did not come to fruition and Toller had to be content to realise his ideas not on screen but on stage. Yet while *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* too was intended to enthuse and inspire the audience, to remind it of the positive aspects of the revolution, it has been interpreted by some critics not as an expression of Toller's optimism but of his pessimism. Interestingly, however, Dorothy Klein, one of those who supports the latter interpretation,[8] finds justification for her argument not so much in the text of the play itself but in other materials relating to it, in, for instance, an open letter Toller published in *Die Weltbühne* shortly after *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* had been premiered in Berlin.[9] Toller was incensed that, under the Weimar Republic, those responsible for the framing and judicial murder of Köbis and Reichpietsch, people such as the chief investigating magistrate, Dobring, had not only escaped punishment but had been allowed to carry on their careers unimpeded. In his open letter, Toller accused Dobring of having used illegal and inhuman methods to obtain convictions against Köbis and Reichpietsch and called on him to have the courage to respond publicly to the charges

levelled against him in the play. 'Herr Landgerichtsrat Dobring!', he wrote, 'seit einigen Wochen ersteht im Theater am Schiffbauerdamm vor jener Öffentlichkeit, die Sie in der Kriegsgerichtsverhandlung ausgeschlossen haben, das Schicksal der fünf im Jahre 1917 zum Tode verurteilte Matrosen der deutschen Flotte'.[10] He continued:

> Jeden Abend sehen die Hörer mit Empörung, welche Mittel Sie, Herr Dobring, angewandt haben, um dies fünf Menschen des Hochverrats, den sie nicht begangen haben, zu "überführen". Vor dem Untersuchungsausschuß des Deutschen Reichstags bekundete der Zeuge Beckers unter seinem Eid, daß Sie auf ein Blatt Papier einen Galgen gemalt, einen Revolver daneben gelegt und gesagt hätten: "Das ist ein Revolver und ein Galgen, es hängt von Ihrer Aussage ab, ob Sie nur erschossen oder erhängt werden".[11]

What is significant about Toller's letter is that it is directed not so much at Dobring as an individual — if his had been merely an individual case Toller would not have been nearly so indignant about it — but at Dobring as a representative of a particular social class. Toller writes:

> Herr Dobring, wollen Sie nicht endlich Ihr Schweigen brechen, das Sie nur einmal durchbrachen, als Sie, ein treuer Diener der Monarchie, nach der November Revolution 1918 den Volksbeauftragten Ihre wertvollen Dienste anboten? Wir schreiben heute nicht mehr den 15. November 1917, wo Sie als Zeuge bei einer Verhandlung in Kiel, als man Ihnen Todesdrohungen gegen Beschuldigte vorhielt, erklärten: "Das ist mein System." Heute wird der Spieß umgedreht und Sie, Öffentlicher Anklager, sind öffentlich Angeklagter. Sie sollen sich für "Ihr System" verantworten.[12]

With *Feuer aus den Kesseln!*, Toller calls on Dobring — or Schuler, the name of the character based on Dobring — to defend the system he represents, the class-based, authoritarian justice system of the old state, the system the revolution rose up against but could not vanquish. Klein's argument, however, is that in calling attention to this, to the failure of the revolution to break with the past, and to the stark contrast between what was hoped for in 1918 and what was achieved, Toller undermines the sense of optimism

he had hoped to generate with his play:

> Er [Toller] sieht im zehnjährigen Bestehen der deutschen Republik weniger einen Anlaß zur Feier, als einen Grund zur Besinnung. Er stellt das 'damals' dem 'heute' abwägend gegenüber und läßt erkennen, daß für ihn die Gegenwart von 1928 keinen Fortschritt bedeutet, gemessen an dem Status, den das Proletariat 1918 erreicht hatte.[13]

Klein's argument is taken up and developed by Thomas Bütow who sees an insoluble contradiction between the revolutionary and judicial aspects of the play:

> Das Ziel, die "Idee" sichtbar zu machen und den in *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* behandelten Ereignissen eine optimistische Tendenz zu geben, das Toller bereits in seinem Filmprojekt angestrebt hatte, wirkt sich also auch auf das Drama aus, soweit es die Matrosenrevolte als etwas Vergangenes behandelt. Das Revolutionsdrama gerät dabei aber mit dem Justizdrama in Konflikt. Denn mit seiner Kritik an der Gegenwart rückt Toller zum Zuschauer zwangsläufig ins Bewußtsein, was aus der Revolution tatsächlich geworden ist: Eine Republik, die das Erbe der Revolution nicht übernommen hat, in der Lösch und Dobring weiter amtieren dürfen.[14]

Cecil Davies, however, has criticised Bütow's argument which, he maintains, amounts to saying that it is not consistent to support the idea of revolution and at the same time demand fair and just treatment for failed or defeated revolutionaries.[15] Yet as Davies points out, in his own life and person Toller himself had carried on that dual struggle for revolution and justice, citing as proof Toller's attacks on the Bavarian judicial system which, for instance, in its desire to secure a death sentence for Eugen Leviné had abandoned any pretence of fairness or impartiality :

> Toller's attitude to the judicial murder, as he construed it, of a fellow revolutionary who was also his personal and political opponent, illustrates his perfectly logical position as a supporter both of revolution and of justice — including justice for revolutionaries. *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* thus reflects two actual and in no way contradictory attitudes of its author.[16]

Bütow's argument, however, is unfair to Toller in another respect. Of course his strong

criticisms of the Weimar Republic were bound to draw attention to the gap between the ideal and reality. Yet such a gap would always confront the revolutionary artist living in a capitalist society. Had Toller wanted to avoid entangling himself in a contradiction — or what Bütow perceives to be a contradiction — he would either have had to abandon his ideals or give up writing about politics, that is to say, give up writing altogether. Klein is right, of course, to argue that the Toller who wrote *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* was not optimistic — if by optimism she means the facile optimism of the Communists whose deterministic approach led them to argue 'Hitler first, then us'. After all, Toller was fully aware of the deep damage done to the anti-fascist cause by the split between the Socialist and Communist Parties, and repeatedly warned them that failure to join ranks would open the door to Hitler. Under these circumstances, historical optimism — to use Klein's phrase — would have been entirely misplaced. On the other hand, if by pessimism Klein means that by the end of the 1920s Toller no longer had any faith in revolutionary socialism — and this is what is clearly implied — then this too is false. The truth is that Toller was neither 'optimistic' nor 'pessimistic' but realistic. *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* was meant to inspire, but to inspire by showing both the strengths and weakness of the workers' movement, by reminding the Left of what it could have achieved in 1918 and warning it of the consequences should it fail to learn the lessons of that period.

It is interesting that, on the whole, Communist critics, normally so hostile to Toller, have been, or were, much more favourably disposed towards *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* than critics from the West, tending to regard this as his best work, at any rate the one in which his commitment to revolutionary socialism was clearest and least problematic. Klaus Kändler, for instance, writes:

> Die November Revolution, in *Hoppla, wir leben!* als historisches Ereignis präsent, an dem die Entwicklung von acht Jahren Weimarer Republik gemessen wird, ist in *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* das Beispiel, aus dem

> Lehren für die Gegenwart entwickelt werden. Zweifellos engagiert sich Toller damit wieder stärker in der revolutionären Bewegung. Das Stück reiht sich eindeutiger in die Bestrebungen der zeitgenössischen sozialistischen Dramatik ein als das Vorangeganene.[17]

Yet while hailing *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* as a step in the right direction, Marxist critics were not fully satisfied with the play. Toller, they argued, lacked the political understanding — by which is meant the Marxist theoretical baggage — to be able to depict the conflict it deals with in its proper historical context, the struggle between the officers and men being shown as one between right and wrong rather than as a class struggle:

> Zwar werden die Matrosen durch soziales Unrecht in Widerspruch zu den Offizieren gebracht, insofern erhält der Aufstand einen sozialen Hintergrund, doch zielt Toller damit nicht auf Darstellung ihres Klassenschicksales ab, sondern gewinnt daraus lediglich Motivierungen für seine ethischen Anklagen. Köbis und Reichpietsch fallen bei ihm als Märtyrer einer abstrakten Rechtsidee.[18]

They also complained that Toller had failed to depict the sailors as conscious revolutionaries and had placed too much emphasis on the unplanned, spontaneous nature of the revolt, indeed had elevated spontaneity almost into a principle. As Martin Reso put it:

> Durch das Bemühen um den Beweis, daß keinerlei politische Beeinflussung von außen vorgelegen, es sich eigentlich gar nicht um einen Aufstand gehandelt habe, erhält die revolutionäre Bewegung bei Toller den Charakter einer spontanen zufälligen Aktion.[19]

What Reso fails to take account of, however, is that the November Revolution *was* a spontaneous event, that it burst forth with elemental power taking all the political parties by surprise. His criticism of Toller, therefore, is not only unfair but senseless. Another Stalinist critic, Alfred Klein, recognising he would be on weak ground if he attacked

Toller for having depicted the truth, criticised him not for having shown the spontaneity of the movement but for failing to recognise this as a weakness.[20] Comparing *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* unfavourably with *Die Matrosen von Cattaro*, Friedrich Wolf's play about the revolt in the Austrian Navy which appeared about the same time as *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* and which deals with the same themes, Klein writes:

> Während Ernst Toller nach wie vor eine Revolution erhofft und auch sein Stück bis an den Ausbruch der Revolution heranführt, wird für Friedrich Wolf nicht der Anfang der Revolution zum Problem, sondern ihr Fortgang, aus dem die Lehre der Novemberrevolution erkennbar werden soll. Toller beweist spontane Ursachen der Revolution, Friedrich Wolf sieht gerade darin ihre Schwäche.[21]

In Toller's play, Klein argues, 'Die Spontaneität der Revolution wird zum positiven Argument'.[22] It fails, in other words, to do what Wolf's play did and address the question of the role of leadership, the role of the Leninist revolutionary party. Yet it is simply not true to say that Toller did not recognise the importance of leadership. *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* shows plainly that the lack of it was a serious handicap to the protest movement which developed in the German fleet.

It has to be admitted, however, that Toller was less concerned with the question of leadership than with uncovering the roots of revolution, with showing that these were nourished not by either Bolshevik or English propaganda but by conditions within the German fleet itself. The nationalist right, the advocates of the *Dolchstoßlegende*, were, of course, adamant that the breakdown of 1918 had been the work of treacherous socialists, liberals and Jews, of Bolshevik saboteurs.[23] Toller, however, shows that the men who came to stand at the head of the November Revolution, 'des Kaisers blaue Jungen',[24] were not revolutionaries or even rebels, that the overwhelming majority of them were, in fact, patriotic in outlook and more or less willing to do their part to defend the Fatherland.[25] They took the path they did simply because they could no longer

endure the war and all its attendant miseries.[26] In scene two, for instance, set during the *Skagerrakschlacht* of 31 May 1916 — about the only major naval battle of the whole war — [27] the main characters, mostly stokers on board the *Prinzregent Luitpold*, are shown as being totally committed to the war effort. During the encounter with the English fleet they work hard to keep the engines under full steam, taking pride in their work and even arguing amongst themselves as to which of them has the most efficient fire. Interestingly, none appears to have any moral reservations about the war or their role in it. They are not concerned about the brutality and inhumanity of war, about the fact that the people they are trying to kill are ordinary workers like themselves. When they learn that one of the enemy ships has been hit they all break into cheers. Even Weber, a member of the SPD and, in theory at least, committed to workers' international solidarity, calls out in excitement 'Gib ihm Saures!'. (p. 128) Toller shows, however, that the patriotism of the enlisted men has quite definite limits and is of a quite different character to the patriotism of the officer caste, less chauvinistic and belligerent, more concerned with defending the Fatherland than with conquering the enemy. This difference in outlook is, of course, a class difference, the officers being drawn mainly from the ranks of the ruling elite while the stokers are ordinary workers. The latter have no real understanding of, or interest in, the issues at stake in the war and though keen to see Germany win, regard this as a question of far less importance than that of their own physical survival. When news is received that the *König Albert* has taken a direct hit, one of the men, Roddei, expresses the feelings of the majority of his comrades by saying quite simply 'Heimatschuß. Gratuliere'. (p. 128) The stokers see the war as a job that has to be done, hardly any different to the one they normally do on the factory floor. The officers, by contrast, see it as a romantic adventure, a welcome opportunity both to further the nation's interests and to make progress in their chosen careers. Toller brings out these differences well in

the battle scene as he depicts the stokers as mere cogs in the gigantic machinery of war. Stuck in the bowels of the ship, they never even see the enemy they are fighting, their knowledge of the battle raging above and around them coming only in the form of the disembodied voice of their captain as he relays orders down the speaking tube. They have no overview of the struggle, being aware only of what is happening in their own sector, and even that only vaguely and indistinctly. At the end of the scene, as the victorious German fleet sets sail for home, Köbis is left to ask 'Und wer hat gewonnen?', (p. 130) so remote was he, both physically and spiritually, from the heart of the action. Köbis's attitude stands in sharp contrast to that of the First Officer who conveys to the stokers the Captain's thanks for their valuable contribution:

> Kameraden, der Herr Kapitän dankt Euch für tapferes Verhalten. Ruhmreich weht die deutsche Flagge auf den Meeren. Der Sieg ist unser. Ihr habt Sr. Majestät dem Kaiser Ehre gemacht ... (p. 130)

This talk of bravery, glory and honour makes no impact on the men who respond to the Officer's words not be celebrating a famous victory — or what they were told was a victory, for, in fact, the Battle of Jutland was an inconclusive affair — [28] but by complaining about their hunger.

Something else Toller brings out well in *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* is that while war might have led to a halt to the class struggle, it did not lead to a diminution or amelioration of class differences. Quite the reverse in fact. With the oppressed and the oppressors, in other words, the ordinary seamen and the officer caste, forced into close contact, the gulf between them became even more conspicuous and intolerable. Though he does not deny that officers and men did forge a certain degree of camaraderie, this was far from the *Frontgemeinschaft* of conservative-nationalist mythology. The unity and solidarity forged under fire was a fragile and transitory entity, one, he shows, which

disappeared with the sound of battle. The First Officer, for example, feigning surprise that the stokers have not been fed, displays his concern for their welfare by ordering Obermaat Purzelmann to distribute extra rations. Yet the sense of comradeship established here does not last and, as soon as the Officer has departed, Purzelmann resumes his normal attitude towards his men which is one of arrogant superiority. The gulf between officers and men is highlighted in scene 5 too. Here, the stokers are lined up for inspection by Leutnant Hoffmann, a young inexperienced officer sent to replace Kapitänleutnant Kohler, a man who *did* have a genuine concern for the men's welfare and who enjoyed in return their trust and respect. Hoffmann, however, is more typical in his attitude towards the lower ranks than Kohler. He has no respect for the men, can only bark commands, addressing them, for instance, as 'Schweine'. When inspecting Köbis he says 'Zeig deine Pfoten', before reprimanding him for not having washed properly, saying 'heb den Arm ... Mensch, da kann man ja Rüben reinsäen'. (p. 137) When Köbis explains that he is dirty because the soap rations have been cut, Hoffmann tells him to wash with sand, an expression of open contempt which causes some of the men to grumble discontentedly. Hoffmann, however, soon silences them by saying:

> Ihr müßt eben auskommen. Seife ist lebenswichtig für unser Vaterland. Deutschland ist von einer Welt von Feinden umgeben. Wer in so schwerer Zeit Seife veraast, der zeigt damit, daß er sein Vaterland nicht liebt. (p. 137)

On the question of food, usually scarce and often inedible and which the previous day the men refused to eat because it was crawling with worms, Hoffmann takes an even tougher line:

> Gestern haben verschiedene Leute um mehr Brot gebeten. Das gibt es nicht. Dann müssen sie eben hungern. Sollte einer von ihnen dabei zugrunde gehen, bin ich bereit, ihn mit allen Kriegsehren beerdigen zu lassen. *(Obermaat lacht)* Da lachen Sie Obermaat; das ist mein Ernst.

> Eure Angehörigen haben noch weniger zu essen. Eure Kameraden in Flandern wären froh, wenn sie solch Essen bekämen wie ihr. Tja, da wurde mir gemeldet, Ihr hättet alle gestern das Mittagessen stehen lassen. Das sieht verdammt nach Meuterei aus. (p. 138)

Hoffmann then launches another attack on Köbis for having had the temerity to complain about the quality of the food, saying sarcastically 'Natürlich, Herr Köbis. Sie möchten wohl Enten und Gänse essen?', ending his tirade by proclaiming 'die Wirtschaft an Bord muß aufhören bei den Stokers'. (p. 138)[29]

Hoffmann's remarks reveal the cynicism of Germany's conservative elite, the way in which it used the argument about the defence of the Fatherland as a screen behind which it could pursue its own social, political and economic agenda. Positing an absolute identity between its own narrow class interests and those of the nation as a whole, it was then able to define any challenge to its authority as equivalent to treason. Hoffmann is able to silence the stokers, to choke-off any possibility of dissent, by interpreting a modest request for a piece of soap as unpatriotic, an attempt to undermine the war effort and aid the enemy. To underline the hypocrisy of the ruling classes, Toller reveals that the officer caste is revelling daily in the kind of luxury which neither soldier or sailor nor, for that matter, the majority of the civilian population could dream of, not even in peacetime. Reichpietsch, having stolen a menu from the officers mess, taunts his comrades by reading out the list of food offered there:

> *REICHPIETSCH*: Wenn ich die Herren servieren darf ... Also ... Hans, dir läuft das Wasser im Munde zusammen, bevor ich angefangen habe. — Achtung! Königinsuppe mit Leberklößchen, Spinat mit verlorenen Eiern und Schinken ...
> *RUFE*: Steckrüben! Wo bleiben die Steckrüben?!
> *REICHPIETSCH*: Nur Geduld meine Herren - in der schweren Not unseres Vaterlandes bleibt auch die Offiziersmesse von Steckrüben nicht verschont. Dritter Gang: Filet mit Steckrüben in Butter, Salat, Kompott. (p. 141)

All this at the time of the so-called *Kohlrübenwinter*, the harsh winter of 1916 to 1917, when the allied blockade of German ports coupled with a poor crop led to a drastic reduction in food supplies which caused great hunger for the majority of the population.[30] Despite the fine talk about equality of sacrifice and the need to show restraint for the sake of the national struggle, there existed nothing approaching it either in the fleet or in German society as a whole; those with money, power or influence were able to isolate themselves from the cold reality facing the masses.

This point is emphasised in scene 3 in which Sachse and Reichpietsch visit parliament to lodge complaints with the socialist deputies about the treatment they receive.[31] As they wait in the lobby, the voices of individual deputies are heard discussing not important affairs of state, or the course of the war but how best to further their private interests, how, for instance, to obtain lucrative government posts as well as such mundane things as 'Mandeln, Eier und Schinken'. (p. 131) The contrast even in physical appearance between the two sailors and the members of parliament is immediately apparent, leading Sachse to remark that the deputies 'sehen [..] nicht aus, als ob sie jeden Tag Steckrüben, Kriegsbrot und Marmelade fressen müßten'. (p. 132) What the two men gradually realise is that the majority of the *Abgeordneten* are concerned solely with their own welfare, have lost contact with the ordinary people, in particular with those they had sent to war, and have reduced the *Reichstag* to the level of a market place for the barter of power and influence. What Toller shows in these early scenes, then, is that it was not Bolshevik propaganda which transformed the consciousness of the enlisted men but material conditions. The treatment they receive at the hands of their officers, their gradual insight into the hypocrisy of the governing class, the general sense of war weariness, all these factors combined to undermine their patriotic enthusiasm and, eventually, led them to take the road of revolution.

It is important to stress this last point, that the sailors did not come to revolutionary conclusions quickly or easily and not all at the same time. Initially, the majority of them merely wanted an improvement in the regime aboard ship, to be treated by the officers as human beings and not some lower form of life. Very few had any definite political goals and even those who did were mainly pacifist in outlook and saw the main task as putting an end to the war, not the overthrow of the capitalist state.[32] In this, in its confusion and immaturity, the sailors' protest movement merely reflected the situation which existed within the German Left, a point Toller also brings out in the *Reichstag* scene.

On their arrival in parliament, Reichpietsch and Sachse ask first of all to speak to Kleidermann, a member of the Social Democratic Party, hoping that he will support their modest demands for an improvement in their conditions. When he arrives, however, Kleidermann is already irritated at having been interrupted in the course of important discussions and assumes an attitude towards the men scarcely better than that of their own officers. He addresses them, for instance, not as a socialist deputy might have been expected to with *du*, but with *Sie*, and can hardly conceal his impatience as he asks what they want, informing them abruptly his time is short. When Reichpietsch explains the nature of their concerns, Kleidermann trys to fob them off, suggesting that it might be better if they put their complaints in writing. His interest is aroused, however, when Sachse announces that if the sailors get no help from outside, they are prepared to take action to help themselves. 'Dann schneiden wir die Kutteraljen durch', he exclaims, 'und werfen die Geschützverschlüsse überbord', (p. 133) a proposition which calls forth a furious reaction from Kleidermann:

> Sind Sie wahnsinnig?! Schlagen Sie sich solche landesverräterischen Gedanken aus dem Kopf! Wollen Sie den Zaren unterstützen? ... Wissen Sie, daß ich verpflichtet wäre, Sie auffliegen zu lassen?! ... Gewiß, ich begreife Ihre

> Empörung. Nur kann der einfache Mann nicht immer die taktischen Gründe verstehen ... Ich will Ihre Klagen gründlich prüfen. Wenn ein Korn Wahrheit daran ist, seien Sie versichert, daß ich bei der Etatberatung den Staatssekretär auf den Ernst der Lage hinweisen werde. (p. 133)

Kleidermann's outburst reveals the nature and extent of the change the SPD had undergone since August 1914. Where it had once inscribed internationalism on its banner and declared its undying hostility to imperialism, it now supported its own bourgeoisie in an imperialist conflict. Conscious that this involved a betrayal of everything it claimed to stand for, the party sought refuge in the argument that Tsarism was the most reactionary force in Europe and the struggle against it a just and progressive one — hence Kleidermann's warning that an act of defiance on the part of the sailors would only bring comfort to the Tsar.[33] But this argument, while it might have spared the blushes of the leadership of the SPD, conveniently overlooked the reactionary nature of the German state. Even now, however, after 3 years of slaughter, the socialists saw no reason to revise their position. Kleidermann, like the rest of the SPD Reichstag faction, sees the defence of the Fatherland as the highest duty of every citizen, remains committed to war and victory and is unwilling to oppose government policy lest this should be construed as an attempt to undermine morale and help the enemy. Such is his devotion to the national cause that he even threatens to denounce Reichpietsch and Sachse to the authorities for having uttered 'landesverräterische Gedanken'. In the end, however, he merely dismisses them with a half-hearted promise to examine their complaints and, if necessary — that is, if they are found to be true, which he clearly doubts — to take them up with the appropriate minister.

Yet if the SPD is unwilling to help the sailors and seems, in fact, to stand on the side of their enemies, the USPD, the only other significant left-wing party in parliament, is unable to offer them anything much beyond warm words. While waiting in the lobby

of the *Reichstag*, Reichpietsch and Sachse recognise Wilhelm Dittmann, a leading USPD Deputy, and approach him for support. Though he is much more friendly than Kleidermann and treats the men as comrades, he cannot provide them with anything in the way of practical advice or assistance.[34] He agrees that a government order banning sailors from reading socialist newspapers is illegal, but his promised solution, simply to speak to the minister about it, is no different to what Kleidermann had promised and reveals the impotence of the Independent Socialists in the face of the military state. This impotence is reflected in the advice he gives when Reichpietsch and Sachse ask what steps they should take to remedy their situation:

> *DITTMANN*: Was Ihr tun sollt? Ihr müßt sehr vorsichtig sein.
> *REICHPIETSCH*: Wenn nur der ganze Schwindel ein Ende nähme!
> *DITTMANN*: Wir wollen uns mit den ausländischen Genossen in Stockholm treffen. Wenn die Regierungen kein Friedensprogramm finden können, werden wir es tun. Habt Vertrauen, Genossen. Einerseits müßt Ihr aktiv sein, andererseits müßt Ihr daran denken, daß Ihr vor Kriegsgericht kommen könnt ... (p. 134-35)

The meeting in Stockholm Dittmann refers to was a meeting of a number of international socialist parties intended to put pressure on the warring countries to bring an end to the slaughter.[35] As was only to be expected, however, it ended in failure and instead of demonstrating the strength of the anti-war forces, only revealed their weakness and isolation. The socialist parties of Britain and France stayed away, while those groups which did attend represented only a small minority of opinion within the workers' movements of their own countries.[36] At this stage, public opinion in Europe was overwhelmingly pro-war. Even in Germany, where, as indicated, a degree of war-weariness had already begun to manifest itself, most people, civilian and combatant alike, were opposed to the idea of peace at any price. This high level of popular support for the war isolated the USPD, reduced it, like all the other anti-war parties, to the role of

passive spectator with no power to influence the course of events.[37]

Dittmann's consciousness of this accounts for the contradictory advice he gives to Reichpietsch and Sachse. Though sympathetic to their plight, he has no desire to encourage them to be too radical in their demands, knowing full well that, should they fall foul of the state, his party would be in no position to offer any real assistance.[38] Lacking political experience, however, they misinterpret Dittmann's expression of sympathy for a promise of practical support and, as they leave the *Reichstag*, say to each other: 'Die sind anders gebaut. Die werden uns helfen. Hast es gehört, gleich hat er uns mit "Du" angeredet'. (p. 135) Though Toller does not seek to blame the USPD for the fate which befell Reichpietsch and Köbis, he makes it clear that the men's belief — albeit mistaken — that they enjoyed the backing of the USPD made them over-confident, led to their running too far ahead of the majority of their comrades and, ultimately, into a premature and disastrous confrontation with military authority.

What finally sets in motion the train of events leading to the execution of Reichpietsch and Köbis is the seemingly trivial matter of the men's right to elect a committee to deal with complaints about the quality of their food, a so-called *Menageprüfungskommission*. Following the confrontation with Hoffmann in scene 4 the men give vent to their anger about his attitude, comparing him unfavourably with Kohler who, as Weber puts it, could do more than simply dish out orders and punishment. 'Sterben können die meisten Offiziere', Köbis complains, 'aber leben können sie nicht mit uns'. (p. 140) Sachse takes up Köbis's theme and adds:

> Richtig, Alwin. Für die Herren ist Krieg das große Los, und für uns die große Niete. Dicke Gelder und doppelte Zulage und Beförderung und Huren und einen Klempnerladen voll blecherner Vögel ... (p. 140)

Fischer, who during the confrontation with the English fleet had been the only one to

show any real enthusiasm for battle, now suggests that the crew should follow the example of the men on the *König Albert* and throw the captain overboard. Despite their anger and frustration, however, it is clear that they are not as yet ready to take the road of open rebellion. For the moment, their attitude is one of resignation rather than defiance, a mood Toller conveys well as he shows the men sitting down to a game of cards following their heated discussion. Most of them clearly want to forget what has just happened, or at least to put it to the back of their minds, and seem unable or unwilling to draw any general political conclusions from their situation. Indeed, Weber, who will later form part of the group charged with treason, derides Köbis for reading what he describes as 'seine gelehrten Bücher' (p. 142) telling him, 'Die Professoren haben das Schlamassel auch nicht verhindern können mit ihrer Weisheit'. (p. 142) Yet it is at this point, just when it seems as if the men are resigned to their fate, that a decisive step in the transformation of their political consciousness takes place. Reichpietsch, who has also been sitting quietly, begins to read from his newspaper a particularly crass article in which the author, while ridiculing the moral qualities of the French, Russians, Italians and British, sings the praises of the heroic German warrior:

> Es muß einen mit Stolz erfüllen, daß die Deutschen all die Jahrhunderte hindurch trotz den Einflüssen der Kulturkranken, die Eigenschaft des Kriegers bewahrt haben. (p. 143)

Initially, the men pay little attention to Reichpietsch, pausing only to express derision at the extravagant claim that the German armed forces would rather fight another 10 years than accept the sort of peace terms laid before the *Reichstag* by the USPD. Their mood changes, however, when Reichpietsch reads out another article, one which reveals that, according to Admiral von Capelle, Naval Secretary in Bethman-Hollweg's cabinet, the enlisted men now have the right to elect a committee to check the quality of their food,

a *Menagekommission*.[39] This comes as a surprise to the stokers who had no inkling of the existence of such *Kommissionen*. Reichpietsch, however, remembers having overheard a conversation whose significance was not clear at the time but which, he now realises, indicates that, behind the men's backs, their captain has already set up a *Menagekommission* to which he intends to appoint the *Offiziersflunkis*, the ship's stewards and batmen, described by Beckers as *Schmarotzer*. Once the initial shock has worn off, the men turn immediately to the task of electing their own *Menagekommission*. What is interesting here is that there is almost no discussion about who should represent them on this committee. Beckers, Sachse, Weber, Reichpietsch and Köbis, the men elected, are clearly the most politically advanced, enjoy the trust of their comrades and emerge as the natural choice as spokesmen. Yet within this leadership group — the group which will face trial together — there exist quite radically differing views as to the proper functions of the *Menagekommission*, with some arguing it should take up the whole range of grievances while others want to see it limit itself to dealing solely with complaints about food. These differences are highlighted in this scene as the men discuss how to react to the news that their shore leave has been cancelled and that instead of the anticipated visit to the cinema they are now expected to turn out for coal-loading.

A dirty and strenuous task at the best of times, this is made all the more unbearable by the knowledge that the officers have placed bets as to which of the coaling squads will finish first:

SACHSE: Auf unsere Kosten wollen sie Champagner saufen.
KÖBIS: Kinodienst ist angesetzt, kein Kohlen.
RUFE: Wir machen nicht mit. Sollen sich mit Säbeln in die Fresse schlagen, wenn sie wetten.
NEUMANN: Wozu haben wir eine Menagekommission gewählt?
WEBER: Was hat die Menagekommission mit Kohlen zu tun?
KÖBIS: Ihr habt recht, Kameraden. Nicht um das bißchen Kohlen geht's. Es geht um unsere Rechte. Ich schlage vor, wir machen, was angesetzt war. (p. 145)

It is significant that, of all the men, Weber is the only one to express opposition to the idea that the *Menagekommission* should become involved in matters formally outside its frame of reference. In real life, Weber was an active member of the Social Democratic Party and his cautious approach reflects that adopted by his party on all the most important questions thrown up by the war and revolution. Neumann's attitude is typical of probably the majority of the rank and file at that time. To him, the *Menagekommission* is not merely an address for food complaints but a means of redressing all their grievances. Though less politically experienced than Weber, he understands that there is little point in such a commission if it is not to deal with those issues of most pressing concern to those it represents. Köbis supports Neumann's standpoint and seeks to lead his comrades to draw wider, more political conclusions from their experience, urging them to recognise that the issue confronting them here is not one of food or of coaling, but of their basic right to decent treatment. He suggests that they should make a stand, refuse to obey this unfair order and instead jump ship and go into town for an hour, a suggestion taken up with great enthusiasm.

The formation of the *Menagekommissionen* marks an important stage on the road leading towards the events of 1918. Under pressure from below, these committees did assume the wider, more political role advocated by Köbis, and developed along similar lines to those of the Workers', Soldiers' and Sailors' Councils which emerged during the Russian Revolution.[40] Admittedly, Soviets or *Räte* did not appear on the scene in Germany until the outbreak of the November Revolution, yet Soviets is precisely what the *Menagekommissionen* were, if not in name, then in effect, and were viewed as such by the sailors themselves. Testimony to this can be found in the diary of Richard Stumpf, a sailor on board the *Helgoland* who later appeared as a key witness before the *Untersuchungsausschuß*.[41] Though he came from a working-class background, Stumpf

was a Catholic, a supporter of the Centre Party, a man who shared the rather conservative social and political outlook typical of that milieu. He was, therefore, not naturally well disposed towards the enlisted men's protest movement. Yet in his diary even he refers to the *Menagekommissionen* as 'our Sailors' Councils'[42] and actually praises their activities, in one case for the way they had organised revenge on an officer who had abused his men by keeping them waiting hours in the cold while he cavorted with his mistress — apparently a quite common occurrence at that time.[43] Yet while underlining the important role played by these food committees, it is also necessary to point out their limitations. Though well able to reflect the growing mood of discontent among the fleet, they did not provide the protest movement with a clear political lead, did not give it any sort of coherence or direction.[44]

This is hinted at in scene 5 in which representatives of the crews of a number of ships meet to discuss how to react to the news of the arrest of the stokers who had refused to carry out coal-loading duties. Significantly, despite some fiery denunciations of the war and calls for action to be taken to bring it to an end, no-one, apart from Birgiwski, an *agent-provocateur*, talks seriously of mutiny or revolution. Sachse does make a radical-sounding speech and appeals for support for the arrested stokers in the name of working-class solidarity, urging the men to remember that, 'Wenn wir jetzt auch Kulis und Stoker sind, wir sind trotz unserer Militärkluft Proleten geblieben'(p. 147):

> Wir waren Packer und Metallarbeiter und Eisenbahner und Kutscher. Wenn der Krieg zu Ende ist, werden wir wieder Packer und Metallarbeiter und Eisenbahner und Kutscher sein. (p. 147)

He takes up the theme dealt with above, of how the war means one thing to the ordinary stokers and sailors but something entirely different to the officer caste:

> Für die ist der Krieg ein Handwerk. Ein Handwerk mit Risiko. Wenn es

> bei ihnen nur ums Vaterland ginge, müßten sie sich schämen, dicke Gelder einzustecken, sich den Bauch vollzuschlagen und aus Liebe zum Vaterland ein Geschäft machen. Habe ich Recht? (p. 147-48)

Yet Sachse's criticism is not of the war itself, but of all those whose selfishness and greed is an affront to the Fatherland, a disgrace to the national cause. He does not call for an end to the war nor does he suggest which measures, if any, should be taken to punish the degenerate officers and war profiteers. Beckers, further to the Left than the moderate socialist Sachse, takes up the theme of inequality of sacrifice, of the continuation of class contrasts even in war time:

> Sag mal, Hein, du hast in Leipzig eine Frau und vier Gören, der Herr Kapitän hat Frau und Kinder in Kiel. Für die in Leipzig kämpfst du, Hein, für die in Kiel kämpft der Kapitän. "Stolz weht die Flagge schwarz-rot-gold" kann deine Frau ebensogut singen wie die Frau vom Kapitän. Aber vom Singen wird keiner satt. Es kommt darauf an, was in der Pfanne preckelt: Obs in der Küche nach Steckrüben oder nach Schweinebraten riecht, ist ja wohl wichtig für die Ausdauer beim Singen. Das ist meine Meinung. (p. 148)

Yet while Beckers understands the class nature of war, how it does not eliminate but merely conceals social divisions, he too, like his comrades, stops short of calling for a revolution to end the war. Reichpietsch, who describes himself as 'ein apostolischer Christ', (p. 148) is opposed to the war mainly on religious grounds, because he is against the taking of human life. It should be noted, however, that he does attempt to raise the level of political discourse and in his speech makes reference to the underlying economic causes of the conflict, explaining that its roots lay in the imperialist rivalry of the nations involved. Yet he too is unable to draw any revolutionary conclusions from this analysis. He does not argue, as, for instance, the Bolsheviks did, that the only way to end this war and to eliminate the possibility of future wars, was to destroy the socio-economic system which gave rise to them. Instead, he appeals to the assembled stokers and sailors to lend

their support to the USPD, the only party in the Reichstag, he exclaims, 'die nach Gottes Wort handelt, du sollst nicht töten'(p. 148):

> Das ist die Opposition. Darum schließt Euch der Oppositionspartei an. Wir werden die Liste mit Euren Namen an die Opposition schicken. Die kann sie mit nach Stockholm zur Friedenskonferenz nehmen und vor aller Welt sagen, die deutsche Flotte will einen Frieden, der Deutschland leben läßt und alle anderen Länder. Wir sind die wahren Patrioten! (p. 148)

Reichpietsch's call for a peace settlement 'der Deutschland leben läßt und alle anderen Länder', (p. 148) is hardly one to make the ruling class tremble.

Köbis, the most radical of the leading group, is also the most practical and realistic. He can see that the stokers' act of defiance, though understandable, was premature and has left them isolated, cut off from the majority of their comrades and easy prey for the vengeance of the military authorities. 'Wir haben zu früh losgeschlagen', he explains, 'Wir hätten warten müssen, bis die ganze Flotte hinter uns steht'. (p. 150) Köbis realises that nothing is to be gained from an open confrontation with authority at this stage and tries to temper the protest movement, to restrain the men's impatience, and persuade them to wait until more favourable conditions have developed:

> *KÖBIS*: Es kommt der Tag, wo wir demonstrieren, daß uns ein Dreck an Belgien und Polen und den baltischen Provinzen liegt. Kameraden! Wir sind nicht von England bezahlt, die Alldeutschland haben das Vaterland nicht gepachtet — wir sind ebenso national. Die Parteien werden uns nicht helfen. Denkt an Karl Liebknecht. Nieder mit dem Scheißkrieg!
>
> *ALLE*: Nieder mit dem Scheißkrieg. (p. 150)

But Köbis's denunciation of the war, like his invocation of the name of Karl Liebknecht, is a rhetorical flourish, a bold promise or threat of future action and not a call to arms. This is clear from his response to Birgiwski, who throughout the meeting has made repeated attempts to incite the men to take radical measures, telling them they ought to

follow the example set by the Russian sailors and blow up their ships, either that or hoist the white flag and hand the fleet over to the English. Köbis replies to this by asking:

> Kameraden! Sind die russischen Revolutionäre mit ihrer Flotte nach Schlickazien gekommen and haben sie Lehmann gebracht als Ostergeschenk? ... Den Teufel haben sie getan. (p. 150)

At the end of this scene, when the military police turn up to arrest those involved in the meeting, Köbis gives a powerful demonstration of his leadership skills by defusing a potentially explosive situation, telling the men to return peacefully to their ships since the point of their protest has been made:

> Kameraden! Alles bleibt hier! Keiner geht raus! Laßt sie [the military police] doch kommen! Wir haben demonstriert für unser Recht! Wir finden den Weg allein! Ammen und Kindermädchen brauchen wir nicht! Wir gehen freiwillig an Bord. Die Versammlung ist geschlossen. Jetzt beginnt der heitere Teil. (p. 150)

It is interesting to compare Köbis's outlook with that of Karl Thomas, the hero of *Hoppla, wir leben!*. Unlike Thomas, who believed that the workers could be roused from their lethargy by a heroic example, Köbis knows that a revolution cannot be conjured out of thin air, that it is dependent on the level of consciousness of the masses, and that this cannot be changed by stunts, only by events. It would be going too far to claim that Toller had come round to accepting the Marxist materialist interpretation of history, yet it is clear from this play that he had abandoned his belief in voluntarism, the notion that revolution is possible at any time irrespective of material circumstances and irrespective of the consciousness of the masses.

Köbis's success in restraining his comrades from taking precipitate action does not protect him from the wrath of the naval authorities. Feeling the ground move under their feet, they have decided to nip the protest movement in the bud and make an example of

its leaders.[45] As revealed in scene 7, set in August 1917, just before the trial of Köbis, Reichpietsch, Sachse, Weber and Beckers, a guilty verdict and death sentence have been reached even before the men have been brought to court. Admiral von Scheer, commander of the High Sea Fleet, is determined to have their heads and rejects the plea, put forward on the men's behalf by Captain Kohler, that their activities were nothing more than a 'Dummerjungenstreich', saying 'Das war kein Dummerjungenstreich. Sie kennen die Leute von Skagerrak her; sie mögen sich damals tapfer gehalten haben, — heute sind sie Landesverräter'. (p. 159) Having lost 2 sons at Skaggerak, von Scheer has personal as well as political reasons for his grudge against the accused and he tells Schuler, the investigating magistrate, that 'diese Leute die Flagge von Skagerrak geschändet [haben]'. (p. 159) Ultimately, however, it is the wider political aspects which are uppermost in his mind. Like his friends in conservative-nationalist circles, von Scheer saw the crushing of the protest movement in the fleet as a blow against the Left, indeed, a blow against all those opposed to the annexationist, expansionist policies to which the nationalist right was committed. As he explains to Schuler, the peace resolution recently passed by the Reichstag calling for an 'Annexionsloser Friede' is 'glatter Landesverrat':

> Die Franzosen wollen Elsaß-Lothringen, die Pfalz, das linke Rheinufer. Und wir sollen in die Luft blasen ... Ich halte auch die Friedensresolution des Reichstages für ein Verbrechen. Die ganze Friedensbewegung basiert meiner Ansicht nach auf der Schwäche der Regierung gegenüber den linken Parteien. (p. 160)

Von Scheer, whose activities may or may not have enjoyed the approval or connivance of the government, clearly believes that if it can be shown that the 'Sozis', the USPD, really were, as Schuler believes, 'die Hintermänner', the guiding hand behind the seamen's protests, this will help the new Chancellor, Michaelis, to take action against the Left; as he puts it, it will help 'den Krebs auszubrennen'. (p. 159)[46]

It is this, the desire to get rid of the cancer of socialism, to ensure the hegemony of the most reactionary forces in German society, which lies behind the approach adopted by Kriegsgerichtsrat Schuler in his interrogation and trial of the men. He sees his task as that of proving the treacherous character of the USPD, of demonstrating how this party had set about trying to help the enemy by seeking to provoke a rebellion among the fleet. The method he chooses to apply to achieve this end is naked terror. The first time the accused are brought before him Schuler greets them as 'die Todeskandidaten', (p. 154) while when he gets Reichpietsch on his own he draws a revolver and a gallows on a piece of paper, telling him 'Sie können erschossen oder erhängt werden. Das richtet sich nach Ihrem Verhalten'. (p. 154)[47] Schuler, as well as being a reactionary, is also a sadist, a man who takes pleasure from the mental torture he inflicts on his victims. As a social type, he is a identical with those who made up the rank and file of the SS and staffed the Nazi death camps. In the interrogation scene, however, he shows himself to be an astute judge of the psychological make-up of each of the accused, using a variety of methods to obtain the desired result. He recognises, for instance, that Reichpietsch has probably the weakest character, and so deliberately plays on his religious beliefs and his love for his parents and fiancée in order to make him sign a fabricated confession. In the confession, Reichpietsch notices, there is not a word about the real reasons for the men's revolt, the bad food and even worse treatment. However, his powers of resistance undermined by the weeks of endless questioning in jail, Reichpietsch, in the end, is ready to sign any document put in front of him, telling Schuler 'mir ist alles egal'. (p. 156) Beckers is a tougher proposition than Reichpietsch, not only of firmer character and less easily intimidated, but also more politically astute, in a certain sense, more astute even than Köbis. During the interrogation the following exchange takes place as Schuler tries to get Beckers to confess to having planned a mutiny:

SCHULER: Wie ist es mit Ihnen? Sie lehnen die Gewaltidee ab?
BECKERS: Ja.
SCHULER: Sie sind der Schlimmste.
BECKERS: Nanu — habe ich nicht ein unschuldiges Gesicht?
SCHULER: (springt auf): Sie verlogener Kerl, Sie schamloser Geselle! Jetzt bringe ich den Beweis, daß gerade *Sie* die Gewalt gewollt haben, und Sie wagen, hier frech zu leugnen! Hoffen Sie jetzt nicht auf Gnade! *(setzt sich.)* Mit wahrer Freude werde ich Ihrer Hinrichtung beiwohnen. Eure sozialistischen Stimmen werden bald im Himmel singen. Kennen Sie diesen Zettel ... (*er liest laut*) "Schiff läuft aus, wahrscheinlich unter Belagerungszustand. Wenn in drei Tagen keine Nachricht — dann los!" (p. 156)

Beckers's reply to this onslaught is interesting, not for the light it sheds upon the 'Zettel' — which, as Schuler probably knows, was quite harmless and not a call for rebellion — but for what it reveals about his attitude towards the whole interrogation process:

BECKERS: Den Zettel habe ich geschrieben.
SCHULER: Sie geben zu, daß Sie gelogen haben?
BECKERS: Nein, ich habe nicht gelogen! Und wenn ich lügen täte, um meinen Kopf zu retten, den Sie mir nehmen wollen um nichts und wieder nichts, haben Sie noch lange nicht das Recht, mich schamloser Geselle zu nennen. (p. 156)

Beckers makes no secret of his desire to save his neck, and is not ashamed to admit that he is willing to lie and deceive to do so. He recognises that he is at the mercy of the military machine and that resistance would be pointless, a futile gesture which would advance the men's cause not one iota. His preference is for survival rather than martyrdom, believing that it is better to live to fight another day than throw his life away for nothing. In his memoir of the Köbis-Reichpietsch affair, Beckers not only defends his own stance but also criticises Köbis, who, he feels, presented reaction with just what it wanted: his head on a plate.[48] Moreover, following the trial, which ended with death sentences for the accused,[49] Beckers tried to convince Köbis to follow his example and petition the Kaiser for clemency.[50] His efforts, however, were in vain. As Beckers put it: 'Scheinbar war ihm alles gleichgültig':

Vor der Verurteilung schon war mir bei ähnlichen Unterhaltungen ein sonderbarer Zug an Köbis aufgefallen. Seine Worte, sein Benehmen schienen darauf hinzudeuten, daß er als Märtyrer für unsere Sache sterben wollte. Ich betonte, daß ein solches Opfer zwar eine schöne Geste sei, aber nur dann gewissermaßen dekorativ und symbolisch wirke, wenn es öffentlich stattfinden würde. Aber angesichts der Lage würde man uns heimlich erschießen und verscharren, und ein solcher Meuchelmord blieb gewiß ohne Wirkung. Besser sei es daher, leben zu bleiben und weiter zu kämpfen.[51]

While Köbis himself rejected the idea that he wanted to sacrifice himself for the cause, it is difficult to interpret his behaviour in any other way.

During the trial, for instance, Köbis, whom Schuler describes as the toughest nut, refuses to defend himself against his accusers, responding to the questions put either with silence or with one word answers. Schuler fails to make Köbis admit that the *Menagekommission* was merely 'Köder', a front for wider political aims, nor is he able to instill in him the kind of terror which had helped induce Reichpietsch to sign a forged confession. When Schuler explains that his stubborn refusal to co-operate is spoiling every chance of a pardon, Köbis replies quite simply, 'Habe ich darum gebeten?'. (p. 158) Schuler's final card is emotional blackmail as he brings in Köbis's sister, Anna, for a face-to-face confrontation:

> *ANNA*: Alwin!
> *KÖBIS*: Anna — nanu! ... Wein' doch nicht Mädchen! Ich bitte dich, flenn' hier nicht.
> *ANNA*: Es steht schlimm um dich, Alwin.
> *KÖBIS*: Wie kommst du her? Haben sie dich verhaftet?
> *ANNA*: Nein ... Alwin, denk an die Eltern! Gestehe alles! Es geht um dein Leben!
> *SCHULER*: Köbis, haben Sie kein Erbarmen mit dem blutenden Schwesterherz?
> *KÖBIS*: Ach so ... auf diese Weise wollen Sie mich kirre machen? ... Pfui Deibel! ... Steh auf, Anna, bist ein gutes Mädchen ... Laß deine Hände weg von Männersachen ... Ich möchte in meine Zelle zurückgeführt werden. (p. 158)

At the trial, Köbis maintains his stoical silence, his attitude of seeming indifference to his fate, almost to the end. His comrades, however, do try to defend themselves against the charge of treason, but it is soon clear that the whole process is corrupt, a charade, and that they have no chance of a fair hearing. Reichpietsch, the first to give testimony, is confronted by the forged confession he signed in which it states that he had full knowledge of the USPD's intention to force the implementation of the decisions of the Stockholm conference by means of strikes and refusing to obey orders. Reichpietsch is bewildered and unable to refute this accusation and when asked by Schuler if he was aware of the USPD's position as regards the war replies:

> *REICHPIETSCH*: Einen vernünftigen Frieden wollten sie.
> *SCHULER*: So harmlos sieht das Programm nicht aus. Die wichtigsten Punkte des Programms der USP lauten: Übertritt der ganzen Flotte, soweit Mannschaften in Frage kommen, zur USP, Erzwingung eines baldigen annexionslosen Friedens durch Waffenniederlegung, Generalstreik und Verweigerung des Gehorsams gegenüber Befehlen der Vorgesetzten zur Unterdrückung der Streikbewegung in Marine- und Volkskreisen.
> *VORSITZENDER*: Kannten Sie das Programm?
> *REICHPIETSCH*: Nein, davon habe ich von Herrn Kriegsgerichstrat Schuler zum ersten Mal gehört. (p. 162)

It is no surprise that Reichpietsch had never heard of such a programme for it was Schuler himself who concocted it. He tells the court 'Ich habe das Programm den Aussagen der Beschuldigten entnommen. Was für ein offizielles Programm die USP hat ist gleichgültig'. (p. 163) Schuler's words reveal that the execution of Köbis and Reichpietsch was not the result of a mistake in the judicial process, was not some simple miscarriage of justice, but the deliberate outcome of a strategy devised by Germany's conservative rulers. Toller's accusing finger, it is clear, is pointed not at this or that individual — no matter how sadistic or malicious — but at the whole reactionary, class-based Wilhelmine justice system.

After an unsuccessful attempt to use the testimony of the spy Birgiwski to prove

the men had planned to blow up the whole fleet, the trial moves towards its inevitable climax. Before the sitting is closed, however, Köbis finally breaks his silence after Weber trys to avoid punishment by lying about his role in events, telling the court that he had wanted the *Menagekommissionen* to stick to complaints about food and stay out of politics. Calling Weber a 'Heuchler', Köbis says to Beckers 'Diese Bande ist nicht wert, daß wir sie belügen'. (p. 168) He decides the time has come to reveal the truth about the activities of the protest movement:

> Gerade Weber hat uns beschimpft, weil wir es ablehnten, unseren Kameraden den *Vorwärts* [the newspaper of the majority SPD] gewaltsam zu verekeln. Ich habe ihm geantwortet: "Du hast kein Recht, mir Angst vor der eigenen Courage vorzuwerfen; wir sind keine Revisionisten, wir sind Revolutionäre." (p. 169)

Köbis's description of himself and his comrades as revolutionaries is, of course, seized upon by Schuler as an admission of guilt. However, after pausing to express his contempt for his accusers, describing them, and not the ordinary English sailor, as his enemy, Köbis continues:

> Wir waren zu dumm und zu feige, um das zu tun, was die Anklage uns vorwirft! Heute bereue ich es. Wir haben auf den Reichstag, auf die Abgeordneten, auf die Zeitungen, und die USP gehofft. Keiner hilft uns, wenn wir uns nicht selbst helfen. Wir müssen der Anarchie von oben die Ordnung von unten entgegensetzen. Ihr habt kein Recht, für Deutschland zu sprechen. Deutschland — das sind wir! (p. 169)

Having begun his testimony by telling the court that he and his comrades were indeed revolutionaries, Köbis ends by conceding that they were actually too stupid and cowardly to do what they were accused of and organise a revolution. Of course, these words are not meant to be understood in a purely historical context: they are addressed primarily at the contemporary Weimar audience, in particular at the working class, and are an attempt to make them see the need for unity in struggle and to understand that none of

the problems they face can be solved without a transformation of society.

While recognising and accepting defeat, then, Köbis, as his defiant speech makes clear, still maintains his faith in revolutionary perspectives. In Scene 9, however, set in prison as the five men await their execution, his optimism gives way to pessimism and he now seems to have no faith in the workers to bring about change. While waiting in their cell, the condemned men hear in the distance voices singing the *Internationale* and for a moment believe that their comrades have come to liberate them. Suddenly, however, the voices fall silent, leaving Köbis to remark 'Betrunkene Werftarbeiter. Nur im Suff erinnern sie sich an die Internationale'. (p. 173) Köbis's words can, of course, be interpreted as an expression of cynicism and pessimism, but that would be out of keeping with the views he has expressed elsewhere in the play. Another way of interpreting them is as a warning, Toller's warning to the German workers that if they do not learn from the mistakes of the past they will be doomed to repeat them, only this time with much more drastic consequences. That this really was Toller's intention is supported by the following conversation between Sachse and one of the prison warders:

> *AUFSEHER*: Ihr wart zu wenig.
> *SACHSE*: Wie meinen Sie das?
> *AUFSEHER*: Das Volk ist eben zu dumm. Ihr hattet Recht, das sagen alle. Ich war Schuster in Köln, hatte mir ein paar Pfennige gespart für meine alten Tage — auch hin. — Was meinen Sie, wie lange wird der Schwindel noch dauern? Sie kennen sich doch aus in der Politik.
> *SACHSE*: Solange Ihr das Maul haltet.
> *AUFSEHER*: Jeder ist sich selbst der Nächste. (p. 171)

In this exchange of views Toller turns almost directly to the audience and pleads with them not to sit back and allow history to repeat itself but to participate in the struggle for a new society. In any events, any trace of pessimism is swept away in the final scene which takes place in November 1918, a year after the execution of Köbis and Reichpietsch. Together with scene 2, this final scene provides a neat framework for *Feuer*

aus den Kesseln! for it too is set in a ship's boiler-room and shows the frantic activity of the stokers as they prepare for battle. Now, however, the optimistic, patriotic mood of 1916 has evaporated, and when the order is given to put to sea for one last desperate encounter with the English fleet, the sailors refuse and take the road of rebellion. An unnamed *Matrose* explains:

> Kameraden! Die Hochseeflote soll auslaufen. Die Offiziere sagen: "Siegen oder in Ehren untergehen." — Können wir siegen? Wir haben heute nicht den 4. August 1914, wir haben heute den 4. November 1918. Österreich-Ungarn, Bulgarien, die Türkei haben Schluß gemacht. Das Waffenstillstandsangebot der Obersten Heeresleitung zeigt klipp und klarr, das deutsche Heer kann nicht mehr, die U-Boote schaffen es nicht, wir sind am Ende. Für die Ehre unserer Offiziere Zehntausende opfern? ... Wollt Ihr das? ... Ich frage Euch: Dampf auf oder alle Kessel Feuer aus? (pp. 181-82)

To the cries of 'Feuer aus den Kesseln!' the sailors take over the ships, hoist the red flag, and with the military-band playing before them, march off in the direction of the jail to free their imprisoned comrades.

In his perceptive analysis of this play, Thomas Bütow argues that, in terms of the question of the legitimacy of the use of revolutionary violence, *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* is the least problematic of all of Toller's plays.[52] Köbis, he writes, is the first of his protagonists 'der das böse Mittel der Gewalt legitimiert, um ein anderes Böses — den Kreig — zu bekämpfen', his first 'vernunftethische[r] Held', the first, that is, to recognise that 'der Macht des Systems nur wiederum mit Macht zu begegnen ist'.[53] Bütow also argues, however, that Köbis's positive relationship towards the use of violence is limited, for the revolutionary counter-force he favours does not go beyond merely passive resistance, meaning that the thorny question of the possible misuse of force by the revolutionary side in a civil war is 'ausgeklammert':

> Auch in *Feuer aus den Kesseln!* gelingt die Versöhnung von Macht und

> Gewissen also nur um den Preis, daß die Frage, ob die legitime Machtausübung auch zum letzten Mittel greifen darf, nicht gestellt wird.[54]

Bütow's claim is, of course, absolutely correct. Toller's play ends at the very beginning of the revolutionary process and so does not have to deal with the bloody consequences of it. There are, however, two points which need to be made here. Firstly, the play ends where it does not so much because Toller wanted to avoid the question of violence, but, as explained above, because he wanted to place the main stress on the idea of workers' unity. He would have subverted his own stated intention had he gone on to explore in detail the further development of the revolution. Secondly, Köbis is, it is true, an advocate of the use of defensive violence and is not brought face to face with the question as to whether or not it is possible to distinguish between defensive and offensive forms of struggle during a revolutionary period. Despite this, he clearly has a much more positive and realistic attitude towards the question of force than the 'gesinnungsethische' heroes and heroines of Toller's earlier plays and as a character, therefore, can be seen as a development of the dedicated revolutionaries of *Hoppla, wir leben!*, Mutter Meller, Eva Berg and Albert Kroll. Admittedly, Toller did not fully renounce his pacifist convictions until the middle of the 1930s — and even then he did so in a quite roundabout and rather shamefaced way — but at least in this play, as in *Hoppla, wir leben!*, he had abandoned the sterile belief — the belief which lies at the heart of, for instance, *Masse Mensch* and *Die Maschinenstürmer* — that all violence, whether defensive or offensive, whether perpetrated by the oppressed or the oppressor, was worthy of condemnation. Unfortunately, the two plays Toller wrote in exile, *Nie wieder Friede*! and *Pastor Hall*, are more or less simple anti-fascist propaganda pieces which do not address in any shape or form the problems of revolution and the class struggle.

1. *Feuer aus den Kesseln. Historisches Schauspiel*, in *GW*, III, 119-83. References are given in brackets after quotations in text. The version of the play reprinted in *GW* is based on a manuscript not intended for sale published in Berlin by Osterheld & Co., in 1930. The first version published for sale was entitled, *Feuer aus den Kesseln. Historisches Schauspiel. Anhang: Historische Dokumente* (Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1930). The historical documents appended to this text were culled mainly from the published transcript of the committee appointed by the German parliament to investigate the background to the revolution of November 1918. See *Das Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses der verfassungsgebenden deutschen Nationalversammlung und des deutschen Reichstages 1919-1928. Vierte Reihe. Die Ursachen des deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918. Zweite Abteilung. Der innere Zusammenbruch*, 12 vols, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgenossenschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1919-28), referred to subsequently as *DWU* followed by volume and page number. In the 'Anhang' Toller referred to vols. IX/1. and IX/2. and X. Apart from *Die Blinde Göttin*, which Toller never saw performed on a German stage, *Feuer aus den Kesseln* was the last full-length drama he completed before being forced into exile. Premiered in Berlin, in the *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm* on August 31 1930, the play opened to a generally mixed reception, though Cecil Davies has shown that the majority of reviews were, in fact, favourable. Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), pp. 373-74 and 570-71. The play has found favour with many modern critics too with some describing it as among Toller's best works. See Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), pp. 176-77. Mainly because of political developments, however, in particular the continuing bitter struggle between the Communist and Socialist left, the play was not a success with the theatre-going public. Despite a last-ditch attempt by the director, Hans Heinrich, to stimulate interest by offering free tickets to Trades Union members, the production was forced to close after a disappointing run of only 35 performances. See Ernst-Josef Aufricht, *Erzähle damit du dein Recht erweist*, (Berlin: 1966), pp. 101-03.

2. See Daniel Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1* (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969).

3. For the background to the sailors' revolt see Wilhelm Dittmann, *Die Marine-Justizmorde von 1917 und die Admiralsrebellion von 1918* (Berlin: 1926). Hans Beckers, one of the sailors involved in the revolt and one of the main characters in the play, also wrote an interesting and highly moving personal account of the period, one which confirms Toller's description of events in all essential details. See Hans Beckers, *Wie ich zum Tode verurteilt wurde. Die Marinetragödie im Sommer 1917*, in the series *Verboten und verbrannt/Exil*, with an introduction by Kurt Tucholsky (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1960). First published in Leipzig by Ernst Oldenburg in 1930.

4. 'Wer schafft den deutschen Revolutionsfilm', *Die Welt am Montag*, 5 November 1928. reprinted in *GW*, I, 117-19.

5. *GW*, I, 117.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

8. Dorothy Klein, 'Der Wandel der dramatischen Darstellungsform im Werk Ernst Tollers 1919-1930 (unpublished dissertation, Bochum, 1968)

9. 'Einladung an Dobring', *Die Weltbühne*, 26, no. 40 (1 October 1930), 510-11. Reprinted in *GW*, III, 335-36. Dobring never replied in public to Toller's challenge but the two men did meet once for a private discussion, the details of which were never made known. See Ernst Feder, *Heute sprach ich ...: Tagebücher eines Berliner Publizisten, 1926-1932*, edited by Cécilie Loewenthal-Hensel and Arnold Pauckner (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1971), p. 273.

10. 'Einladung an Dobring',in *GW*, III, 335.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

13. Dorothy Klein, 'Der Wandel der dramatischen Darstellungsform', p. 152.

14. Thomas Bütow, *Der Konflikt zwischen Revolution und Pazifismus im Werk Ernst Tollers* (Hamburg: Lüdke, 1975), pp. 362-63.

15. Cecil Davies, *Ernst Toller. A Revaluation*, p. 362.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

17. Klaus Kändler, 'Zwischen Masse und Mensch — Ernst Toller von der *Wandlung* bis *Hoppla, wir leben!* und *Feuer aus den Kesseln!*' in *Zu Ernst Toller. Drama und Engagement,* edited by Jost Hermand (Stuttgart: Klett, 1981), p. 110.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

19. Martin Reso, 'Der gesellschaftlich-ethische Protest im dichterischen Werk Ernst Tollers' (unpublished dissertation, Jena 1957), p. 119.

20. Alfred Klein, 'Zwei Dramatiker in der Entscheidung. Ernst Toller, Friedrich Wolf und die Novemberrevolution', in *Sinn und Form*, 10, (1958), 702-25.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

23. See *Der Dolchstoßprozeß in München vom 19. Oktober - 20. November 1925. Eine Ehrenrettung des deutschen Volkes. Zeugen- und Sachverständigen-Aussagen. Eine Sammlung von Dokumenten*, edited by E. Beckmann (Munich: Birk, 1925).

24. This is what Toller called the sailors in his autobiography where he described the spark which lit the flame of revolution in November 1918:

> Die Matrosen der Flotte, des Kaisers blaue Jungen, rebellieren zuerst. Die Hochseeflotte soll auslaufen, die Offiziere wollen lieber 'den Untergang in Ehren als schmachvollen Frieden', die Matrosen, die schon 1917 Pioniere der Revolution waren, weigern sich, sie löschen die Feuer,

> sechshundert Mann werden verhaftet, die Matrosen verlassen die Schiffe, stürmen die Gefängnisse, erobern die Stadt Kiel, die Werftarbeiter verbünden sich mit ihnen, die deutsche Revolution hat begonnen.

Ernst Toller, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994), (p. 79). First published in Amsterdam by Querido in 1933.

25. Toller makes this quite clear in the first scene, which is set in the *Reichstag* in the summer of 1926 at the opening session of the parliamentary *Untersuchungsausschuß* charged with reporting on the background to the revolution. The chairman, *Abgeordneter* Moos, explains that it is not the committee's job to decide whether or not the sentences passed on Reichpietsch and Köbis were correct but to establish 'ob diese Unruhen aus der deutschen Marine hervorgegangen, oder wie weit sie in diese hineingetragen sind'. The first witness, Simpf, formerly chief stoker on the *Helgoland*, explains:

> *SIMPF*: Was keine Aufwiegelung zustande gebracht hatte, erreichte dieser unselige Prozeß. Von hier ab war alles Vertrauen dahin. Waren wir denn wirklich nur Kulis und Galeerensträflinge? Dieser Tag ist für die Geschichte der Kriegsgerichte in Deutschland ein schwarzer Tag. Ich habe mir immer gesagt: wenn es noch Gerechtigkeit auf Erden gibt, muß diesen Leuten, die, soweit ich kenne, aus Vaterlandsliebe handelten, ihr Recht werden. Wir genossen die Früchte des Opfers. Das Essen wurde nach dem Prozeß merklich besser. Aber die Offiziere fühlten selbst: der Prozeß hat die Leute erst rebellisch gemacht.

GW, III, 123.

26. For by far the best account of the background to the revolution in the fleet see Daniel Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1*.

27. Known in English as the Battle of Jutland, the *Skagerrakschlacht* took place on 31 May — 1 June 1916.

28. Daniel Horn writes on this subject:

> The German Navy acquitted itself unexpectedly well at the *Skagerrakschlacht*. The German ships were outnumbered two to one by the British, who also had a decided superiority in range and firing power. Yet the Germans managed because of their superior training and audacity in the face of danger to sink nearly twice as many English ships as they lost, and they suffered only one third as many casualties. In that sense, Jutland may be regarded as a victory for the High Sea Fleet.
>
> In a realistic sense, however, the outcome of that battle is subject to a great deal of controversy. Many naval historians, some of them German, argue that the Battle of Jutland was not really a German victory; it did not for a single moment jeopardize England's control of the seas. No matter how many ships the German sank [...] the British fleet never lost control of the battle.

The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1, pp. 18-19.

29. Toller provides abundant factual evidence to support all of this in the 'Anhang' to the first published edition of the play.

30. Poor weather in the summer of 1916 reduced the harvest, a problem compounded by an unusually cold autumn and a bitter winter. Turnip, therefore, became the staple food for the German population, including the sailors. Not, however, for the officers. As Horn writes:

> If the officers had shared this hunger and privation with the men, common suffering might have improved their relationship and ameliorated the class conflict. But the class-conscious and caste-ridden German naval officer corps refused to avail itself of this opportunity. Instead it aggravated the conflict. Insisting on their privileges and determined to maintain their superiority over the men, the officers allowed a revolutionary situation to arise in the fleet by their stubborn maintenance of unequal rations.

Daniel Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1*, pp. 39-40.

31. For details of the various visits to the *Reichstag* made by Sachse, Reichpietsch and Köbis see Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1*, pp. 76-93.

32. See Heinrich Neu, *Die revolutionäre Bewegung auf der deutschen Flotte*, 1917-1918 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930).

33. On 3 August 1914, responding to attempts by the government to lend the war a liberal character by portraying it as a struggle against reactionary Tsarism, the SPD's main daily newspaper, *Vorwärts*, wrote that the task of overthrowing Tsarism was one which could be undertaken only by the Russian working people themselves. See Karl Grünberg, *Die Internationale und der Weltkrieg* (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1917), pp. 73-74. A few days later, after voting for war credits, the SPD *Reichstag* faction declared the struggle to defend culture and freedom against Russian despotism was the highest of the German working class. See Grünberg, *op cit*, pp. 76-77.

34. In the course of his testimony to the *Reichstag* committee of enquiry Dittmann described Sachse, whom he met on several occasions, as a political fanatic who had psychopathic tendencies. See *DWU*, IX/2, p. 254.

35. Held in July and August 1917, the Stockholm Conference was an attempt to bring together those groups and parties involved in the Zimmerwald movement with those Socialist parties still supporting the war. The aim was to make preparations for a further conference, to be held in September, at which steps would be discussed to help end the war. Unfortunately, the socialist parties in the Allied countries, with the exception of Russia, at first regarded the proposed conference as an adjunct of German propaganda and refused to have anything to do with it. When their suspicions were removed, the socialists elected delegates in the US, Great Britain, France and Italy. In the event, however, the governments of the US France and Italy refused to issue passports while the British socialists changed their mind about attending due to the pressure of hostile public opinion. Delegates from Russia and some neutral countries did attend, but discussions were overshadowed by the recent revolutionary events inside Russian and the basic differences between the revolutionaries and social patriots were not overcome. See Louis Leo Snyder, *Historic Documents of World War 1*, New York: Greenwood, 1977),

and Julius Braunthal, *The History of the International 1914-1943*, 2 vols (London: Nelson, 1967), II, 65-94.

36. See Braunthal, *op cit.*

37. See A. J. Ryder, *The German Revolution of 1918. A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), pp. 99-106.

38. See Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1*, p. 88.

39. The article in question was in the local newspaper, the *Wilhelmshavener Tageblatt*.

40. See Erich Kutter, *Von Kiel bis Berlin: Der Siegeszug der deutschen Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 1918), pp. 26-35.

41. Richard Stumpf, *War, Mutiny and Revolution in the German Navy* edited and translated by Daniel Horn (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967)

42. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 328. Stumpf also writes:

> I respect the Food Committee for its good work. Indeed noticeable improvements are already apparent. we have been issued additional rations several times and the ordinary meals are much tastier than before. I imagine that this will continue until the uproar dies down. We still have a long way to go before thorough going and basic changes are made. However, judging from the talk of the men, one might almost believe that the events in Russia are about to be repeated here. Much has yet to be done to merit such a comparison.

Ibid., p. 342.

44. Kurt Zeisler, 'Die Revolutionäre Matrosenbewegung in Deutschland im Oktober/November 1918', in *Revolutionäre Ereignisse und Probleme in Deutschland während der Periode der großen sozialistischen Oktober-revolution 1917-1918*, edited by Albert Schreiner (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957), pp. 42-75. Zeisler tries hard to prove that the movement among the fleet was of a consciously revolutionary character, but his own account reveals that, even if there were, it was of a very limited nature, certainly nothing like that seen in the Russian fleet.

45. In a latter dated 14 August 1914 to the Navy Secretary, Admiral von Capelle, Von Scheer expressed the view that a few trials and death sentences would put an end to any revolutionary activities, a view he repeated some four days later on the occasion of a visit by the Kaiser to the fleet in Wilhelmshaven. See *DWU*, IX/1 p. 85.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

47. Compare Toller's letter, 'Einladung an Dobring'.

48. See Hans Beckers, *Wie ich zum Tode verurteilt wurde*, pp. 77-86 (p. 78).

49. On 26 August 1917, Admiral Scheer announced death sentences for Köbis and Reichpietsch while Sachse, Weber, and Beckers each received 15 years imprisonment. The execution was carried out under the greatest of secrecy on 5 September 1917 at the Wahn firing range near Cologne by an army firing squad. See Daniel Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War 1*, p. 167.

50. Köbis did not put in an appeal for mercy, but he was still denied the chance of escaping the death penalty by the actions of von Scheer who knowingly, it seems, rushed through the executions so as to circumvent Paragraph 418 of the Code of Military Justice which stated that death sentences could only be carried out if the *Kaiser* chose not to show clemency. Reichpietsch did put in a plea for mercy, but his letter to his parents asking them to do this on his behalf 'went missing', not being delivered until 19 September, 5 days after the executions. Toller dramatises this well in scene 11 in which a sailor turns up at the parents' apartment to discover to his horror that they know nothing of their son's fate. *GW*, III, 177-79.

51. Hans Beckers, *Wie ich zum Tode verurteilt wurde*, p. 80.

52. Thomas Bütow, *Der Konflikt zwischen Revolution und Pazifismus*, p. 359.

53. *Ibid*,. p. 360.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 360. Cecil Davies has challenged this interpretation, arguing that Bütow is wrong to see Köbis as the hero of the play and the '"apex of the pyramid" of characters. The Toller of 1930, Davies asserts, could not possibly have made 'an advocate of violence' the hero, for at this stage he 'was still a committed pacifist and remained so until about 1935/36'. Davies does concede, however, that Köbis represents a new phenomenon in Toller's plays, namely 'a *sympathetic* presentation of a man prepared to use violence in the last resort'. Davies sees different aspects of Toller's attitude towards the question of violence expressed not only in the figure of Köbis but also in Reichpietsch, the Christian pacifist, with these two embodying 'Toller's past and future attitudes to force'. Cecil Davies, *Ernst Toller. A Revaluation*, pp. 358-61.

CHAPTER 8

THE RISE OF THE VOLKSFRONT: TOLLER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE SOVIET UNION IN EXILE

Sometime after 10 January 1933 Toller left Germany for what was intended to be a short lecture tour of Switzerland, promising Christiane Grautoff, soon to be his wife, that he would be back home before the end of the month.[1] Due to some unexplained hold-up, however, he was unable to return as planned and consequently was not at home when, on 27 February, the night the *Reichstag* was set on fire, some Nazi stormtroopers turned up at his flat in Berlin to arrest him.[2] Through this stroke of luck, Toller escaped the fate which befell so many of his friends and comrades, people such as Erich Mühsam, who found such a terrible end at the hands of the Nazi sadists. Now, however, he had before him the long and sometimes bitter years of exile, years which tested him, both personally and politically, years which saw a decline, if not in the quality, at least in the quantity of his creative output. Apart from *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*, which must have been virtually complete before he was forced to leave Germany, he produced only two more major works in the years before his death, the anti-war comedy, *Nie wieder Friede!* (1935), and *Pastor Hall* (1938), a drama about the development of the internal opposition to Hitler. It must be stressed, however, that this decline in productivity was not due to any sense of resignation or depression on Toller's part — not initially at least — but to the fact that he devoted most of his efforts to political activities of one sort or another.[3] Despite the immense political and psychological blow of Hitler's *Machtergreifung*, he was full of energy and determined to carry on the struggle against fascism, not just in Germany but throughout the whole of Europe.[4] Most of Toller's political activity in exile was, of course, carried out under the banner of the *Volksfront*, in English the Popular or Peoples' Front, the name given to the foreign policy pursued by the Soviet Union from about 1935 until the signing of the Stalin-Hitler Pact on 23 August 1939.[5] In view of the enormous impact this idea had on his thinking in exile, it is necessary, at this point, to take a brief look at how the *Volksfront* arose and to define precisely what it was, and in

particular, to show in what ways it differed from the *Einheitsfront*.

Once in power, Hitler lost no time in eliminating his enemies on the left. The *Reichstag* was still in flames when the order was signed banning the KPD, accused by the government of having started the fire, and in the course of the next few days hundreds of its leaders were rounded up and either murdered or taken off to concentration camps.[6] On May 2 1933, the day after they had participated in the Nazis 'National Day of Labour', the Trades Unions were dissolved,[7] while the SPD, some of whose leaders deluded themselves into believing that they would be allowed to function as a legal opposition to Hitler, was crushed just a few weeks later, on 22 June 1933.[8] At the elections of 5 March 1933, the last 'free' elections to be held under the Third Reich, the NSDAP received 17 million votes, 5.5 million more than in the previous election, while the combined total for the SPD and KPD fell just short of 12 million.[9] Given the atmosphere of fear and intimidation, this was a respectable result, yet these 12 million votes counted for nothing in terms of *Realpolitik* and were simply ignored by Hitler who now faced no obstacle on the way to the creation of the totalitarian state. Despite all this, there was a deep reluctance within the ranks of the Comintern to recognise the scale of the defeat suffered by the German Left, indeed, to accept that it had been defeated at all. In large measure, of course, this was due to a guilty conscience. While few party members were willing to admit it openly, they must have been aware that the tactics pursed by the KPD had been of inestimable assistance to the National Socialists. It was to conceal their embarrassment about this, and in order to blunt the edge of internal party criticism, that Communist leaders took refuge in the argument that what had happened in Germany was not a defeat but a necessary and inevitable stage in the revolutionary process. Karl Radek described the March 5 elections as a brilliant victory for the Communists and argued that the National Socialists had suffered a defeat 'like the defeat

amounted to much in practice. It was only in France and Spain that *Volksfront* governments came to power and in both of these countries the experiment in anti-fascist coalition politics ended badly; indeed, in Spain it ended in complete disaster with the triumph of General Franco.[28] The attempt to build a common front among the German exile community never even got off the ground. Understandably, the leadership of the SPD was sceptical about the extent of the KPD's commitment to democracy, believing that its recent sudden discovery of the virtues of this idea had more to do with political expediency than a genuine change of heart.[29] Following talks between the two parties on 23 November 1935, the only official contact to take place, the SPD spokesmen, Stampfer and Vogel, refused to sanction a formal alliance with the Communists precisely because they did not believe the latters' protestations of faith in democracy.[30] The KPD's rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Stampfer and Vogel argued, was 'reine Taktik', posing the question what would happen if democracy were to be restored in Germany? Would this also call forth 'eine neue taktische Änderung eintreten'? In other words, would the KPD take the same attitude towards a new democracy that it had taken towards the Weimar Republic?[31] Yet while the socialists were right to be suspicious of the motives underlying the transformation in the Communist Party's outlook, they were quite wrong to believe that their old adversaries were lying when they said that their overriding priority now was the defence of democracy. During the Spanish Civil War the Comintern strangled the nascent socialist revolution precisely because it wanted to prove to the West just how committed it was to bourgeois democracy and to the anti-fascist *Volksfront*. Yet even before the Spanish Civil War had revealed the mendacity which lay at the heart of the *Volksfront*, the idea had been effectively shipwrecked by the Moscow Show Trials which reached their peak at the very moment in which the Communists were trying to pass themselves off as champions of liberty and justice.[32]

It is important to understand exactly what Dimitrov was trying to do here. By characterising fascism as an expression not of bourgeois reaction *per se* but of a particular kind of bourgeois reaction, i.e. finance capital, he was trying to create, indeed did create, the theoretical justification for an alliance between the various Communist Parties and what the Comintern now began to describe as the progressive bourgeoisie. As already indicated, Communists the world over were now expected to enter into agreements not only with their former enemies in the various Social Democratic parties, those people, that is, hitherto categorised as social fascists, but with all kinds of middle-class parties and groupings, with Liberals, Radicals and even Conservatives, all of those who showed a readiness to defend democracy against fascist aggression. While recognising the limitations of bourgeois democracy and while maintaining their long-term revolutionary goals, Communists were to become the champions of freedom and culture. Instead of frightening away the middle-classes with radical, anti-capitalist slogans, they were to join hands with all people of progressive opinion, irrespective of party or social class, and build a great anti-fascist coalition, the *Volksfront*.[25] Interestingly, and a good indication of the grip Stalin had on the world Communist movement, hardly any of the delegates to this conference even alluded to the fact that in proclaiming the *Volksfront* the Comintern was tacitly admitting that the previous policy had been a disaster. Not only was the theory of social fascism laid to rest, it was as if it had never existed in the first place. History was rewritten and all the crimes of the previous period expunged from the memory of the Communists, indeed, of many of their fellow travellers too.[26] Within a short space of time the Communists transformed themselves from the self-proclaimed vanguard of the proletarian revolution into guardians of bourgeois democracy, from internationalists and champions of workers' solidarity, into flag-waving patriots.[27]

Despite the hyperbole which surrounded it, however, the *Volksfront* never

left-wing parties in the struggle against fascism, describing this as a betrayal of the working class. Now it was about to abandon this position and argue instead in favour of co-operation not just with the social fascists of yesteryear, but with bourgeois governments as well. The only way this could be done without loss of face would be by presenting the new course not as a reversal of the old one, but as the logical and inevitable development of it. It would have to be done, in other words, in such a way as to confirm the genius and infallibility of Stalin himself.[20]

It was in order to overcome these two difficulties that Moscow proclaimed the birth of the *Volksfront* at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow on July 25 1935. The task of explaining precisely what it meant fell to Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist leader and chief defendant at the Reichstag Fire Trial.[21] Dimitrov began his speech, a speech which lasted some 4 hours, with what seemed like the usual Communist analysis of the social and economic roots of fascism, explaining that it was a manifestation of the crisis in the capitalist-imperialist system, 'the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital'.[22] What is significant, however, is that while describing fascism as 'the power of finance capital itself',[23] Dimitrov was also keen to stress that the fascist dictatorship was qualitatively different from other kinds of capitalist dictatorship, that it posed a threat not only to the workers' movement, but to liberal democracy as well, indeed that it threatened to destroy the very essence of western culture and civilisation:

> The accession to power of fascism is not an *ordinary succession* of one bourgeois government by another, but a *substitution* of one form of state form of class domination of the bourgeoisie — bourgeois democracy — by another form — open terrorist dictatorship. It would be a serious mistake to ignore this distinction, a mistake liable to prevent the revolutionary proletariat from mobilizing the widest strata of working people of town and country for the struggle against the menace of the seizure of power by the fascists and from taking advantage of the contradictions which exist in the camp of the bourgeoisie itself. [Italics in original] [24]

on the Marne'.[10] In the same vein, Fritz Heckert interpreted Hitler's victory as a significant step on the road to the ripening of the revolutionary crisis in the heart of Europe,[11] while a resolution passed by the Central Committee of the KPD in May 1933 stated: 'Die Krise der kapitalistischen Wirtschaft- und Gesellschaftsordnung verschärft sich sprunghaft [...] die grundlegenden objektiven Faktoren [...] entwickeln sich auf Grund der Maßnahmen der Hitler-Regierung schneller zur revolutionären Krise hin'.[12]

What was most astonishing about the Comintern's analysis, however, was not the self-deception about the prospects of revolution, but the continued insistence on describing the Social Democrats as Social Fascists. Even while members of the SPD were being tortured and murdered by Hitler's thugs, Communist leaders were proclaiming that party's complicity in the NS victory:

> We Communists have been telling you for years that the Second International is leading you into fascism and imperialist wars ... Mark well, workers, international Social Democracy prefers a United Front with the fascists to defend and preserve capitalism to a workers' United Front for the overthrow of capitalism by a workers' revolution.[13]

Heckert placed the blame for the rise of Hitler squarely on the shoulders of the SPD which, he claimed, since 1914 had pursued a 'reactionary united front with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat'.[14] On 1 April 1933, in its first public statement on Germany, the Presidium of the Communist International sought to absolve itself from all blame for the catastrophe and asserted that 'the political line and the organisational policy followed by the Central Committee of the German Communist Party up to and including Hitler's *coup* was perfectly correct'.[15] The establishment of a fascist dictatorship, it was argued, destroys all democratic illusions among the masses, frees them from the influence of the Social Democrats and so hastens Germany's progress towards the proletarian revolution.[16] Having learnt nothing from the experience of the previous period, the

Communists still saw Social Democracy as the enemy, as the chief prop of the capitalist dictatorship, and continued to argue that the defeat of this party was the most important precondition for a successful struggle against fascism. 'The question of how soon the rule of bankrupt capitalism will be overthrown by the proletariat', the ECCI declared, 'will be determined by the successful work of the Communist parties in undermining the mass influence of Social Democracy'.[17]

Yet while the leaders of the Comintern gave the impression of being supremely confident and unperturbed by Hitler's victory, they were, in fact, deeply concerned by the recent turn of events. They could see that, far from collapsing due to its inner contradictions, as they had predicted, the NS regime was actually consolidating its position, even managing to win support among sections of the working class, that group which had previously proved most impervious to Nazi blandishments.[18] It dawned on the Kremlin that the inner dynamics of German fascism, its aggressive nationalism, its anti-Bolshevik philosophy - in a word its *Weltanschauung* - would sooner or later lead to armed conflict with the Soviet Union. Attempts to forestall this by friendly overtures to Berlin met with rejection, leaving Stalin isolated and mortally terrified of being engulfed by the seemingly unstoppable tide of reaction sweeping Europe.[19] In this situation, Stalin began to consider the possibility of a defensive alliance with the capitalist democracies of the West, in particular, with France and Britain. Such a move, however, posed two main difficulties. Firstly, the West was suspicious of a regime whose avowed goal was, or was thought to be, the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Before he could become a trusted partner Stalin would have to prove that the Soviet Union no longer represented a threat to the capitalist system. Secondly, there was the problem of what to do about the theory of social fascism. For the past 7 or 8 years the Comintern had rejected co-operation with other

Whatever the precise motives for the Show Trials might have been — and historians have advanced a variety of explanations[33] — there is no doubt that they did enormous damage to the prestige of the Soviet Union.[34] It is difficult to say exactly how many victims the purges claimed, but one estimate puts the number at about 5 million with another 8 million arrested on various charges of treason between, one million of these being executed and another 2 million perishing in one of the myriad of labour camps which infested the country.[35] Although few contemporary observers suspected the extent of the purges, the fact that they were taking place was no secret. The trials were carried out in the full glare of publicity, and when the chief prosecutor, Vyshinky, referring to Bukharin und Rykov, told court officials to 'take them away and shoot the mad dogs', his words echoed around the world.[36] Yet despite the damage done both to the idea of socialism and, of more immediate concern, to the developing *Volksfront*, there was little adverse reaction among the ranks of what were termed the fellow-travellers, the literary men and women who, like Toller, supported the Soviet Union without actually belonging to the Communist Party. Admittedly, there were one or two critical voices, André Gide, for instance, who in *Retour de l'URSS* painted a devastating picture of life in the Soviet Union, the lack of freedom, the toadying and the monstrous Stalin cult.[37] Yet Gide's criticisms were remarkable precisely because they were so isolated. The majority of fellow-travellers, from those close to the Communist Party, such as Brecht, to the more independent intellectuals, like Heinrich Mann, turned a blind eye to what was going on mainly because they feared that inopportune criticism might damage the USSR, which was, in their eyes, the most reliable bulwark against fascism.[38]

Toller had begun to move towards the idea of the creation of a broad, cross-party, anti-fascist coalition even before the *Volksfront* was proclaimed in 1935. His lent his voice to the movement, in other words, not just because he was a supporter of the Soviet

Union but because he had already come to the conclusion that this was the only way to stop the forward march of fascism. Yet the fact that he was a supporter of the Soviet Union, and remained so until his death, has to be recognised, for otherwise it is not possible to understand why he adopted the stance he did on some of the most important political issues of the 1930s. Admittedly, he was never a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, yet he was a dedicated if sometimes critical supporter of the Soviet Union and had been ever since 1917. In 1934, in the course of a speech to the Soviet Writers' Congress in Moscow, he described the enthusiasm which had taken hold of him and all the 'junge Menschen, die gegen den Imperialismus kämpften' when they heard the news of the October Revolution.[39] They knew then, he asserts, that the dreams of millions would finally become reality and 'daß diese Welt des Mordens und des kapitalistischen Raubbaus an menschlicher Kraft durch eine sozialistische Welt voll Sinn und Vernunft überwunden wurde'. (p. 151) 'Wir erlebten mit leidenschaftlicher Teilnahme', he continued, 'die schweren Jahre der Selbstbehauptung und der heroischen Verteidigung gegen die Konterrevolution an allen Fronten', (p. 151) adding:

> Wir waren Zeugen, wie die UdSSR, umgeben von faschistischen Staaten, unbeirrt ihren Weg verfolgte. Wie Völker, die bis vor wenigen Jahren dumpf und versklavt lebten, in fieberhafter Arbeit zu eigenem kulturellen Leben erwachten. (p. 151)

After praising what he felt were the immense social and economic achievements of the USSR, he made the following important point:

> Was haben wir der UdSSR zu verdanken? IHR DASEIN. Heute mehr denn je. Ihr Schutz, ihre Verteidigung ist die Pflicht aller, die sich den Glauben an die historische Mission der arbeitenden Klassen bewahrt haben. (p. 152)

As far as he was concerned, the defence of the Soviet Union, the world's first workers'

state, was his duty as a revolutionary, irrespective of how far the reality might be from the socialist ideal.[40]

It is important to underline this point here for some critics, among them John Spalek, have argued that Toller was actually an opponent of the Soviet system, indeed, that towards the end of is life he became as critical of Communism as he was of National Socialism.[41] Yet Spalek's claim not only lacks any supporting evidence, it stands contradicted by everything Toller wrote or said about the Soviet Union. On his first visit to the country in February 1926, for instance, he had been deeply impressed by what he considered were genuine attempts to rebuild society on a more just and humane foundation. In *Quer Durch*, a collection of essays in which he describes the impressions he had gained of life in the Soviet Union and the United States following visits to the two countries, he made it quite clear on which side of the great ideological divide he stood.[42] In a foreword written in 1930, some 4 years after his visit to Russia, he stated:

> Laßt die Völker Rußlands ihre eigenen Wege gehen, nirgends auf der Welt sonst sehen wir so gigantische Selbstentfaltung menschlicher Tatkraft.
> Gelingt das Experiment nicht, war es in der Geschichte der Menschheit ein heroisches Beispiel schöpferischen Geistes.
> Gelingt es, und manches spricht dafür, wird für die Erde eine Regeneration der Kulturen beginnen, von deren vielfältiger Wirkung wir heute nur wenig ahnen. (*QD*, p. 82)

Toller, of course, was not alone in his admiration for the USSR; many millions of people, not all of them revolutionary socialists like himself, supported the Soviet regime and saw in it the model of the society of the future. From Sidney and Beatrice Webb, to Bernard Shaw, from Henri Barbusse to Heinrich Mann, from H.G. Wells to Bertolt Brecht, from Paul Robeson to Lion Feuchtwanger, all of these at one time or another and to one degree or another expressed the view that the Soviet Union represented a new, better type of civilisation, one which other countries should strive to emulate. Given the

historical context, there was nothing particularly surprising about such a view. While the West was struggling to come to terms with the consequences of the Great Depression, mass unemployment, poverty, homelessness and depravation, the Soviet Union seemed to be taking massive strides forward in both the economic and social sphere. Industrial output and the general standard of living may have been below that of the West, but the government was trying to better the lot of ordinary people, providing free health and education services, building homes and a modern infrastructure, and actually working towards genuine equality between the sexes, not only encouraging women to go out to work but enabling them to do so by providing such things as free nursery care.[43]

All of this made a tremendous impression on Toller. In *Quer Durch*, he makes specific reference to the position of women in the Soviet Union when he describes one of the many meetings he attended on International Women's Day:

> Am stärksten packte mich die Versammlung der Frauen im Experimentaltheater. Wir kennen die russischen Bäuerinnen aus der Literatur als dumpfe Wesen, preisgegeben der Gewalt des Fatums. Hier sah ich Frauen, die zu Selbstbewußtsein und Gesellschaftsbewußtsein sich durchgekämpft hatten. Das Schönste, keine sprach in abgeleierten Patreiphrasen, jede fand ihre eigenen Worte und Bilder.
> Da war ein Kaukasierin aus Kuban. Sie erzählte vom Kampf der Frauen in den Bergdörfern um eine neue Welt. Leidenschaftlicher noch vom Kampf der Frauen gegen ihre Männer, die die alte Welt in der Ehe zäh und tyrannisch festhalten wollen. (*QD*, pp. 109-10)

Toller recognised, of course, that full emancipation for women could not be achieved at one stroke, the burden of the past was too great for that, but at least, he writes, 'die russischen Frauen sind erwacht'. (*QD*, p. 111) He was pleased by the progress being made in other fields too, in particular what he felt was the exemplary fashion in which the Soviet regime looked after its children, as well as its enlightened, tolerant and progressive approach towards the problem of national minorities:

> In der Sowjet-Union enthüllen viele Völker, die vom zaristischen allrussischen Nationalstaat unterdrückt waren, erst heute wieder ihr eigentümliches Gesicht, finden zu ihren alten Literaturen, Kunstwerken, Naturbeziehungen. Hier wird die Idee des Internationalismus, die Nation zu befreien und dadurch den Nationalismus zu überwinden, Wirklichkeit. (*QD*, pp. 183-84)

He goes on to explain how in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Leningrad he had spoken to one of the curators who confessed that even he, an opponent of the Communist regime, had been forced to recognise 'die großen Verdienste der Bolsheviki' in their handling of the nationalities problem. (*QD*, p. 184) Toller also writes in praise of the Soviet penal system, though he does express regret that the government should still see fit to employ what he described as 'ein furchtbares, bekämpfenswertes Werkzeug des bürgerlichen Staates' (*QD*, p. 128):

> Gefängnis ist immer etwas Furchtbares [...] Ein noch so tolerantes Gefängnis bleibt Gefängnis. Bezweifeln mag es, wer Gefängnis nicht erlebt hat. Hier soll nicht die Frage erörtert werden, ob Gefängnisse zu jenen Institutionen gehören, die der Sozialismus auszurotten die Pflicht hat. Ich gehöre zu den Anhängern dieser Meinung. (*QD*, pp. 129-30)

Yet despite criticising the continued use of prison as an institution of repression, Toller is pleased to report that the Soviet prisons compare favourably with those in the West. The inmates in the Ssokolniki prison, he reports, seem well fed and have the opportunity not only to study in a well-stocked library but can even learn various trades, half of the money earned being held in an account and made payable on release. (*QD*, p. 133) He also notes the comparatively lenient prison regime, the 'ungezwungene Haltung der Gefangenen. Kein Strammstehen, kein Katzbuckeln, kein schmieriges Sichanbiedern':

> In Westeuropa versucht man das Rückgrat des Gefangenen, sein freiheitliches Selbstbewußtsein zu zertrümmern, nachher wundert man sich, wenn er unfähig wird, sich der Gesellschaft einzugliedern. (*QD*, p. 130)

In Ssokolniki, by contrast, the prisoners are treated like human beings and are given the maximum possible freedom to develop as individuals. Toller expresses amazement, for example, at the fact that women, the relatives of some of the warders, are not only allowed inside the jail but can even take part in a play being organised by the inmates; in his opinion lack of contact with the opposite sex is one of the hardest, most dehumanizing parts of prison life and of his own experience he writes 'Ich habe fünf Jahre, abgesehen von seltenen Besuchen, keine Frau aus der Nähe gesehen, geschweige berührt'. (*QD*, p. 133)

In retrospect, Toller's sympathy for the USSR seems naive and it is easy to criticise him for what appears to be an almost wilful blindness, a refusal to even perceive the blemishes on the cheek of the Soviet state. Yet before rushing to judgement, it is important to remember that, at that time, the Stalin regime was still in its infancy and that many of the features which were to cause revulsion later on and which, in the eyes of many, would discredit the idea of socialism, had either not yet appeared or not developed fully. Moreover, he was not an uncritical admirer of all that he saw during his visit to the USSR and in *Quer Durch* drew attention to a number of the more disturbing aspects of life in the first workers's state. He was disturbed, for instance, to discover that a high percentage of those in prison had been jailed for 'Unterschlagung', embezzlement, financial misdeeds. When the Minister for Justice sought to justify this by arguing that the country was going through an 'Unterschlagungsepidemie' and that it was necessary to fight this with high prison sentences Toller was not convinced:

> Sollte die Unterschlagungsepidemie als soziale Erscheinung nicht bedingt sein durch bestimmte soziale Mißstände? Vielleicht werden gewisse Kategorien von Arbeitern und Angestellten zu gering bezahlt im Verhältnis zu den Kosten des Lebensstandards? Es war der Fehler bürgerlicher Gesellschaft, Symptome zu bekämpfen, statt das Übel auszuheilen, das jene Symptome zeitigte. (*QD*, p. 134)

Here is one clear indication that Toller realised that everything was not as it seemed in the Soviet state. He could see that there was a clear contradiction between the boasts of officialdom that socialism has already been achieved and the reality of prisons bulging with people on charges of fraud. If socialism really had been created, Toller was saying, then such crimes would not take place for they would not be necessary. The fact that they did, indicated to him the continued existence of social inequalities. Interestingly, however, such misgivings as Toller did have were couched in the most guarded of language, and he ventured only to suggest that *perhaps* certain categories of workers were being paid too low in relation to the standard of living.

What troubled Toller most, however, was the rise of the Lenin Cult, the quasi-religious veneration of Lenin, something which had begun with the embalming of his corpse and which was by now beginning to take on extraordinary dimensions. Every house, Toller writes, had its own Lenin Room or Lenin Corner and even his own small hotel 'prunkt mit einer rotausgeschlagenen Nische, darin, wie auf einem Altar, die Büste Lenins steht'. (*QD*, p. 106) Toller found all this not only distasteful but contrary to the spirit of socialism. Party officials, however, explained that the people needed this cult to replace what they had lost in the revolution. Lenin, they maintained, had become a symbol for 'die bindende Einheit des russischen Reiches' and that when the people made a pilgrimage to see his embalmed corpse they were making a pilgrimage 'zum Bild des großen Rußlands'. (*QD*, p. 107) Again, Toller did not find such arguments convincing and asked, 'Darf der Sozialismus Ersatz geben wollen für Heroenkult bürgerlicher Gesellschaft, für mystische Heiligenverehrung der Kirche?'. He continues:

> Liegt hier wirklich eine zeitlose Tendenz des Volkes zur Vergottung vor, der die Bolsheviki Rechnung tragen müssen? Es gibt eine Grenze auch für politische Taktik. Es gibt Rechnungen, die auf die Dauer nicht stimmen. Im Augenblick erreicht man viel, übermorgen sieht man, daß man zu wenig erreicht hat. Man darf nicht um der Gegenwart willen Künftiges

> hemmen. Denn immer lähmt Kult Selbstverantwortung, Entfaltung eigener Fähigkeiten, und gibt Kultanhängern den Glauben, daß das, was erkannt und getan werden muß, vom Idol schon erkannt und getan sei. (*QD*, p. 107)

Yet while quick to spot the dangers in the growth of the Lenin Cult, Toller did not seem to understand its underlying political causes. Russia's ruling elite, the state and party bureaucracy which had brought Stalin to power, had not yet consolidated its position, did not yet exercise the virtually untrammelled authority it did later on in the 1930s. At this stage, it was still uncertain of its own future, afraid that the enemies of the revolution might sweep it away, just as Tsarism had been swept away. To a large extent, the bureaucracy was still dependent on the support of the working-class and poorer peasantry in whose name the revolution had been made. To maintain this support, it was obliged to pay lip-service to the revolutionary traditions it had inherited. Deliberately and consciously it invoked Lenin's name, elevated him to the status of a idol even as it trampled underfoot the principles to which he had been committed. Every increase in social inequality, every cut in the living standards of the masses, every extension of the privileges of the bureaucracy, was done in his name and justified most often by a distorted quotation taken from his works. As already explained, at the time of Toller's first trip to the Soviet Union, Stalinism was still in its infancy and it was still too early to say with certainty whether or not the country was developing towards the kind of socialist society Toller himself favoured. It would be unfair, therefore, to criticise him for not having shown a greater degree of scepticism than he did. Yet by 1930, by the time, that is, when *Quer Durch* was finally published, it was clear to all who wanted to see, that the trend of development in the USSR was not towards greater freedom and equality but in precisely the opposite direction, towards dictatorship and inequality. Had he cared to, Toller could have revised his essays to express his doubts about the clique

now in control. He not do so, however and left unaltered views such as this on the question of censorship:

> Einige Anzeichen sprechen dafür, daß die Zensur in Sowjet-Rußland gemildert wird. Der russische Schriftsteller kannte niemals Zeiten, die frei von Zensur waren, nur, sagt mir Lunatscharski, wurde sie früher zugunsten einer Minderheit ausgeübt, heute richte sie sich im Interrese einer Mehrheit gegen eine Minderheit. (*QD*, p. 159)

In 1926 it might have been possible to detect a certain degree of liberalism on the question of censorship. By 1930, however, all forms of literature were under strict state control and only those writers who were able to bend every word to fit the current orthodoxy stood any chance of having their works published.

Even as late as 1934, however, following another visit to the USSR to attend a Writers' Congress, Toller still clung firmly to the view that the Soviet government still permitted perfect freedom of public opinion.[44] In October of that year, just after his return, the British left-wing magazine, *The New Statesman and Nation* published an interview which H.G. Wells had recently conducted with Stalin.[45] In itself, the interview was of little interest, being distinguished only by the banality of Wells's questions and Stalin's replies. However, it did prompt a lively debate about the nature of Soviet society, a debate which involved Wells himself, George Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes and Toller.[46] Like Shaw, an unashamed admirer of Stalin, Toller defended the Soviet Union against what he felt were Wells's unfair criticisms, rejecting in particular the claim that the Soviet regime had suppressed the freedom of the writer and that in the USSR there was no intellectual life at all:

> Mr Wells [Toller wrote] bases his opinion on his experience during a recent visit to Moscow and Leningrad. I have myself just returned from Russia, where I spent two months. I visited not only Moscow and Leningrad but also many autonomous republics, some of them in the Middle East. I am afraid the Russians have made the mistake of not

> acquainting Mr Wells with the mental life that is so strong in those republics. Otherwise he could not have come to such a judgement. (pp. 27-28)

Toller went on to state his own view of the nature of intellectual life in the Soviet Union:

> My strongest impression in Russia was that, while in fascist countries intellectual freedom is ever more and more closely circumscribed, and writers who do not slavishly obey the orders of dictators must go into exile, in the USSR on the other hand intellectual freedom is *growing*. There are real signs that the restrictions of mental freedom, which the Soviet Government has hitherto thought necessary, are being greatly relaxed. (p. 28)

Cultural life, he argued, was most definitely *not* being suppressed in the Soviet Union. Quite the contrary. It was being fostered and encouraged everywhere, as proof of which he cited the declaration of a government representative who had told the Writers' Congress that 'in the USSR every writer is at liberty to write what he likes, but he is not at liberty to write badly'. (p. 28) In fact, Toller added, Soviet writers are at liberty to write badly, 'otherwise the productions of modern Russian literature would all be masterpieces which they are not by any means'. (p. 28) Young writers, he continued, appeared to have no fear whatsoever of their critics in the party apparatus and had fought 'tooth and nail against any proposal to restrict their artistic liberty'. (p. 28) Moreover, the Congress had enthusiastically acclaimed Russian writers such as Pasternak, Babel, Tikhonov, Oliesha and Ehrenburg, 'writers who are neither members of the Communist Party nor active propagandists, but who were honoured because they are great artists'. (p. 28) A new type of humanity was growing in Russia, Toller asserted, and the working people were 'striving to find an intellectual basis for their life in order to achieve a lasting relationship with the great cultural values of the past and the present'. (p. 30) He ended by predicting that at the next PEN Congress Russian delegates themselves would give an account of the 'vigorous mental life of the USSR' and that no one would be more

pleased about this than 'Mr Wells himself'. (p. 30) Victor Serge, a Belgian revolutionary and novelist, a man who spent 3 years in prison in Moscow because of his opposition to the Stalin clique, provides eloquent testimony to the 'vigourous mental life of the USSR'. In his memoirs, he tells of Boris Pilniak, one of the most talented Russian writers of his generation, being forced to revise his work, word by word, page by page, under the direct supervision of Yezhov, successor to Henry Yagoda as head of the GPU.[47] 'Pilniak would twist his great mouth', Serge writes. 'He [Yezhov] has given me a list of fifty passages to change outright! "Ah!", he would exclaim, "if only I could write freely! What would I not do!"' (*Memoirs*, p. 169) But Pilniak, like all those writers who refused to prostitute themselves before Stalin, was not to be given the opportunity to write freely. He disappeared without trace during the purges in 1937. The censors mutilated and murdered books, Serge writes, with only those being published which had been sanctioned by the Literature Office. Those chosen, however, were recommended to every library in the country, printed in tens of thousands of copies, translated into several languages and the authors — the likes of Ehrenburg, a lifeless hack — lauded by the kept press as 'great writers'. Little by little, Soviet writers were conscripted into the service of the party and their creative freedom smothered. (*Memoirs*, pp. 271-72) Interestingly, in describing the atmosphere of 'overpowering, sickening absurdity' which pervaded literary life, Serge recalls having met Toller during what must have been the latter's first visit to the country in 1926:

> One day in a small, dark meeting-room in Herzen House, we heard a report from Averbach on the spirit of the proletariat, the collective farm, and Bolshevism in literature. Lunacharsky, frozen in a stance of weary boredom, kept passing me ironical little notes — but he spoke nothing but a few quasi-official remarks in terms more intelligent than the official speaker had used. Between the two of us Ernst Toller was seated, lately released from a Bavarian prison. Bit by bit the whole deadening speech was translated for him, and in his great dark eyes, in his face of strength and gentleness, a kind of confusion could be seen. Surely in his years of

> imprisonment as an insurgent poet, he had pictured the literature of the Soviets as altogether different from this. (*Memoirs*, p. 272)

Toller, however, did not notice — or to be precise did not care to mention — this or any other form of repression, neither in 1926 nor at any time thereafter. 'Nowhere is cultural life suppressed', he announced to the world, 'it is encouraged everywhere. Nowhere are spiritual values destroyed: everywhere they have become the possession of the people'.[48]

Liberal critics do not like to admit it, but it is clear that Toller *was* a Soviet fellow-traveller during the 1930s. Contrary to what Spalek implies, there is not one passage in any of his writings from this period which could be interpreted as criticism of the leadership in the Kremlin. Not only that, but he also kept quiet on the Soviet purges, even when former friends and acquaintances of his fell victim to them, people like, for example, Karl Radek, who at his trial in January 1937 pleaded guilty to the ludicrous charge of having plotted with Trotsky to overthrow the Soviet system and restore capitalism.[49] Another prisoner of the Stalin justice system was Zeinl Mühsam, the wife of Erich Mühsam, the revolutionary poet and one of Toller's collaborators during the *Münchner Räterepublik*.[50] In his final play, *Pastor Hall*, Toller pays tribute to Mühsam's courage in the face of persecution, telling how, when held prisoner in a concentration camp, he had defied his captors and sang the *Internationale* after being ordered at gunpoint to sing the *Horst Wessel Lied*.[51] How ironic that this brave man's wife, having sought refuge from Hitler in the USSR, should herself have been mistreated by another form of totalitarian regime. Someone else who suffered at the hands of Stalin's justice system and a former close acquaintance of Toller's was the German actor Alexander Granach, the man who had been so successful in the role of Karl Thomas in the Berlin production of *Hoppla, wir leben!*. A keen supporter of the Soviet Union Granach had been working there since 1934, but decided to leave in early 1937, probably

because he was disillusioned with what he had witnessed in the previous 2 or 3 years. The authorities, however, were unwilling to let him emigrate and arrested him at the end of 1937 on the trumped up charge of having corresponded with foreigners. Fortunately, Lion Feuchtwanger spoke to Stalin on Granach's behalf and he was released from custody after only a few weeks, pale and thin, but otherwise unharmed.[52] Finally, it is worth mentioning one other prisoner of the Stalin regime, Max Hölz, a KPD activist, who had played a leading role in an abortive Communist rising in Saxony in 1921 and who had been sentenced to 9 years imprisonment for the killing of a local landowner.[53] In 1926, after another man, Erich Friehe, had confessed to the murder, Toller became involved in the campaign to have Hölz released, gradually developing a warm friendship with the imprisoned man.[54] It was not until 1928, however, after the proclamation of an amnesty for all of Germany's political prisoners, that Hölz was released and shortly afterwards, in 1929, he went to live in the Soviet Union. Like Granach, however, Hölz seems to have been disappointed with what he found there, quarrelled with his fellow German emigrés over the direction in which the country was going and eventually fell foul of the secret police. He was not actually arrested, but in September 1933, after he had been sent to live in Gorky, his body was dragged from the river Volga. The official explanation for his death was drowning by accident but it was fairly well known that Hölz had, in fact, been murdered by the GPU.[55]

Of course, there is no suggestion that Toller approved of the treatment meted out to the opponents of Stalin's regime nor that he was even aware of what had happened to the likes of Granach or Mühsam. Yet while it is claimed he told close friends that the Moscow Show Trials had been one of the greatest disappointments of his life, he refused to speak out in opposition to Stalin's reign of terror.[56] Admittedly, Toller did not descend to the level of Feuchtwanger, whose *Moscow 1937* is surely the most repulsive

apologia written for the Stalin regime.[57] But does his attitude towards Moscow in this period not conflict with the view, widespread among liberal critics in the West, that Toller was an ethical socialist who condemned the use of violence for political ends? Even as late as July 1936, just weeks before the trial and execution of Zinoviev, Kamanev and the others, Toller was still seeking to convince public opinion in the West of how wonderful the USSR was. In June of that year, at an International Writers' Congress in London, he spoke of the emerging *Volksfront*, and of how in Western Europe 'alle jene, die weder Herren noch Knechte sein wollen', were gathering together without thought for party label, while 'im Osten Europas [...] sich das große russische Volk eine Verfassung [gibt], die das Fundament wahrer Demokratie ist'.[58] Like countless others, Toller was secretly ashamed about what was going on in the Soviet Union, but was reluctant to do or say anything which might upset the developing *Volksfront* and so impair Moscow's ability to defend itself in a hostile world environment. As he himself had explained in 1931, in the *Die Rote Fahne*, the KPD's own daily newspaper, the defence of the Soviet Union was the duty of all those committed to human progress:

> Es gibt in der Geschichte keine Barbarei, vor dem Kapitalismus zurückgeschreckt ist. Jeder Revolutionär, jeder Mensch, der den sinnvollen Aufbau menschlicher Gesellschaft will, muß den drohenden Krieg bekämpfen.[59]

By the middle of the 1930s, in the face on an increasingly aggressive fascist Germany, the need to defend the Soviet Union was even more of an imperative in Toller's eyes. This does not excuse his silence on Stalin's purges, the most divisive issue on the left during the inter-war period, but it does at least help to explain it.[60]

Whatever reservations Toller might have harboured about the Soviet regime, he remained committed to the *Volksfront* throughout his exile period, playing an active role in a number of the organisations and committees set up by the Comintern to promote the

idea among the intellectual community, what has come to be known as the 'Literary Popular Front'.[61] He was, for instance, one of the hundred or so prominent figures — writers, artists and intellectuals — who attended the founding meeting of the Committee for the Establishment of a German Popular Front, held in the Hotel Lutetia in Paris, on February 1 1936.[62] In 1938, on his way to Spain, he also attended the International Writers' Conference for the Defence of Culture, the second such conference to be held during the 1930s, which met in Madrid, Valencia and on the final day in Paris.[63] In 1936-37 he undertook an extended lecture tour of the USA giving more than 200 speeches in which he sought both to alert the American people to the danger posed by Hitler and to encourage them to follow the example of those in Europe 'die, trotz aller politischen und religiösen Gegensätze gewillt sind, in einer gemeinsamen Abwehrfront zu kämpfen'.[64] He was also involved in various other more generally anti-fascist campaigns and committees, some of which were set up before the *Volksfront* policy had been proclaimed but nearly all of which were under tight Comintern control. In September 1933, for instance, at the start of his exile, he testified in London before the Committee of Inquiry into the Origins of the Reichstag Fire, an event intended to expose the fraudulent nature of the real trial then about to open in Leipzig with Georgi Dimitrov and Ernst Torgler as the main defendants.[65] He played a prominent role too in the committees set up to campaign for the release of both Carl von Ossietsky and Ernst Thälmann, the latter being the leader of the KPD who had been taken prisoner by the Nazis and who was to die a brutal death in a concentration camp.[66] He supported the so-called German Freedom Library, a Paris based organisation dedicated to the collecting of those works of literature banned by the Nazis and every other kind of anti-fascist publication.[67] As already explained, all of these committees and organisations — and many other like them — were Communist Party fronts, the brainchild of Toller's old

friend, Willi Muenzenberg, a former KPD Reichstag deputy and now the Comintern's propaganda chief, the man charged with winning the liberal intelligentsia to the *Volksfront* banner.[68] It is important to underline this point for there is a tendency among liberal critics to take the *Volksfront* movement at face value, to see it in the terms the Comintern wished it to be seen, that is, as a progressive crusade, a worthy and honourable mission to defend liberty against the forces of evil.[69] Of course, this is how the credulous saw it, but in reality the whole thing was simply a huge public relations stunt, a cynical exercise in manipulation designed to make the name of the USSR synonymous with the words freedom and democracy. Just how false this claim was can be gauged by examining the political views of some of the leading figures in the *Volksfront* movement in Great Britain, the supposedly independent, radical men and women Toller made friends with after he set up home in London in 1934.

Take D.N. Pritt, for instance, cited by Dove as one of Toller's close acquaintances during that period. A barrister and Labour MP for North Hammersmith from 1935-40, a member of the executive of the supposedly radical Socialist League and the chairman of the Reichstag Counter Trial, Pritt was eventually expelled from the Labour Party because of his pro-Soviet views. In 1937 he attended the Moscow Trials along with Dudley Collard, another Labour lawyer and a leading light in both the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Howard League for Penal Reform. Like Victor Basch, head of the French section of the League for the Rights of Man, both Pritt and Collard took the pulse of the Stalin regime and declared everything to be in order.[70] Contrary to what some believed, Pritt explained, the accused, Zinoviev and Kamenev, had not been maltreated in any way and had confessed to the crimes they had been accused of because there was overwhelming evidence of their guilt.[71] Pritt's testimony, coming from a man with a track record in fighting civil liberties cases, was of

inestimable value to the Communists, and did much to allay the fears of many on the left about the veracity of the trials.[72] Another of Toller's close political friends, Kingsley Martin, editor of *The New Statesman and Nation* from 1931 to 1960, was slightly more critical of the purges but never wavered in what he liked to feel was his critical admiration of the USSR. During the Spanish Civil War he was vociferous in his support for Moscow's tactics and refused to print George Orwell's review of Franz Borkenau's book *The Spanish Cockpit* on the grounds that it controverted *The New Statesman's* editorial policy, by which he meant that it exposed the counter-revolutionary role played by the Spanish Communists and their Russian advisors.[73] Some years later, in 1968, Martin made a half-hearted apology for his actions, explaining that he had supported Stalin's policies in Spain because the USSR was the only country which had provided arms for the Republic. He had, he conceded, 'probably underestimated the Communist atrocities' in Spain.[74] Not much better was the stance taken by another of Toller's friends, Harold Laski, Professor of Political Science at the University of London. A Marxist theorist and member of the Labour Party National Executive from 1936-1949, Laski too closed his eyes to the reality of the purges and argued that the Trotskyists, with their attacks on the Soviet Union, had to be seen as 'strong allies of Nazi Germany in her militarist plans'.[75]

It would be possible to extend almost indefinitely the list of apologists for the Soviet Union whom Toller regarded as his political friends during the 1930s. The point of this, however, is not to try to establish guilt by association, to make Toller responsible for the actions of his associates, merely to show that the democratic credentials of many of the advocates of the *Volksfront* were fraudulent. What united all of these people was the belief that it was possible to oppose one form of totalitarianism, fascism, without opposing another, Soviet Communism. They were all happy to write articles, sign

manifestos, attend meetings condemning the atrocities carried out by Hitler's regime, but were curiously blind when it came to Russia.[76] Where Toller differed from most of his *Volksfront* friends was that he was not willing to defend publicly the atrocities carried out in the name of socialism. Yet silence on what was the most divisive issue on the left during the thirties could sometimes be as bad as speaking out. A good example of this is provided by the controversy over Victor Serge, imprisoned in 1933 in the Soviet Union because of his support for Trotsky's Left Opposition.[77]

Serge's case was well-know in left-wing and progressive circles, the details having been published in 1934 by the French League for the Rights of Man. Yet despite enjoying the support of such prominent personalities as Georges Duhamel and Charles Plisnier, Serge was still in exile in Siberia when delegates assembled for the first 'International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture' which met in Paris from 21-25 June 1935.[78] This congress had been formally called by Barbusse, Rolland, Malraux and Gide, but the people pulling the strings were Muenzenberg and his comrades who used such events to prove to the world that the *Volksfront* really was a strictly non-partisan affair, a movement which embraced people of every shade of political opinion who were prepared to put aside their differences in the defence of liberty. Unfortunately, some of the delegates had a rather one-sided and conditional view of liberty, one which did not extend to encompass the likes of Serge. When some of his supporters tried to raise his case on the conference floor, they were prevented from doing so by the organisers who feared that a frank discussion of the details would be an embarrassment.[79] Under pressure from Gide, however, Malraux, the conference chairman, granted a hearing to Magdeleine Paz, who called on the delegates to give the same support to those persecuted by the Soviet government as it gave to those persecuted by Hitler, to see the attack on Serge as an attack on the very liberties the conference claimed to defend. But Paz's

words fell on deaf ears.[80] Two Soviet writers, Ilya Ehrenburg and Nikolai Tikhonov, honoured in Russia, Toller explained, not because they were fellow-travellers but because they were 'great artists', forerunners of a 'new type of humanity',[81] loudly denounced Serge, with Tikhonov declaring that there were no worse enemies of the Soviet Union than 'die Oppositionellen und die Trotzkisten' and implying that Serge was implicated in the Kirov murder, a murder which had actually taken place *after* Serge had been imprisoned.[82] Ehrenburg, one of the most loyal supporters of Stalin in that period, sought to undermine Paz by drawing attention to her friendship with Trotsky, knowing that, for many of the delegates, the mere mention of such a connection was enough to convince them of the truth of the accusations levelled against Serge. Deploying the argument most favoured by the Communists to discredit their opponents, the 'great artist' and 'forerunner of a new type of humanity' hinted that Paz, like Trotsky, might be an agent of Nazi Germany:

> Sie reden von Freiheit? Welche Freiheit meinen Sie? Sie kommen hierher mit Informationen.[i.e. about Serge] Was die Sowjetdelegation aus der Sowjetunion mitbrachte, brachte sie in sowjetischen Koffern mit. In welchen Koffern brachten Sie Ihr Material? *(Starker Beifall)*[83]

Anna Seghers, another new convert to democracy and freedom of speech, joined the attack, declaring that there was no place at the conference for a discussion of Serge's case. 'In einem Haus, in dem es brennt', she argued, 'kann man nicht einem Menschen helfen, der sich in den Finger geschnitten hat', adding that the exaggeration and false exploitation of this case by those who claimed to defend the revolution, 'muß in einem Zeitpunkt des Kampfes gegen den Faschismus konterrevolutionär wirken!'.[84] Let us speak instead, she pleaded of Ossietsky and Renn,[85] a call taken up by Kirschon, who, on behalf of the Soviet delegation, declared:

> Alle hier anwesenden Mitglieder der aus der Sowjetunion gekommenen Delegation haben die Revolution mit der Waffe in der Hand verteidigt. Wenn Leute hierher kommen, die kein Wort über Thälmann und die antifaschistischen Gefangenen verlieren, die gleichzeitig für die Freiheit des Gedankens aufrufen, so muß mann wissen, daß ihre Worte Kugeln gegen unsere besten Führer werden können. Aber man muß auch wissen: Wir nehmen jede Kugel des Gegners and antworten mit unserem Leben. *(Brausender Beifall)*[86]

These few quotes suffice to reveal the sheer mendacity which lay at the heart of the *Volksfront*, the hollowness of the claim that its advocates were committed to intellectual liberty; this conference, like all similar conferences, was pervaded by the stench of hypocrisy. Significantly, — and here it is possible to see a pattern beginning to emerge — Toller for one did not seem bothered by the stench. He made no public comment about the Serge affair, never wrote or spoke about it, raised no protest when Serge's friends and supporters were thrown out of the hall or when the Soviet journalist, Mikhail Koltsov, denounced Serge as a 'confessed counter-revolutionary'.[87] The contrast with his outspoken support for the likes of Ossietsky and Renn could not be greater.[88] Toller's attitude — the attitude of the majority of *Volksfront* supporters — was summed up by Gide, soon himself to be denounced as a counter-revolutionary after he exposed the reality of the Soviet paradise. While Serge's case may be regrettable, he said, the most important thing at present was the success of the Soviet Union, 'der unsere Liebe und unsere Bewunderung gehört'.[89] 'Man muß verstehen', he declared, 'daß in diesem Falle unser Vertrauen der größte Beweis unserer Liebe ist, die wir geben können'.[90]

Serge's case reveals quite starkly, then, the real nature of the *Volksfront*, focuses attention on the complex web of contradictions which ensnared Toller when he became a supporter of it. What the following chapter will do is to examine the precise impact of this idea on his political thinking and show how his search for an effective answer to the questions posed by the rise of fascism gradually affected his revolutionary socialist and

pacifist beliefs.

1. *Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist: Christiane Grautoff — ihr Leben mit Ernst Toller*, edited by Werner Fuld and Albert Ostermaier (Bonn: Weidle, 1996), p. 37. Grautoff, a child star in both German theatre and film, was some 24 years younger than Toller and barely 17 when they were married in London in 1935.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

3. Alongside of his more directly political work, Toller was also involved in a great deal of practical campaigning activities on behalf of the many thousands of refugees from the fascist countries who were now living especially in Great Britain and the USA. For an example of just how practical and level-headed Toller was in his approach to this work see his article 'The Refugee Problem', *The Political Quarterly*, 6, no. 3 (July-September 1935), 386-89.

4. For a detailed account of Toller's activities in the early part of his exile see William, M. Park, 'Ernst Toller: The European Exile Years 1933-1936' (unpublished dissertation, University of Colorado, 1976).

5. See Helen Graham and Paul Preston, 'The Popular Front and the Struggle against Fascism', in *The Popular Front in Europe*, edited by Helen Graham and Paul Preston (Houndmills, Basingstoke and Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 1-19.

6. See Klaus Mommach, *Widerstand 1933-1939: Geschichte der deutschen antifaschistischen Widerstandsbewegung im Inland und in der Emigration* (Berlin: Akademieverlag, 1984), p. 27.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

9. The precise figures were as follows:

KPD 4 848 059
SPD 7 181 629
NSDAP 17 277 180 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

10. Lionel Kochan, *Russia and the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1954), p. 176-77.

11. Fritz Heckert, *Rundschau*, II, no.9, 12 April 1933, 121.

12. 'Entschließung des ZK der KPD zur Lage und den nächsten Aufgaben', May 1933, in *Der deutsche Kommunismus: Dokumente 1915-1945*, edited by Hermann Weber, 3rd edn. (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1973), p. 347.

13. Fritz Heckert, *Rundschau*, 28 March 1933, 301-02.

14. Fritz Heckert, *Rundschau*, II, no.9, 12 April 1933, 123.

15. 'Resolution of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International on the Situation in Germany', *Rundschau*, 25 March 1933, 136.

16. *The Communist International 1928-1943: Documents*, edited by Jane Degras, 3 vols (London: Cass, 1953) III, 261.

17. *Rundschau*, 28 July 1933, 935-36.

18. See Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die deutsche Diktatur: Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969), pp. 412-13.

19. Fascist governments had recently come to power in both Bulgaria and Latvia, while in Austria the Christian-Democratic government of Dollfuss had shown its true colours when it used massive military force to crush the social-democratic party in Vienna. See Franz West, *Die Linke im Ständesstaat Österreich: Revolutionäre Sozialisten und Kommunisten 1934-1938* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1978).

20. Harry McShane, a leading British Communist at that time, explained:

> Once the line had changed, nobody ever mentioned the old policy. It was never explained. To quietly forget it was an unprincipled thing to do, but that became typical of many decisions made inside the Communist Party over a long number of years.

Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter* (London: Pluto Press, 1978). p. 214.

21. For Dimitrov's report, entitled 'The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of The Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class Against Fascism' see *Georgi Dimitrov: Selected Works*, 2 vols (Sofia: Foreign Language Press, 1967), I, 561-639.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 562.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 564.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 621-22.

26. See Jane Degras, *Communist International 1928-1943: Documents*, III.

27. In France, where the *Volksfront* came into being before it had been formally ratified by the Comintern, the French Communist Party, the PCF, abandoned the Red Flag and the *Internationale* and adopted the Tricolour and the *Marseillaise*. 'We shall not abandon to our enemies', its leader, Maurice Thorez explained, 'the Tricolour, the flag of the great French Revolution, nor the *Marseillaise*, the song of the soldiers of the Convention'. (*Rundschau*, 8 August 1935, 727). Following the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Pact in May 1935, Thorez, having previously described the French socialists, the SFIO, as the chief prop of the bourgeoisie now argued for co-operation between the two parties at almost any price. Paradoxically, the Socialists opposed co-operation with the Communists, not because they were too far to the left but because they were now too far to the right. Léon Blum, leader of the SFIO, expressed amazement at the fact that the PCF, for so long a bitter opponent of militarism, at Moscow's behest was now willing to give full backing to the French government's proposed increases in defence expenditure. 'We Socialists', Blum wrote, 'refuse to make common cause with the ideas

and the military planning of the bourgeoisie', adding that his party 'could never accept an unconditional commitment to national defence'. *Le Populaire*, 18 May, 1935, p. 12.

28. On the formation of the *Volksfront* governments in France and Spain see Julius Braunthal, *History of the International 1914-1943*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), I, 415-67.

29. In an article written in 1936 Toller gave vent to his impatience and frustration with the lack of progress in the efforts to build a *Volksfront*:

> Die Herren im Reich dürfen zufrieden sein. Drei Jahre — und welche Jahre — sind ins Land gegangen, und noch immer fehlt die einheitliche entschlossene Front der Gegner, noch immer wird die Tat zerschrieben und zerredet. Haben wir nichts gelernt? Wir verraten unsere Kameraden in Deutschland, wir verraten das künftige freie Reich, wenn wir uns nicht endlich, endlich finden.

'Mahnung', *Die neue Weltbühne*, 32, no. 5 (1936), 153.

30. *Mit dem Gesicht nach Deutschland: Eine Dokumentation über die sozialdemokratische Emigration,* edited by Erich Matthias (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1968), pp. 241-50.

31. See David Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 157.

32. For a comprehensive account of the trials and purges see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror. Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1968).

33. For a discussion of the various interpretations see Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, Reading History Series (London, New York, Melbourne and Auckland: Edward Arnold, 1993), pp. 108-50.

34. The purges swept away a generation of leading Bolsheviks, the so-called 'Old Guard', those who had played a vital role both in the revolution itself and in helping to rebuild the country after the devastation of Civil War. Among those who fell victim to the terror were Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rykov and Radek, Generals Tukhachevski and Uborevich, and, in a bitter twist, both Henry Yagoda, the former head of the secret police, and his successor, Yezhov, a man whose name appeared at the bottom of countless scores of death warrants. Yagoda, until 1936 head of the GPU (*Gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravlenie* or State Political Administration), was executed in 1938 after the third Moscow Trial. Yezhov simply disappeared in 1939 and is thought to have died around 1940. See Leon Trotsky, *Portraits, Political and Personal*, (New York: Pathfinder, 1977), p. 233. Trotsky himself, of course, was also slain by an agent of Stalin in his Mexican exile. See Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929-1940* (Oxford, Toronto and Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970).

35. For a discussion of the difficulties in reaching a reliable estimate of the number of victims see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 529-35.

36. See Montgomery Hyde, *Stalin. The History of a Dictator* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 336.

37. André Gide, *Retour de l'URSS*, (Paris: Gillimard, 1936).

38. For a discussion of the role of the fellow travellers, including Heinrich Mann, see Heinz Abosch 'Von der Volksfront zu den Moskauer Prozessen' in *Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch*, 1983 VI, pp. 27-44. Heinrich Mann gave his blessing to the Show Trials, saying that they had proved to the world that the USSR was 'moralisch gerüstet' for her defence in the forthcoming war. Seeking to defend the legality of the trials, Mann cites another fellow-traveller, D.N. Pritt, 'ein britischer Jurist von Rang', who had confirmed that 'in keinem Rechststaat das Verfahren anders gelaufen [wäre]'. Heinrich Mann, *Ein Zeitalter wird besichtigt* (Stockholm: Neuer Verlag, 1947), pp. 110-11.

39. Toller's speech reprinted under the title 'Schriftsteller über die Sowjetunion und über Sowjetliteratur' in *Internationale Literatur*, (Moscow), 4 (1934), 146-53 (p. 151). Further references to this speech are given after quotations in the text.

40. In the Communist journal, *Die Linkskurve*, in August 1932, Toller wrote an article in which he discussed the possibility of an attack by the West on the Soviet Union:

> Ich glaube, daß heute, in diesem Jahr, die Gefahr eines Krieges gegen die USSR gemindert ist, gewiß nicht, weil die pazifistischen Willenstendenzen der Völker gefürchtet werden, sondern weil die materielle Bereitschaft des europäisch-amerikanischen Kapitalismus noch nicht organisiert ist. Im nächsten Jahr, in zwei Jahren, irgendwann, wird man versuchen, Sowjetrußland zu vernichten, weil es 1. zum unbezwinglichen Konkurrenten wird, 2. weil es ein gefährliches Beispiel darstellt für alle Arbeiter, auch die rückschrittlichsten, die sehen und vom Augenschein belehrt werden, wie man ohne Generaldirektoren, Bankiers, Aktionäre, Makler, Zwischenverdiener plan- und sinnvoll Güter erzeugt und verteilt [...] Wer für Sowjetrußland kämpft, kämpft für den Frieden. Das muß die gesamte Arbeiterklasse erkennen, das sollten die Reste freiheitlichen Bürgertums sich sagen, die es noch in Europa gibt und vor allem — die II Internationale, die 1914 so furchtbar versagt hat und der heute von den Faschisten mit Stahlruten und "langen Messern" beigebracht wird, was es heißt, den Kapitalismus Jahrzehnte zu tolerieren.

'Schriftsteller stellen sich', *Die Linkskurve*, 4, (8 August 1932), 3.

41. John M. Spalek, 'Ernst Toller: The Need for a New Estimate', in *German Quarterly*, 39 (1966), 581-98 (p. 590).

42. *Quer Durch: Reisebilder und Reden* (Heidelberg: Das Wunderhorn, 1978). First edition in Berlin by Gustav Kiepenheuer in 1930. The edition used here is the later one. Further references to this are given after quotations in text as *QD*, followed by page number.

43. For a good account of these developments see J.P. Nettl, *The Soviet Achievement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp. 106-14.

44. In his speech to this conference, Toller spoke with great enthusiasm not only about Russian literature but about the way in which the government was seeking to bring world

literature to the masses:

> In den ersten Tagen des Kongresses, als Sie über die Leistungen und Probleme der Sowjetliteratur sich Rechenschaft ablegten, befand ich mich auf dem Dampfer "Rykow". Manche Stunde saß ich bei den Matrosen und Heizern in der Lenin-Ecke, und ich sprach mit ihnen über die gleichen Fragen, die Sie bewegen — Fragen der Literatur. Verrußt, geschwärzt von der Arbeit auf Deck und an Maschinen, saßen diese Männer, einfache Proleten, wie man im Westen sagt, mir gegenüber, und sie erzählten von den Büchern der Weltliteratur; sie kannten *Puschkin* und *Leo Tolstoy*, *Gogol* und *Tschechow* ebenso wie *Gorki*, *Pasternak* und *Ehrenburg*, *Tretjakow* und *Fedin*, *Scholochow* und *Tichonow*. Sie hatten *Dickens* und *Balzac* gelesen, *Wells* und *André Gide*. Da bestätigte sich als lebendige Wirklichkeit die große schöpferische, kulturaufbauende Kraft der ersten Arbeiterrepublik der Welt. Denn wo sonst wird man auf der gesamten Erde Männer solchen Schlages finden.

'Vom Werk des Dramatikers', *GW*, I, 178-82 (pp. 178-79). First published in *Internationale Literatur. Deutsche Blätter*, 4 (1934), 42-44.

45. *The New Statesman and Nation*, 27 October 1934.

46. *Stalin-Wells Talk: The Verbatim Record and a Discussion by G. Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, J.M. Keynes, Ernst Toller and others*, a pamphlet published by *The New Statesman and Nation*, December 1934. Further references to this pamphlet are given after quotations in the text.

47. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941*, edited by Peter Sedgwick (London, New York and Toronto: OUP, 1963), p. 269. Further references are given after quotations in text as *Memoirs* followed by page number.

48. *Stalin-Wells Talk*, p. 29.

49. Radek escaped the death penalty and was sentenced instead to 10 year imprisonment. Unfortunately, he did not live to see out his sentence, being killed by a fellow inmate — or so the official story goes — in either 1938 or 1939. See Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, pp. 150-51.

50. Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 80.

51. For details of Mühsam's fate see the speech Toller gave at the so-called 'Deutscher Tag' in New York in 1938 entitled 'Unser Kampf um Deutschland', in *GW*, I, 198-209.

52. For details of Granach's case see David Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile*, pp. 328-29.

53. For a critical account of the so-called *März-Putsch*, the failed Communist insurrection in Saxony in which Hölz took part, see Paul Levi, *Unser Weg wider den Putschismus* (Berlin: Seehof, 1921).

54. For Toller's relationship with Hölz see *GW*, I, 86-90, and *Der Fall Toller: Kommentar und Materialien*, edited by Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek (Munich-Vienna: Hanser, 1979), pp. 171-77.

55. See Karl Albrecht, *Der verratene Sozialismus: Zehn Jahre als hoher Staatsbeamter in der Sowjetunion* (Berlin-Leipzig: Niebelungen Verlag, 1942), pp. 314-18.

56. Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), p. 264.

57. Lion Feuchtwanger, *Moskau 1937: Ein Reisebericht für meine Freunde* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1937).

58. Toller, 'Das Wort. Eröffnungsrede zum internationalen Schriftsteller-Kongreß in London', in *Das Neue Tagebuch*, 4 (4 July 1936), 639-41. Referred to here is the version reprinted in *GW*, I, 193-98 (p. 197).

59. 'Schriftsteller für die Sowjetunion', in *Die Rote Fahne, Beilage*, 30 July 1931.

60. On this see William MacFarlane Park, 'Ernst Toller: The European Exile Years', p. 74. and Robert Bruce Elsasser 'Ernst Toller and German Society: The Role of the Individual as Critic 1914-1939' (unpublished dissertation, Rutgers University, 1973), pp. 332-33.

61. For an account of Toller's political activities in exile, including his involvement in the various *Volksfront* organisations see Dove, *He was a German*, pp. 199-234. For a more general discussion of the evolution of the 'Literary Popular Front' see Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile*, pp. 199-307.

62. Dove, *He was a German*, pp. 222-23.

63. For Toller's speech at this conference see, *Das Wort*, III, 10, October 1938, pp. 122-26.

64. For Toller's lecture tour see John M. Spalek, 'Ernst Toller's amerikanische Vortragsreise 1936-37', in *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, 6, (1965), 267-311.

65. For an interesting account of the work of the Reichstag Fire Commission see Betty D. Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson 1891-1947* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 159-62.

66. See Richard Dove, *He was a German*, p. 213. From the following open letter, published in the Communist journal *Gegenangriff*, it is clear that Toller sees the campaign for the release of Thälmann as part of the campaign to build the anti-fascist *Volksfront*:

> Ernst Thälmann unterscheidet sich dadurch von Hitlers Kameraden, daß er weder gemordet, noch die Gelder des Volkes verprasst hat, daß er weder sich bestechen und korrumpieren ließ, noch mit Lustknaben die Nächte verbrachte. Das einzige 'Verbrechen', das Thälmann begangen hat, ist, daß er als aufrechter Kämpfer der Sache des Kommunismus gedient hat. Darum will ihn die Hitler-Kamarilla, die heute das deutsche Volk unterdrückt und betrügt, vor Gericht stellen und vernichten. Aber sie wird sich täuschen. Der Angeklagte wird zum Anklager. Die Welt wird seine

> Anklage vernehmen. Die Welt wird seiner Anklage glauben, nicht der des national-sozialistischen Staatsanwaltes. Wie aber dürfen nicht schweigen. Wir müssen uns unermüdlich um die Rettung Thälmanns und der anderen Gefangenen bemühen, wir müssen uns an alle aufrechten Menschen, in denen das Gefühl für Gerechtigkeit nicht gestorben ist, wenden. Die große Front, die für Dimitroff gekämpft hat, muß heute für Thälmann kämpfen.

'Für Thälmann', *Gegenangriff*, 9 February 1934. p. 4. See also his article,'Thälmann unser Banner ...', in *Die Einheit* (Paris), 1, no. 7 (1935), 3.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

68. For Muenzenberg's Volksfront activities see Fritz J. Raddatz, *Erfolg oder Wirkung: Schicksale politischer Publizisten in Deutschland* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1972), pp. 81-101. For his role during the Weimar period see Helmut Gruber, 'Willie Muenzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933, *The Journal of Modern History*, 38, (March-December 1966), 278-97.

69. David Blaazer describes the Popular Front as being 'nothing more than a means of uniting the political efforts of progressives in a shared and urgent cause', in his work *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition: Socialists, Liberals, and the Quest for Unity, 1884-1939* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 193.

70. See D.N. Pritt, *The Zinoviev Trial* (London: Gollanz, 1936). After protests about the trial in left circles in the West, Pritt cabled the following message from Moscow to the British Communist Party:

> Myself attended trial, followed proceedings carefully. Completely satisfied case properly conducted and accused fairly und judicially treated. Their appearance, demeanour indicated absence any ill treatment or fear. They voluntarily renounced counsel; they addressed court freely as often as they wished, including final speeches after prosecutor finished. Am personally satisfied no ground whatever for insinuating any unfairness in form or substance. Consider whole procedure and treatment prisoners throughout trial as example to world in cases where prisoners admitted guilt and deliberate conspiracy to murder leaders state and overthrow government. In circumstances think courts any country would pass death sentence and executive carry out.

Quoted from R. Page Arnot, 'The Soviet Trial', *Labour Monthly*, 18 (October 1936), 614-618 (p. 617).

71. See Pritt's autobiography *From Right to Left* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1966). Pritt's views on the proper conduct of the trial and the guilt of the accused, first published in the *News Chronicle*, were so useful to the Soviet leadership that they were reprinted in *Pravda* on 4 September 1937.

72. See Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London: Gollanz, 1959), p. 48.

73. For details of this controversy see *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), I, 'An Age Like This', 333-6. Orwell never forgave Martin his pro-Stalin views. Malcolm Muggeridge records how, in a restaurant, Orwell once asked him to swap seats with because he 'couldn't bear to look at Kingsley Martin's corrupt face'. Quoted in John Thompson, *Orwell's London* (Fourth Estate: London, 1984), p. 108.

74. Kingsley Martin, *Editor: A Second Volume of Autobiography, 1931-45* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p. 230. To excuse his silence on the purges in Spain Martin resorts to the following argument:

> It was only long after the war that we learnt to what lengths of treachery to his own supporters Stalin was prepared to go. *Ibid*, p. 233.

This is an obvious lie and is a result of Martin's shame at the role he played in concealing the truth about Spain from the outside world.

75. Harold Laski, *Left News*, August 1937, p. 23.

76. The Irish dramatist, Sean O'Casey, a friend and admirer of Toller, is a good example of that group of people active in the Popular Front movement who prided themselves on their love of liberty but who were wilfully blind to what was going on inside the Stalin regime. O'Casey, it must be admitted, went further than many of the literary friends of the Soviet Union, further than Toller at least, in that he publicly defended the Show Trials. See, for instance, his letter to the Scottish left-wing journal *Forward*, 16 April, 1938 where he claims that no pressure was put on the defendants to confess their guilt, none of them receiving even so much as a black eye. Even as late as 1941 O'Casey was still boasting of his unequivocal backing for the execution of 'the Trotsky group of traitors'. See his letter to John Burns reprinted in *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-1941*, edited by David Krause, 2 vols (London: Cassell, 1975), I, 915.

77. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, pp. 285-322.

78. A selection of speeches from the conference, first published in the Communist journal *Rundschau* (Basel) in 1935, is reprinted in *Zur Tradition der sozialistischen Literatur in Deutschland. Eine Auswahl von Dokumenten*, edited by the Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, 2nd edn (Berlin-Weimar: Aufbau, 1967), pp. 802-41. For a good account of the conference see Pike, *German Writers*, pp. 105-15.

79. Heinz Abosch, 'Von der Volksfront zu den Moskauer Prozessen', p. 34.

80. *Zur Tradition*, pp. 832. The Italian writer, Gaetano Salvemini, also raised Serge's plight at the conference, saying pointedly that 'es gibt nicht nur eine Gestapo, sondern auch eine Tschecka [Soviet Secret Police], und in Siberien sitzt auch ein Victor Serge'. The stenographic report — and this gives a flavour of the blinkered outlook of the majority of the delegates — reports the following reaction to Salvemini's speech:

> Einige Schriftsteller klatschen Beifall in der Absicht zu stören, doch die große Mehrzahl der Kongreßteilnehmer protestiert stürmisch gegen diesen Ausfall gegen die Sowjetunion. *Ibid*, p. 826.

81. 'A Comment by Ernst Toller', *The New Statesman and Nation*, November 3, 1934, pp. 614-15.

82. Heinz Abosch, 'Von der Volksfront zu den Moskauer Prozessen', p. 34.

83. *Zur Tradition*, p. 832.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 832.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 832.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 832-33.

87. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 318.

88. At about this time, Toller, alongside of Brecht and others, was also involved in the campaign for the release of another Nazi prisoner, Edgar Andre. See his article 'The Meaning of the Andre Trial', *New Republic*, (13 January 1937), 331-32. Brecht's involvement, however, provoked the following impassioned open letter from the German Trotskyist, Walter Held, much of which applies equally to Toller:

> Die deutsche *Volksfront*: die Herren Heinrich und Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, Arnold Zweig, die *Weltbühne*, die *Pariser Tageszeitung*, die *Volkszeitung* und die *Neue Front*, Max Braun, Pieck, Dengel, Merker, Jakob Walcher, sie alle hüllen sich in Schweigen [about the purges J.F.]. Sie Herr Brecht, haben Carola Neher gekannt. Sie wissen, daß sie ein tapferer Mensch und eine große Künstlerin war. Warum schweigen Sie? Weil Stalin Ihre Publikation *Das Wort*, die verlogenste und verkommenste Zeitschrift, die jemals von deutschen Intellektuellen herausgegben worden ist, bezahlt? Woher nehmen Sie noch den Mut, gegen Hitlers Mord an Liese Hermann, an Edgar Andre und Hans Litten zu protestieren? Glauben Sie wirklich, daß Sie mit Lüge, mit Knechtseligkeit und Niedrigkeit die Kerkerpforten des Dritten Reiches sprengen können?

Quoted in Heinz Abosch, 'Von der Volksfront zu den Moskauer Prozessen', p. 42.

89. *Zur Tradition*, p. 833.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 833.

CHAPTER 9

DEMOCRACY AND FASCISM

NIE WIEDER FRIEDE!

The transformation in Toller's political outlook brought about by his support for the *Volksfront* was a long, slow and hesitant process, one in which his basic socialist beliefs kept breaking through to the surface as he grew increasingly impatient with the West and sceptical about the strength of its commitment to the anti-fascist cause. It must be stressed, however, that the change which did take place was not simply a question of Toller adjusting his ideas to suit *Volksfront* orthodoxy: he had already begun to revise his position on some of the most important questions of the day even before Moscow had proclaimed the new policy. In May 1933, for instance, at the very beginning of his exile, he made a speech at a stormy meeting of the PEN Club in Dubrovnik, a speech which touched on many of the themes that would come to dominate his thinking in the years which lay ahead.[1] As Wolfgang Rothe rightly says, Toller's intervention at this meeting transformed the outlook of the Pen Club, forcing what was little more than a literary debating society to take notice of the threat posed by Hitler, to adopt what Rothe calls 'eine geistespolitisch entschiedene Position'.[2] What is more significant than the fact of Toller's attempted politicisation of the Pen Club, however, is the tone of the arguments he used to win the audience to the anti-fascist position. In his speech, Toller drew attention to what he saw as the barbarism and irrationality of National Socialism, the threat it posed to civilisation, culture and 'Vernunft'. 'Wahnsinn beherrscht die Zeit', he told the delegates, 'und Barbarei regiert die Menschen, die Luft um uns wird dünner und dünner':(*GW*, I, 172)

> Wir leben in einer Zeit des tobenden Nationalismus, des brutalen Rassenhasses. Die geistigen Menschen werden isoliert, werden bedroht und bedrängt von den Mächten der Gewalt, die Vernunft wird verachtet, der Geist geschmäht.(*GW*, I, 172).

It is true, of course, that National Socialist philosophy was a particularly brutal and barbaric one, a philosophy which appealed not to the reason and intellect of the German

people, but to its darkest and most base instincts. Yet to seek an explanation of the rise of fascism solely in terms of the irrationality of man's soul is to lose sight of the social, economic and political circumstances which allowed it to flourish. Toller, however, makes no reference here at all to the class nature of fascism, to its roots in the capitalist-imperialist system. Neither did he argue that only an *Einheitsfront* of workers' organisations could defeat it, but instead appealed to his audience in the name of humanity and reason, calling on them to follow the example of Socrates, Giordano Bruno and Spinoza, 'Männer des Geistes' who were persecuted and killed 'weil sie sich nicht beugten und eher den Tod wählten als die Lüge' because they believed in a 'Welt der Freiheit, der Gerechtigkeit, der Menschlichkeit'. (*GW*, I, 173).

As indicated above, what makes Toller's speech so interesting is that it encapsulates the very essence of the *Volksfront* idea a full two years before it was proclaimed. Throughout the *Volksfront* period, from 1935 to 1939, the Comintern too shunned any kind a class analysis of fascism and instead sought to focus attention on the threat it posed to civilisation and culture. As George Orwell explained, the Communists sought to characterise fascism as 'a kind of meaningless wickedness, an aberration, "mass sadism", the sort of thing that would happen if you suddenly let loose an asylumful of homicidal maniacs'.[3] The advantage of this approach, he argued, was that it made co-operation with bourgeois parties seem not only acceptable but logical and necessary.[4] Of course, it was not calculations such as this which formed the basis of Toller's analysis; with the instinctive and sure touch of the natural orator, he simply tailored his remarks to suit his audience. He knew that the liberal intelligentsia would be offended by a Marxist analysis of fascism, and so tried instead to present the struggle against it as a struggle for justice, humanity and freedom. This is even more clear from a speech he gave a few years later in Paris to the 'Internationale Schriftstellervereinigung zur

Verteidigung der Kultur', the last of the great 'Literary Popular Front' gatherings to be held before the Second World War,[5] In this, Toller described fascism as 'de[n] Feind der Menschheit' and the struggle against it as a struggle between reason and unreason:

> Heute wird die Vernunft verlacht und der Geist geächtet, die Quantität triumphiert über die Qualität, der Tod über das Leben. Der Wahnsinn hat sich in Europa erhoben und verfolgt die Vernunft.[6]

This approach, the stress on the alleged irrationality of fascism, was indistinguishable from that adopted by the Communists. Speaking at the same conference, Erich Weinert, a leading KPD member, called fascism 'der uralt böse Feind' and the war against it as a war 'des Rechts gegen das Unrecht, der Wahrheit gegen die Lüge, der Freiheit gegen die Sklaverei'.[7] Writing elsewhere, another Communist, Alexander Abusch, explained that what united Communists and the liberal opponents of Hitler was their 'gemeinsame Kampfwille gegen die nazistische Unfreiheit und Kulturzerstörung'. He continued:[8]

> In diesem demokratischen Freiheitskampf sind wir Kämpfer gegen Hitler im breitesten Sinne die Erben und Verteidiger alles Wertvollen in der bürgerlichen Kultur [...] Die Deutsche Volksfront ist von der Geschichte dazu ausersehen, die Verteidigung der deutschen Kultur gegen das braune Barbartum als einen wesentlichen Teil ihres großen Freiheitskampfes zu führen.[9]

Interestingly, Toller was ahead of *Volksfront* opinion not only in his description of the nature of the fascist threat, but in his prescription for dealing with it. In his speech to the PEN Club in 1933 he called on his comrades to recognise the need to become politically active and advocated the creation of the sort of Literary Front organisation subsequently set-up *en masse* by the Comintern:

> Täuschen wir uns nicht, die Stimme des Geistes, die Stimme der Humanität wird von den Mächtigen nur dann beachtet, wenn sie als Fassade dient für politische Zwecke. Täuschen wir uns nicht, die Politiker dulden uns nur und verfolgen uns, wenn wir unbequem werden. Aber die

> Stimme der Wahrheit war niemals bequem. (*GW*, I, 172-73)

He did not ask his listeners to forget their past political differences or to abandon their own point of view, but to recognise that what divided them was of far less significance than what united them, their common cultural heritage:

> Ich zweifle, ob wir in diesem Europa noch oft die Möglichkeit finden werden, uns zu versammeln und miteinander zu sprechen. Wer sich heute auflehnt, ist gefährdet. Was liegt an uns. Überwinden wir die Furcht, die uns erniedrigt und demütigt. Wir kämpfen auf vielen Wegen, es mag Wege geben, wo wir gegeneinander stehen [*sic*] müssen; aber in uns allen lebt das Wissen um eine Menschheit, die befreit ist von Barbarei, von Lüge von sozialer Ungerechtigkeit und Unfreiheit. (*GW*, I, 173)

Aside from the fact that they prefigure the central core of *Volksfront* thinking, Toller's closing remarks to the PEN Congress contain another feature of particular interest, an idea which, again, he was to repeat often during his years of exile, the idea of 'die Überwindung der Furcht'. The National Socialist dictatorship would remain strong, Toller believed, only as long as those opposed to it, those both inside and outside Germany, remained silent. In another speech to the PEN Club, this time in Edinburgh in August 1934, he spoke of the power of public opinion and 'die Macht des Wortes' to influence the behaviour even of dictators like Hitler, citing as an example the recent release from custody of Georgi Dimitrov after the failure of the Nazi justice system to convict him of involvement in the *Reichstag* fire:

> Wie oft verzweifeln wir an der Gewalt und Wirkung dessen, was wir tun. Aber Beispiele, wie das eben erwähnte, sollten uns Kraft und Vertrauen geben und uns nicht ermüden lassen. Nein, auch wir *Vertriebenen* dürfen nicht müde werden. Damit geben wir uns auf und verlassen jenes Deutschland, von dem Sie nichts in den offiziellen Zeitungen lesen: Das leidende Deutschland, das im geheimen kämpfende Deutschland, das größer ist, als Sie ahnen.[10]

Toller appealed to his writer colleagues, to the men and women who quite clearly

believed in the power of the written and spoken word, not to remain silent, not to forget the plight of their persecuted brethren in Germany but to overcome their own fear of persecution and speak out loudly on their behalf. 'Auch die Inquisition war eine Macht', he said, trying to give courage to those who might have doubts, 'die verfolgte und leiden machte. Trotzdem haben die Verfolgten und Leidenden ihrem Glauben nicht abgeschworen'.[11] He continued:

> Von Ihnen wird nicht der Flammentod verlangt, von Ihnen wird nur gefordert, daß sie um der guten, humanen und gerechten Sache willen, um jener Sache, der trotz aller gegenwärtigen Verfinsterungen eine künftige Menschheit sich zuwenden wird, sich solidarisch mit ungerecht Verfolgten erklären und die Bedrückung des Geistes und den Ungeist nicht dulden.[12]

This speech — framed again, it should be noted, as a plea to humanity and justice —, reveals that Toller did not fully understand the nature of the Nazi regime, had not yet grasped the fact that it tolerated no opposition, organised or unorganised, no contrary opinions whatsoever, and that the only language it understood was the language of brute force. An appeal to Hitler's enemies to overcome their fear, to give public voice to their opposition, was not one which was likely to meet with much success. To be fair to Toller, however, his remarks were aimed not so much at Germany as at the outside world, at the western democracies, which he hoped to persuade to show firmness and determination in the face of the Nazi treat. It is precisely this, however, which highlights the nature of the changes which were taking place in his political outlook. For what were these western democracies Toller was appealing to? They were the very same 'imperialistische Räuber' whom in his speech to the League against Colonial Imperialism, for instance, he had denounced with such vigour.[13] In his heart, Toller must have felt that it was absurd to look to these nations for help in the struggle against fascism, that the big imperial powers were not interested in defending democracy, only in defending

their own material interests. He also understood, however, that if the *Volksfront* were to be a success, it was necessary to overlook such facts — even if only for the time being — and to maintain the belief that somehow or other the imperialist nations could be won over to the defence of freedom and democracy. Yet for all Toller's brave efforts to suppress his real views and remain committed to the idea of the *Volksfront*, he could not help but be conscious of the contradictions which lay at its heart. Inside of him a fierce struggle raged between Toller the revolutionary socialist and Toller the champion of liberal democracy. Though the latter maintained the upper hand for most of his period in exile, every now and then, his sense of social justice chafed against the self-imposed limits of *Volksfront* rhetoric.[14]

Take, for instance, an article he wrote for the Sunday newspaper 'Reynolds Illustrated News' in which he set out his views on liberty and described the long battle which had been necessary in order to establish this principle.[15] Freedom of thought, of conscience and of scientific research, Toller explained, had not been handed down on a plate, but had been fought for and won by people such as Socrates, John Huss and Thomas More, all of whom 'had to pay for their knowledge with their lives'. (*Ibid.*,p. 13) The struggle for political freedom too had been a long and painful one, one which begun as far back as the thirteenth century, when King John had been forced to sign the Magna Carta and had reached a peak in the French Revolution. This, Toller argued, had brought human rights to the people, had made the citizen for the first time an 'active responsible participant in the life of the State', and destroyed the privileges of Feudalism. (*Ibid.*, p. 13) In the centuries which followed, these gains had been augmented by the introduction of the secret ballot and equal electoral rights, the citizen winning the right to 'make and to alter law, to control the finances of the State, and to decide on war and peace'; adminstration slipped out of the hands of central government and into the hands

of the local communities and ordinary people took an 'active part in the affairs of State'. (*Ibid.*) Of course, many of these civil and political liberties were restricted to the privileged classes, working people not gaining their say in the running of society until they had learned how to organise themselves. The Tolpuddle Martyrs, six farm labourers from Dorset sentenced to life-long transportation to Australia for having formed a Trades Union, were among the brave pioneers of the labour movement, their example having encouraged others in the fight to win legal recognition for workers' representation. Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the last great political battles had been won when women, in some countries at least, won the same political rights as men, the right to vote and the right to be elected to sit in parliament.

Yet important as the struggle for political liberty was, side by side with it an equally fierce struggle had been waged, the struggle for economic liberty. The economic bondage of feudalism, Toller explained, had been broken by the 'victory of the bourgeois revolution'. (*Ibid.*, p. 13) The rising capitalist class had no use for the artificial restrictions to production and trade imposed by feudal law, and under the motto of 'laisser-faire, laisser-aller', had swept these into the dustbin of history. But economic liberation was a double edged sword, for while it had brought freedom to the capitalist, in had also led to 'anarchy and the ruthless exploitation of human labour':

> Anatole France once expressed the essence of this economic "liberty" in the words: "Everybody has the right to sleep underneath the bridges of Paris." In witty form this gives the basic truth. The conception of economic liberty is meaningless if man is not granted a minimum of the means of existence. He ought to have not only the liberty to work, he ought to have the right to work and the right to sufficient payment for his toil. (*Ibid.*, p. 13)

'Capitalism', Toller argued, 'gives to a limited number of men the possession of the means of production — the land, minerals, and machines', and with that the right to

decide 'not only on production but on consumption as well'. (*Ibid.*, p. 13) Capitalism means waste and inefficiency, it means that in certain places some people have to go cold and hungry while in others 'fuel is wasted and wheat is destroyed'. (*Ibid.*, p. 13) Capitalism provides the owners of 'vast fortunes' with the means to influence public opinion through the possession of newspapers and to interfere with the affairs of state. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, capitalism, he claimed, meant war, citing as evidence a book by Otto Lehmann Russbueldt entitled *War For Profit* and a report by the American Government Committee in Washington both of which, he explained, showed the 'close relationship between wars and the armament trade [...] in all its abominable cruelty'. (*Ibid.*, p. 13)

What this article demonstrates is how little Toller's political views had changed at this stage in exile.[16] His answer to the chaos and anarchy of capitalism was, as before, socialism. 'Socialism' he wrote, 'will regulate production and consumption according to the needs of mankind and not according to the urge for profit'. (*Ibid.*, p. 13) Though it does limit liberty to a certain extent, it does not abolish it, it merely subordinates the freedom of the individual to the needs of the community as a whole. 'Real freedom', he insisted, 'exists only when every citizen enjoys — not just on paper but in reality — the right to work, the right to culture, and the right to recreation'. (*Ibid.*, p. 13) It is significant, however, that while Toller was prepared to use this kind of language when preaching to the converted, he was far more circumspect during his lecture tour of America when his aim was to convince a middle-class audience to lend their support to the *Volksfront*.

Toller left England on board the *SS Normandie* on 5 October 1936 and arrived in New York a week later, on the twelfth. Christiane went with him, but only after what seems to have been a good deal of persuasion. Unlike her husband, she had settled down

well to life in London and was reluctant to leave her new home and turn her back on an acting career which had got off to such a promising start in England with her appearance in *Nie wieder Friede!*[17] Events in the outside world, however, in particular the Spanish Civil War, which broke out in July 1936, stirred Toller's imagination and did not allow him to settle down to a quiet domestic life. As always, he felt that his place was in the front line of the fight against fascism and he was not prepared to allow any consideration, not even his relationship with Christiane, to interfere with his political work. On his arrival in America, Toller plunged headlong into the political life of the country, embarking immediately on his lecture tour, a tour which involved appearances in Canada and Mexico as well as the United States.[18] According to John Spalek and Wolfgang Frühwald, Toller had prepared and delivered lectures with 4 different titles, these being 'Hitler — The Promise and the Reality', 'Are You Responsible for Your Times?', 'The Place of Theatre in Our Changing World' and 'Drama as an Expression of Youth'. Of these, the text of 'Are You Responsible for Your Times' is extant while 'The Place of Theatre in Our Changing World' was published in the New York Times under the title 'The Function of Drama'.[19] There is no known copy of either of the other two texts, although it is likely that 'Hitler — The Promise and the Reality' was similar to a speech entitled 'Unser Kampf um Deutschland' which Toller delivered at the so-called *Deutscher Tag* in new York, on 14 December 1937.[20] In this, Toller does indeed compare Hitler's promises with the reality of Nazi Germany, and exposes the contradictions at the heart of National Socialist philosophy. In particular he exposed the lie that what was being created was a *Volksgemeinschaft*, a new society free of class division and conflict. Hitler, Toller said, had promised the German people to take up the struggle against monopoly capital, to break the chains of 'der Zinsknechtschaft' and reduce the influence of 'der Riesenbetriebe und Warenhäuser'. But what was the result?:

> Das Großkapital hat sich auf Kosten des Volkes bereichert. Die großen Banken wurden nie angetastet, und die Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft besteht darin, daß Zehntausende von ohnmächtigen Juden, daß Gewerkschaften und freiheitliche Männer ihrer Sparpfennige beraubt wurden. (p. 201)

Going into some detail on the NS party programme, he explained that ordinary workers had been promised a share of the profits of the firms in which they worked. The reality, however, was that, under Hitler, wages had fallen by between almost 30% while prices had risen by anything between 50 and 100%. 'Die Lebenshaltung des arbeitenden Volkes', he said, 'ist ärmlicher denn je', and yet it was at precisely this moment that Goering dared to tell the people 'es solle an Kanonen denken und nicht an Butter'. (p. 201) What Toller demonstrated here was that there was precious little socialism in National Socialist philosophy. The much vaunted Nazi revolution had been, at best, a political revolution, one which might have brought to power a new political caste, but which had left untouched the economic foundations of capitalist society. Hitler had, it was true, made a huge dent in the unemployment figures, but had achieved this, first of all, by expelling half a million women from the workplace, and secondly, by preparing for war. (p.202)

As explained above, Toller's primary aim in America was to alert public opinion to the fascist threat and to promote the idea of the *Volksfront*. In this, however, he faced one or two major obstacles. Firstly, the American public was, on the whole, isolationist and little interested in the problems besetting the seemingly distant Europe. It was unwilling to get involved in what it saw as other people's affairs and in any case did not regard Nazi Germany as a serious threat to American interests.[21] Acutely aware of this, Toller appealed to his listeners' sense of moral responsibility, explaining to them that the struggle for justice knew no national boundaries, that 'Unrecht, das an einem Menschen begangen wird, ist Unrecht, das an der Menschheit begangen wird.' 'Wenn morgen

Thälmann dem Henker ausgeliefert wird', he declared, 'wird die Gerechtigkeit dem Henker ausgeliefert', continuing:

> Wenn deutsche Pazifisten, Sozialisten, und Liberale wie Mierendorff, Neubauer und Litten, wenn Tausende namenloser Bürger, Arbeiter und Bauern, wenn deutsche Katholiken, Protestanten und Juden um ihrer Überzeugungen und ihres Glaubens willen in Gefängnissen und Konzentrationslagern zugrunde gerichtet werden, dann gehen die Verfolgungen alle an. (p. 208)

While it would be wrong to suggest that Toller's words had no effect, it was inevitable that they would make the deepest impression mainly on those already committed to the anti-fascist cause. His was a voice in the wilderness and he must often have felt an inward shudder at the enormity of the task he had set himself. If he didn't, then Christiane certainly did. She frequently accompanied her husband to these lectures and writes that he clearly enjoyed them, loved the applause and was never too tired to give his time to helping fellow emigrants and those engaged in the fight against fascism.[22] However, she paints a quite devastating portrait of his audiences, writing that they were full of enthusiasm and interest only as long as Toller was speaking. 'Kaum war die Rede vorbei und das Publikum drehte sich zum Ausgang, hörte ich Bruchstücke von Sätzen, die nur zu deutlich die innere Unberührtheit anzeigten'.[23] Christiane, of course, was very young and politically immature and it would be a mistake to attach too much weight to her account. Yet she had no reason to lie about this matter and the following passage does have the ring of truth about it:

> Das beste war noch, wenn man von ET als "marvellous guy", "gee what good looks" oder "real nice, real deep and special" hörte. Viel öfter wurde das Gespräch weitergeführt, als hätte er nie stattgefunden. Auch bei den antifaschistischen Vorträgen oder Versammlungen konnte man das ehrliche, große Interesse sehen und hören, ohne jedoch wirklich den kleinsten Eindruck zu hinterlassen. Als sei alles nur zum Zeitvertreib gesagt worden.[24]

Aside from indifference, however, the other problem facing Toller was that middle-class opinion in America was, in the main, hostile towards the idea of socialism. It would not back the *Volksfront* if it suspected that it was a Trojan Horse for the left, or even worse, that it was under Moscow's control. When Toller appealed for the creation of the *Volksfront*, then, he went out of his way to make it clear that it was not a partisan or class organisation but one intended to bring together as wide a coalition of anti-fascist opinion as possible. Referring to the abortive attempt to set up a *Volksfront* committee among German emigrés, he said:

> Zu Beginn dieses Jahres saß ich in Paris an einem Tisch mit Männern beisammen, die sich einst leidenschaftlich bekämpft hatten, mit Katholiken und Kommunisten, mit Sozialisten und Liberalen, mit Gewerkschaftlern und freien Schriftstellern, mit Männern, die aus der Fremde und, unter Lebensgefahr, aus Deutschland gekommen waren. Sie alle waren sich einig in dem einen glühend ersehnten Ziel, ein Deutschland der Freiheit, des Friedens und der Gerechtigkeit zu schaffen. Sie hatten die Zersplitterung und Ohnmacht überwunden, sie hatten der deutschen Zwietracht einen Dolch ins Herz gestoßen, sie hatten sich, wie wir es heute tun, geeint in der deutschen Volksfront.[25]

Anxious not to frighten or alienate his audience, Toller eschewed any Marxist or socialist analysis of the struggle against fascism and stated quite bluntly that the Nazis were lying, trying to dupe people, when they proclaimed that the choice facing the world was a choice between National Socialism or Communism. 'Kündet der Welt die Wahrheit', he exclaimed, 'es geht heute einzig und allein um die Frage: Diktatur eines Mannes oder wahre Demokratie, Unfreiheit oder Freiheit, Recht oder Rechtlosigkeit, Barbarei oder Menschlichkeit'. *(Ibid., p. 206)* What is so striking here is that instead of disparaging the achievements of the democratic system, Toller was now keen to emphasise them, even praising the Weimar Republic, whose democratic pretensions he had satirised in *Hoppla, wir leben!* and whose biased, class-based justice system he had exposed in *Justiz: Erlebnisse*. Despite its imperfections, he now argued, democracy had been 'ein

Meilenstein in der Geschichte der Völker', for it had brought 'Freiheit des Gewissens und Glaubens, Freiheit des Bürgers, des Forschers, des Künstlers'. (*Ibid.*, p. 206) Hitler, he maintained, had created not so much as a fraction of that which the Weimar Republic 'als schöpferische Leistung aufweisen kann', adding:

> Die Republik hat Werke aufgebaut, die in der Welt vorbildlich wirkten. Ihre Sozialpolitik, ihre Krankenversicherungen, ihre Invalidenversicherung, ihre Hospitäler und Erholungsanstalten, ihr Tarif-und-Arbeitsrecht, ihre Siedlungen und Sportpaläste, ihre kulturellen Leistungen, die Freiheit des Glaubens, der Wissenschaft und der Kunst, die in ihr herrschte, haben die Bewunderung der Welt erregt. (*Ibid.*, p. 200)

Passages such as this seem to lend weight to Spalek's view that Toller abandoned socialism to become a supporter of liberal democracy. On closer inspection, however, it is clear that he had not, in fact, renounced his fundamental beliefs, but rather assumed a new type of vocabulary as he did his best to make socialism appetizing to his American audiences, to make it sound like straightforward common-sense. In his lecture 'Are You Responsible for Your Times?', for instance, he repeats an argument he had used in July 1936 at a PEN Club conference in London, the argument, that is, that democratic rights were worthless without social and economic justice. In this instance, however, he is at pains to stress that this was not a Marxist idea but a bourgeois one:

> Das hat das Bürgertum, als es noch jung und stark war, selbst eingesehen. Im Jahre 1800, als vom Sozialismus noch keine Rede war, erschien in Deutschland das Buch des bürgerlich-idealistischen Denkers, Fichte, in dem es hieß: "Es sollen erst alle satt werden und erst wohnen, ehe einer seine Wohnung verziert, erst alle bequem und warm bekleidet sein, ehe einer sich prächtig kleidet."[26]

Seeking to show that there was nothing intrinsically socialist in the belief in human solidarity, the notion that everyone should enjoy certain basic rights, he went on to criticise an economic system, i.e. capitalism, which, he said, was incapable of matching

existing resources with human needs:

> In der Welt von heute wird aber menschliche Kraft vergeudet, wenn die einen in Luxus leben und die anderen hungern wenn hier Weizen verbrannt wird und dort Weizen fehlt, wenn hier die Kohlen sich auf den Halden anhäufen und dort die Menschen frieren. Das ist Verantwortungslosigkeit und nicht Freiheit. (*LWJB*, 283)

His solution to this problem was 'eine planvolle Gestaltung von Produktion und Verbrauch nach dem Bedarf der Gemeinschaft', (*LWJB*, 283) which was really just another way of saying that the only way out of the crisis facing mankind was a socialist plan of production:

> Anstelle der Planlosigkeit, die heute die Weltkrise heraufbeschwört, muß eine planvolle vernünftige Organisation der irdischen Güter einsetzen. Denn es ist Überfluß in Hülle und Fülle auf dieser Erde — an allem, was der Mensch wünscht. (*LWJB*, 283)

Clearly, despite his repeated admiring comments about the virtues of bourgeois democracy, Toller at heart was still very much committed to the vision of a socialist society. Does this mean, then, that Dove was correct to argue that his support for the *Volksfront* had *no* real impact on his fundamental political beliefs, that any change was more apparent than real, being simply the consequence of his attempt to win the middle classes to the anti-fascist cause? There are a number of reasons for rejecting such an analysis. Firstly, and this will be looked at in detail in the final chapter, there is the question of Toller's tacit approval of the counter-revolutionary strategy adopted by the Soviet Union in Spain during the Civil War. This was a direct consequence of his devotion to the *Volksfront* cause. Secondly, and something which demonstrates the change not just in his socialism but in his pacifism too, there is the fact that, after about 1936-37, Toller was prepared to give his backing to military action by the major Western democracies in the struggle against fascism. Previously he had viewed the capitalist world

as his enemy, had argued, indeed, that fascism itself was a product of the crisis within the capitalist-imperialist system; now he spent much of his time trying to convince public opinion that these countries which formed the very cornerstone of that imperialist system, Great Britain, France and the USA, could be counted upon as a reliable bulwark against fascism. It is interesting to see just how much difficulty Toller had in trying to convince himself of the truth of this argument.

Like most ordinary people, in particular, like those who had experienced violence at first hand during the First World War, Toller hated war and loved peace. However, he had also come to understand that it was not enough simply to want peace, it was also necessary to state clearly which means one was willing to use to preserve and defend peace in the face of those whose aim it was to destroy it:

> Wer wahren Frieden wünscht, muß bereit sein, auch für den Frieden zu kämpfen. Wahrer Frieden verlangt heldenhafte Taten und Opfer. Kein Pazifist wird das bestreiten wollen.[27]

Toller had come to realise the limitations of pacifism, be it conditional or unconditional, to see that peace at any price was, or could be, peace not worth having. Throughout the centuries, he explained, generation after generation had fought for 'die geistige Freiheit des Menschen [...] haben für dieses Ideal gelitten und sind dafür gestorben'. 'Heute, he declared, 'ist es unsere Pflicht, diesen kostbaren Besitz der Menschheit zu verteidigen'.[28] Toller stops short of calling on the West to strike the first blow against fascism, but is this not what his words imply? Referring to the Nazi persecution of the Jewish minority in Germany he said:

> In einer Zeit, in der der Völkerbund die Rechte der Minderheiten feierlich garantiert hat, sind die Judenverfolgungen keine innenpolitisiche Angelegenheit eines Staates, in die sich einzumischen andere Staaten kein Recht haben. Der Völkerbund hat nur dann einen Sinn, wenn er über die Rechte aller wacht. Es ist seine Aufgabe und seine Pflicht, Staaten, die die

> Grundrechte der Menschen, die Menschenrechte mißachten, zur Aufgabe dieser Verfolgung zu zwingen. Die Judenverfolgungen sind eine Form des Krieges nach innen.[29]

What is striking here is the dramatic change in Toller's attitude towards the *Völkerbund*. Previously, as we have shown, he had despised this organisation, regarding it is an elite club whose primary aim was to maintain the interests of the imperial powers, mainly against the claims of the colonial peoples; now he looked towards it to defend peace and democracy against fascist aggression and argued that there would be little point in having a *Völkerbund* if it could not force Hitler to respect the rights of all his people. Then there is the question of how the West was to enforce peace. Was Toller of the opinion that it had the moral and political right to act first to achieve this end? This is a question he could or would not answer directly, one he shied away from every time he confronted it. For instance, in an article he wrote around 1937, he confessed quite openly that his pacifist views had undergone a profound change in recent years, saying that he had been a convinced pacifist but that 'reality had set me right'.[30] He had come to recognise, he wrote, that social and economic circumstances sometimes compelled even those who abhorred violence to take actions which conflicted with their most deeply held beliefs. Repeating an argument he used on more than one occasion he said that the laws and consequences of the struggle in which the pacifist is engaged are 'determined by other forces than his good intentions'; in many instances, he explained, the 'means of offence and defence are forced upon him, means which he cannot but feel as tragic, upon which in the deep sense of the word he may bleed to death'. (*GW*, I, 83) Seeking to demonstrate the inconsistencies and flaws in the unconditional pacifist case, he wrote that he had asked a pacifist friend what he would do if faced with a situation in which the only way to prevent a robber from murdering a defenceless woman was by the use of force? Naturally, his friend had answered that force would then be justified. Transcribing this

example from the personal to the political sphere, he went on to ask how peace could be maintained when there were forces at large who wanted war? Should we not be prepared, he asked, to enforce the continuation of peace? He clearly feels that the answer to this question is yes, but cannot bring himself to say how, being again somewhat ambiguous and evasive:

> In children one notices a particular kind of development. To begin with the undeveloped child considers himself the center of the universe, he wants to possess everything and what he cannot possess he would like to destroy. Then, as he grows up, the child begins to see that he is one of many children, that there are others with the same claims, the same rights. He begins to control himself, to suppress the bellicose desire to possess everything, he becomes more patient and peaceful.
> Today after thousands of years of human history, certain dictators are still in the condition of the undeveloped child.
> To teach them activity is needed, a curative compulsion. Otherwise they will hurl themselves and us into the hell of another war. (*GW*, I, 83-4)

Toller's digression into the field of child psychology is interesting but it brings him no nearer to an answer to the question of how peace was to be enforced. For what precisely did he mean when he said the dictators had to be taught activity, what was 'a curative compulsion'? Was it war, and if so who was to land the first blow.[31] Perhaps realising the imprecision of his words, Toller made another attempt to define his position, arguing that the only thing which would give pause to those countries determined to break the peace would be the knowledge of certain punishment if they did:

> If Hitler today knew positively, that he had to face a bloc of strong countries, which would defend freedom collectively, if he knew positively that he could not with impunity break unilateral treaties, undermine international law, he would in all probability give the matter forethought and the peace of the world would have greater chances. (*GW*, I, 84)

Yet this answer too is an evasion for it does not address a point he himself considered of primary importance: namely, that it is not possible to speak of genuine peace when the

fascist dictators are free to violate the rights of their own people with impunity. Toller was prepared to say openly that he was in favour of force as an 'Akt des Selbstschutzes',[32] but still had extreme difficulty in admitting that he was also now in favour of offensive action on the part of the West. Yet it is quite clear that this was his opinion:

> That state which fires the first shot is not the breaker of the peace. The peace breaker is the state which prepares its people to glorify war, which changes its country into barracks where marching feet are more important than intellect and reason, which teaches its citizens to live for a heroic death and not for a heroic life.[33]

Unfortunately, these appeals, like his appeals to the West to build a *Volksfront* fell on deaf ears. We have already seen that American public opinion was isolationist. In Britain, the position was similar, with appeasement, the policy of avoiding war with the fascist states at all costs, enjoying fairly widespread popular support.[34] Of course, Chamberlain's government advocated appeasement not because it was devoutly committed to pacifism but because it was terrified of Hitler and preferred conciliation to a war which it thought it had little chance of winning; ordinary people, however, favoured it for different reasons, mainly because they remembered all too clearly the horrors of the First World War and had no wish to become embroiled in another, one which, as Spain had shown, was likely to bring about even greater suffering and destruction. Moreover, there were many who believed that the Treaty of Versailles had been unfair to the defeated countries and that Germany's territorial claims — at least until March 1939 when it occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia — were justified.[35] The inability or unwillingness of the democracies to enforce peace, invoked in Toller, as in most German exiles, a deep sense of frustration. This is obvious from a speech he gave in Paris on 25 July 1938 to the 'Internationale Schriftstellervereinigung zur Verteidigung der Kultur',

the last of the major 'Literary Popular Front' events to take place before the outbreak of the Second World War.[36] Referring to the *Weltfriedenskongreß* which had attended only the day before, Toller explained that in the congress hall there had been huge banners painted with the slogan '"Rettet den Frieden, indem ihr die Hilfe für die angegriffenen Völker organisiert!"' Was this slogan, he asked, not a concession to those 'die die Klarheit scheuen, und, da sie der Wirklichkeit ausweicht, verwirrend?'.[37] He continued:

> Können wir noch den Frieden retten? Sind wir nicht schon mitten im Krieg? Wütet der Weltkrieg nicht in Spanien und China? Hätte es nicht heißen sollen, "Macht dem Krieg ein Ende, indem ihr die Verteidigung gegen die faschistischen Angreifer organisiert. Werdet so stark, daß niemand in Zukunft mehr wagen wird, das Geschick fremder Völker zu bedrohen und den Frieden zu zerstören"?[38]

In his opinion, war had already begun and it was time that the politicians and the broad public in the democracies woke up to the fact, time that they found the courage to face reality and admit that pacifism and appeasement were dead. 'Was heute not tut', he said', ist, den Krieg zu beenden'.[39] Toller recognised, however, that the West was not prepared to take the action necessary to stop Hitler, in fact, it had made concession after concession, ignoring the fact that every Nazi foreign policy success not only weakened the internal opposition in Germany, but also represented 'eine verlorene Schlacht für die demokratischen Mächte'.[40] This was quite clearly the case with Spain, where non-intervention, the West's policy of sham neutrality, had helped ensure that the Republic was more or less starved of arms and other war materials while Hitler and Mussolini were free to supply Franco with everything he needed.

In his *Spanisches Tagebuch*, an unfinished account of his relief campaign for Spain, Toller wrote that, like the opposition inside Germany, the people in Republican Spain felt that they had been abandoned and betrayed by the democracies, deprived by them of their right to 'Schutz und Verteidigung'.[41] He was clear in his own mind that

the democracies' policy towards Spain was not a mistake, but a quite conscious and deliberate one. Fearing a socialist revolution in Spain, certain sections of the British and French bourgeoisie in particular hoped for a victory for Franco, sheer hatred blinding them to the threat posed to their own interests by the emergence of yet another fascist state in Europe.[42] Their hatred was such, Toller explained, that some leading conservative politicians even refused to support his humanitarian aid programme simply because they feared that this could have what were in their view unfavourable political consequences, namely strengthening the Republic. By now, of course, the list of countries Toller felt had been 'betrayed' by the West had grown even longer with the addition of Czechoslovakia, which he described as 'die einzige wahre Demokratie in Europa'.[43] Following the annexation of the Sudetenland after the Munich Crisis in September 1938 he wrote:

> Der Verrat ist besiegelt. In München wird die Tschechoslowakei Hitlers Beute. Nur wenige in England sehen die tragischen Folgen dieses "Friedens". Die Menge, von Kriegsangst befreit, bejubelt den Tag und ist blind vor dem Mord.[44]

Such fierce criticism of the role played by the West in the immediate pre-war period, sits uneasily with Spalek's claim that Toller became a champion of liberal democracy in the years before his death. Clearly, he would have liked to believe in the decency of the democratic states, but could not do so in the face of concrete reality. What he was compelled to understand was something that he had once known only too well: that what motivated bourgeois governments was not concern for abstract concepts such as justice and humanity but self-interest. When finally forced to use force against Hitler it was not because they objected to the brutality of his regime but because he posed a real threat to their economic and strategic interests. It is ironic that Toller of all people should have forgotten this, or to be precise, pushed it into a corner of his mind. Even more ironic is

the fact that Toller was prepared to support the democracies if they had heeded his advice and taken pre-emptive measures against Hitler. The question of the legitimacy of violence was, we have seen, one that had tormented Toller ever since he first became active in politics. Previously, he had seen socialism as an ethical goal and one that was quite incompatible with the use of violence; if violence could be justified at all then it was only as a last resort and in self-defence. Now he was willing to sanction its use by the very capitalist states he had formerly seen as the enemy. Nothing could better illustrate the nature of the changes his thinking underwent in exile. Having abandoned — temporarily he thought — his revolutionary perspectives and his pacifism, he became a mere anti-fascist, a champion of the *Volksfront*, and as such was constrained to believe, or to pretend he believed, in the democratic credentials of the capitalist classes of Western Europe. Toller's consciousness of the hollowness of this belief, the contradiction at the heart of the *Volksfront*, did not only affect his political work, it crippled his creative faculties too, something which is only too clear from the two plays he wrote during his exile period, *Nie wieder Friede!* and *Pastor Hall*.

Nie wieder Friede!

Even Toller's most dedicated admirers are forced to concede that, in artistic terms, *Nie wieder Friede!*[45] is somewhat less than a complete triumph.[46] Not only is it handicapped with a weak and obvious plot, one practically devoid of invention or dramatic interest, it is also riddled with banal jokes and wooden characters and weighed down with the most plodding and leaden dialogue imaginable.[47] Like his final play, *Pastor Hall*, it casts a stark light on Toller's deficiencies, both technical and artistic, as a playwright, deficiencies which, while present in his earlier Expressionist plays, were

less manifest there, less easy to perceive beneath the innovative and bold form of these works. Perhaps the worst thing that can be said about *Nie wieder Friede!*, however, is not that it is badly written, but that it lacks conviction.[48] The subject it deals with, the nature of fascism, the most burning issue of that period, was one on which Toller of all people might have been expected to have had something meaningful to say.[49] Yet *Nie wieder Friede!* fails to present an even half-way convincing or interesting portrait of a fascist society. Naturally, allowance has to be made for the fact that Toller was, at this stage, still trying to find his feet in exile and that he faced the enormous difficulty of adjusting to a quite different audience to the one which he was used to, an audience which brought with it to the theatre its own distinctive tastes and expectations.[50] Ultimately, however, the lack of real conviction in this play has its roots in the changes taking place in Toller's political outlook at that time. *Nie wieder Friede!* is not the work of a revolutionary socialist — however one might care to define that term — but of an anti-fascist pure and simple. It marks the point, in other words, at which Toller abandoned his faith in socialism — or to be more precise, placed it in what he was firmly convinced was temporary abeyance — and became instead a fully-fledged supporter of the *Volksfront*.[51] It is this, it will be argued here, which accounts in large measure for the play's manifest weaknesses.

Set in the imaginary province of Dunkelstein, a tiny statelet lying somewhere between France and Spain, *Nie wieder Friede!* aims to bring home to audiences in the West the true nature of the totalitarian state, to show, among other things, how easy it was for fascist leaders to manipulate public opinion, to create, for instance, feelings of love or hate, pro-war or anti-war sentiment, as easily as someone flicking a light-switch.[52] Divided, like his Expressionist plays, into a series of *Bilder*, in this case 7, the play opens in Olympus with a scene in which Napoleon and St. Francis of Assisi,

representatives respectively of war and peace, discuss the affairs of the world, with St. Francis happy that, at long last, mankind seems to have come to its senses and declared itself in favour of peace. Napoleon, however, more realistic and hence more cynical than St. Francis, reacts to the news that the nations of the world are celebrating peace, firstly by inquiring about the state of armaments shares on the stock market, then, his suspicions confirmed, declaring 'Dann stehen wir vor dem Krieg!':

> *FRANZISKUS*: Aber lieber Napoleon, der Krieg ist geächtet. Die Regierungen haben es beschworen. Die Minster halten Friedensreden. Die Staaten schließen Friedenspakte.
> *NAPOLEON:* Friedenspakte haben nur einen Sinn. Sie dienen der Vorbereitung neuer Kriege.
> *FRANZISKUS*: Sie glauben nur an das Böse im Menschen.
> *NAPOLEON:* Sie glauben nur an das Gute im Menschen. (p. 189)

In order to prove that it is his perspective which is correct, Napoleon challenges St. Francis to a bet, telling him boldly that, should he wish, he could kindle a war mood in any country on earth, even in what seems to be the most peaceful. When St.Francis accepts the bet and suggests they try Dunkelstein, at that point also engaged in celebrating the 'outbreak' of peace, Napoleon orders a forged telegram to be sent to its leader, Laban, containing the simple message that war has been declared on his country by some unnamed enemy.

As already suggested, one of the Toller's central aims with this play was to demonstrate just how tight a grip the fascist rulers had on public opinion in their countries, how they were able to form and mould it for their own purposes. In Dunkelstein, a thinly disguised Germany, the public mood verges on what can only be described as schizophrenic, changing as it does from being in favour of peace to being in favour of war not only with no sense of incongruity but without even an interval in time. At a public ceremony held to celebrate the advent of peace, Laban, in seeming

good faith, swears an oath against war and calls on his people to sacrifice all the things they possess which remind them of it, at which point some people come forward to give up their war medals, their weapons, their gas-masks, their books glorifying war, books which, as one puts it, 'unsere Köpfe verdunkelt und unsere Herzen verdorben [haben]'. (p. 197) In the midst of the general celebrations, however, a sour note is struck by a certain Noah, a beggar, war-invalid and pacifist, who comments, as the war minster hands back his uniform as a sacrifice, 'Das war ein sauberer Mann. Der hat seine Uniform sauber gehalten', adding:

> Es wäre eine Schande gewesen, wenn eine so saubere Uniform im Schützengraben verdreckt wäre. (p. 197)

Practically the only voice of reason and humanity in Dunkelstein, Noah understands that if the country's rulers are in favour of peace then it is not out of moral or ethical considerations but because, in some way or other, this must coincide with their commercial and financial interests. Noah puts forward his views on this subject later on in the play in a discussion with Socrates, sent to earth by St. Francis in a desperate attempt to restore some faith in reason:

> *NOAH*: Lieber Herr, jetzt will ich Ihnen ein Rätsel aufgeben [...] Wenn es Mannah regnet, haben alle zu essen.
> *SOKRATES*: Gewiß.
> *NOAH:* Regnet es im Krieg Mannah?
> *SOKRATES*: Nein. Es hat sich jedenfalls noch nicht zugetragen.
> *NOAH*: Regnet es im Frieden Mannah?
> *SOKRATES*: Nein.
> *NOAH*: Was ist der Unterschied zwischen Krieg und Frieden?
> *SOKRATES*: Es regnet weder im Krieg Mannah noch im Frieden.
> *NOAH*: Falsch. Es regnet Mannah im Krieg und Frieden.
> *SOKRATES*: Diese Folgerung widerspricht der Vernunft.
> *NOAH*: Lieber Herr, die Vernunft. Für die einen regnet es Mannah im Frieden, für die einen im Krieg. Die einen und die einen sind meistens die einen. (p. 222)

What seems like the cheap cynicism of a disillusioned pacifist is shown to be entirely realistic by a conversation between Laban and some of his business associates, the latter designated only as 'der Hagere' and 'der Dicke', the people who are the real rulers of Dunkelstein. Congratulating Laban on his victory in the recent war, 'der Hagere' begs leave to ask him why he had sworn on peace, saying disapprovingly 'Man soll nichts verschwören':

> *LABAN*: Ein Friede ohne Schwur?
> *DER HAGERE*: Alles ist relativ. Auch der Friede.
> *DER DICKE*: Herr von Laban hat gewiß nicht an den Frieden um jeden Preis gedacht.
> *LABAN*: Wann ist der Friede zu teuer meine Herren?
> *DER HAGERE*: [...] Wenn der Krieg billiger ist.
> *LABAN*: Wann ist der Krieg billiger?
> *DER HAGERE*: Wenn der Friede zu teuer ist. *(Gelächter.)* (pp. 198-99)

Despite their public protestations of faith in peace, Laban and his friends are clearly prepared for any eventuality, their sole consideration, as Noah explained, being that of financial expediency. When war does resume, therefore, they lose no time in perceiving how best to profit from it, with Laban himself licking his lips in anticipation of the wealth his processed-food factory will generate, 'Konserven', as he rightly appreciates, being 'kriegswichtig'. (p. 206)

What Toller brings out quite well in this and other scenes is the remarkable ease and speed with which the arguments in favour of peace are reversed to favour war. Tomas, for instance, the state's official poet, though initially in despair at the thought that his new hymn to peace has immediately become redundant, soon cheers up after the 'der Hagere' points out to him that all he need do to make it fit the new set of circumstances is to go through the text and replace the word peace with the word war. 'Was liegt am Inhalt', 'der Hagere' reassures him, 'Nur die Form ist entscheidend. Die Form ist das Ewige'. (p. 204) Of course, the group of businessmen to which 'der Hagere' belongs has

even less difficulty than the artist in adjusting to the demands of the new situation, with 'der Dicke', turning on its head the meaning of the words contained in Isaiah, announcing with great pride that his factory will give up making ploughs and produce grenades instead. (p. 204) As for the masses, they are credited with no power of independent thought at all, and accept the declaration of war with the same degree of enthusiasm with which they had welcomed the prospect of peace only a few minutes earlier. Indeed, the children of Dunkelstein are delighted to be told that they can have back the tin soldiers they had been compelled to hand over as a token of their love of peace at the beginning of the scene. (p. 205)

Another point well made by Toller in this scene is that war, a senseless, irrational squandering of both material and human resources, is rooted in capitalism, itself a senseless and irrational system. When Laban, responding to the question as to who has declared war, says that there is no mention of this in the telegram, 'der Hagere' explains that this is irrelevant for there are always many more reasons for war than for peace:

> *DER HAGERE*: Vielleicht braucht Spanien unsere Petroleumfelder, vielleicht brauchen wir Spaniens Kohlenfelder.
> *DER KLEINE*: Vielleicht brauchen wir gar nichts. Vielleicht haben wir zuviel.
> *DER DICKE*: Wir ersticken an Korn und Wein und Kohlen. (p. 202)

Later on, after war has been declared and the country finds itself in a state of panic about spies and saboteurs, the order is given to burn down all the cornfields so as to leave no hiding place for the enemy. Even Napoleon, the arch cynic, is moved to comment on this act of insanity, saying to St. Francis that times have changed since his day when it was the enemy which destroyed their fields. (p. 214) War, Toller shows here, is a product of economic rivalry, and can come about either because a country is too rich or too poor, because it has either too much or too little in the way of material possessions. The

difficulty with this argument, however, indeed the difficulty with the whole of the play, is that it could have been applied not just to the kind of fascist state depicted in Dunkelstein, but to the liberal democracies of the West as well, to those very countries, that is, at which Toller directed his anti-fascist appeal. While there were clear and important differences between, for instance, Great Britain and France on the one hand and Germany and Italy on the other, they were all governed by the same laws of capitalist economics, with the British and French capitalists being every bit as calculating and immoral in the defence of their own material interests as the German capitalists were in defending theirs. Admittedly, Britain and France were both democratic countries in which the people enjoyed freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly and all the other rights which Hitler and Mussolini had abolished. Yet as Toller well knew, both these countries also presided over colonial empires, empires which provided vast supplies of cheap labour and a captive market for their own goods, empires in which the subject peoples were often treated every bit as badly if not worse than the way in which Hitler's opponents in Germany were treated.[53] In other words, Britain, France and all the rest of the imperial powers could be held up in contrast to the fascist countries only if one concentrated on the faults of the latter and did not look too closely at the democratic credentials of the former. Consciousness of this contradiction permeates all of Toller's work, artistic and political, during his period in exile, and robs it of the edge it had at the time when he believed that revolutionary socialism was the only alternative to fascism and that fascism and capitalism were but two sides of the same coin. It certainly goes a log way to explaining why this is such a weak and unconvincing play.

While Toller, as shown above, makes a reasonable effort to uncover for his audience the economic roots of fascism, what is so striking about *Nie wieder Friede!* is the complete absence of any notion of class conflict. Unwilling to risk offending

significant sections of his potential audience, or, to put it positively, keen to attract as much support as possible to the anti-fascist banner, Toller intentionally sought to portray the struggle against fascism not as a struggle between capital and labour, the oppressors and the oppressed, but as one between democracy and dictatorship, reason and unreason, good and bad. This is why the heroes of *Nie wieder Friede!* are not the likes of Albert Kroll or Erwin Reichpietsch, but St. Francis and Socrates, representatives of peace and reason, of a timeless, transcendental morality which, Toller hoped, no decent person could possibly oppose. Naturally, this is then easily counterposed to the sort of amoral, inhumane, irrational philosophy which Napoleon and the rulers of Dunkelstein stand for.

Peace, a very fragile and probably temporary peace, is eventually restored to Dunkelstein after Napoleon sends another forged telegram in which it is declared that the war was due to a misunderstanding. Emil, the puppet-dictator who had been installed by Laban, tries to ignore the telegram and wants to continue the war for its own sake and for the sake of the country's honour and prestige. 'Der Hagere' and his business associates, however, have reversed their earlier position and are now firmly of the opinion that war has become too expensive, too harmful to their material interests, and manage to overthrow Emil by the simple expedient of producing a birth certificate which proves that he, the great patriot, is not a true Dunkelsteiner but actually half-Brasilien. Towards the end of the scene, as 'der Hagere' loudly proclaims 'es lebe der Frieden', Toller once more highlights the cynicism of the capitalist class these people represent and reinforces the point that it is they and they alone who are the real winners both in war and peace:

> *DER HAGERE*: Der Friede war unvermeidlich.
> *LABAN*: Was sagten Sie? In alten Zeiten hieß es, Kriege sind unvermeidlich. Jetzt wird der Friede unvermeidlich.
> *DER HAGERE*: Beruhigen Sie sich Herr von Laban, beruhigen Sie sich, ewig wird der Friede nicht dauern. Auch für Ihre Konservenfabrik kommt

> die große Zeit.
> *LABAN*: Ich habe keinen Grund zu klagen, vor einer halben Stunde habe ich mein Lager im Bausch und Bogen verkauft.
> *DER HAGERE*: Zu Kriegspreisen?
> *LABAN*: Zu Friedenspreisen. (p. 237)

Napoleon and St. Francis, looking down from Olympus, discuss the lessons of the events their bet had set in motion. While St.Francis is shocked and dismayed that a single day can contain 'soviel Schrecken, soviel Grausamkeit, soviel Leid, soviel geistige Armut', Napoleon is quite content, pointing out that the people were happy 'sterben zu dürfen'. (p. 241) 'Diesen Mut sich zu schlagen und zu sterben', he adds, 'nenne ich Heldenmut'. (p. 241) Though horrified by Napoleon's attitude, St. Francis has to admit that there may be something in his claim that 'Friede kein Ideal ist, für das es sich lohnt zu leben', going on to ask himself:

> Liegt das vielleicht am Frieden? ... Vielleicht sollten wir darüber nachdenken, was Friede ist, und was Friede sein könnte. Vielleicht ist der Friede, von dem die Staatsmänner so viel sprechen garnicht der rechte Friede. (p. 241)

What Toller wants to suggest to his audience here is that a decent society, a just society, demands not just the absence of war, but that there are other important factors which have also to be taken into consideration. Significantly, however, he does not actually spell out in detail what these other factors might be, does not say, in other words, what he as a socialist had long believed, that peace without a measure at least of social and economic equality is a peace not really worth striving for. This rather vague and tentative passage is one of the very few in the whole play in which he expresses this thought, and about the only one in which he is even mildly critical of the social and economic framework of the liberal democracies. Of course, *Nie wieder Friede!* is first and foremost a play, not a political tract and it would be wrong to judge it solely according to its

political message. Nevertheless, it is only necessary to think of the views Toller expressed on the same subjects in, for instance, *Hoppla, wir leben!*, to perceive the extent to which his political outlook had changed under the impact of the *Volksfront* even at this early stage in his exile. Much the same points can be made in respect of the final exchange between St. Francis and Napoleon, which has the nature of an appeal to the audience to wake up to the dangers threatening them:

> *FRANZISKUS*: Wann werden die Menschen wunschlos glücklich sein?
> *NAPOLEON*: Niemals.
> *FRANZISKUS*: Wann endlich wird der Friede auf Erden einziehen?
> *NAPOLEON*: Seit Jahrtausenden wissen die Klugen, daß der Friede ein Traum der Toren ist.
> *FRANZISKUS*: Eines Tages wird der Traum sich erfüllen. Die Liebe wird stärker sein als der Haß, die Wahrheit stärker als die Lüge, und die Menschen werden sehen und sich erkennen, und es wird Friede sein auf Erden.
> *NAPOLEON*: Wann wird dieser Tag sein?
> *FRANZISKUS*: Wenn die Klugen schweigen. Wenn die Toren handeln. (p. 242-43)

Toller himself must surely have felt that this was an unsatisfactory conclusion, indeed, that the general thrust of the play, its central pacifist message, left a lot to be desired. While he was still content to continue to describe himself as a pacifist, he had long since recognised that pacifism, unconditional pacifism at least, was impotent in the face of the challenges posed by the rise of Hitler.[54] Yet despite this, all he can do here is to make a weak appeal for action on the part of what he calls the 'Toren', meaning, it would seem, the majority of decent people. Interestingly, he is not able or not willing to specify exactly what kind of action they should take, whether or not, for instance, they, the 'Toren' should be allowed to resort to violence to oppose the 'Klugen', i.e. the fascists, and if so under what conditions. In other words, should this only be in self-defence or should they be allowed to strike the first blow in defence of peace and humanity? This question, of course, was one which tormented Toller throughout his exile period, one he

never succeeded in answering unambiguously in the affirmative.[55] It is also significant — again a measure of the degree to which his thinking was now attuned to *Volksfront* ideology — that in *Nie wieder Friede!* Toller also seeks to define the struggle against fascism as a struggle between right and wrong, reason and unreason, good and evil. He himself, however, was only too well aware that the question was much more complex than this, and that it was not possible to divide the world up so neatly into black and white. Indeed, as explained above, the play itself shows that, while fascism may well have been irrational and evil, it was also much more, namely that it had social and economic roots, roots which were deeply embedded in the soil of the capitalist-imperialist system. Toller was well aware, however, that such an interpretation, if pushed too far, would have been damaging to the kind of broad anti-fascist coalition to which he was now committed. Consciously or unconsciously, therefore, he eschewed any sort of class-based analysis of fascism in *Nie wieder Friede!* and avoided any mention of the word socialism. Of course, Toller was perfectly entitled to do this since he believed that only the *Volksfront* could defeat Hitler. Yet it is clear that his attempt to suppress an important side of himself, to ignore the set of ideas which, in one way or another, had informed his creative work ever since 1919, and provided them with a source of vitality and inspiration, had an enormously corrosive impact on Toller's creative spirit during the 1930's.

1. Toller's speech at this congress was first published in *Die Weltbühne*, 29 (15 June 1933), 741-744. Reprinted in *GW*, I, 169-73. Further references are to this latter edition and appear in brackets after quotations. For an account of the controversy surrounding his appearance at it see Mitar Papic, 'Ernst Toller auf dem PEN-Kongreß in Jugoslawien 1933', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 14, special edition no. 2 (1968), 73-77.

2. Wolfgang Rothe, *Ernst Toller in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1983), p. 109.

3. George Orwell, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', in *George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), p. 428. First published in *New English Weekly*, 29 July and 2 September 1937.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 428.

5. Ernst Toller, 'Ansprache auf der außerordentlichen Konferenz der Internationalen Schriftstellervereinigung zur Verteidigung der Kultur, Paris, 25 July 1938', in *Zur Tradition der deutschen Sozialistischen Literatur: Eine Auswahl von Dokumenten*, 5 vols (Berlin & Weimar: Aufbau, 1979), II, 775-81, (p. 778). First published in *Das Wort*, October 1937.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 778.

7. Erich Weinert, 'Speech to the 2nd International Congress for the Defence of Culture', in *Zur Tradition*, II, 195-6. First published in *Das Wort*, October 1937.

8. Heinz Abusch, 'Die Verteidigung der deutschen Kultur und die Volksfront', in *Zur Tradition*, II, p. 705. First published in *Die Internationale*, 1937, pp. 5-6.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 711. This shift in emphasis was not without its critics in the Communist camp. More than once Brecht expressed dissatisfaction with what he felt was a shallow, one-sided interpretation of fascism, one which placed too much emphasis on the threat it posed to culture and not enough on its class nature. In a speech in 1935 he said:

> Reden wir nicht nur für die Kultur. Erbarmen wir uns der Kultur, aber erbarmen wir uns zuerst der Menschen! Die Kultur ist gerettet, wenn die Menschen gerettet sind [...] Kameraden denken wir nach über die Wurzel der Übel [...] sprechen wir von den Eigentumsverhältnissen.

Bertolt Brecht, 'Eine notwendige Feststellung zum Kampf gegen die Barbarei', in *Zur Tradition*, I, 875-6. First published in *Neue Deutsche Blätter*, 2, Nr 6, August 1935. It is rather ironic that Brecht, who prided himself on his knowledge of Marxist theory, should have been so much slower than Toller, normally dismissed by the Communists as a petty-bourgeois idealist, in realising that this kind of class based analysis of fascism was at odds with the *Volksfront* strategy. He did not yet understand what Toller had grasped quite quickly and intuitively: namely, that for the sake of a prospective alliance between the Soviet Union and the capitalist democracies it was necessary to drop all talk of socialism and the class struggle.

10. 'Speech to the International PEN-Congress in Edinburgh', *The Scotsman*, 19 June 1934. Reprinted under the title 'Ernst Tollers Anklage' in *GW*, I, 173-78 (p.175).

11. *Ibid*, p. 178.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

13. 'Gegen Kolonialimperialismus', in *Quer Durch, Reisebilder und Reden*, (Heidelberg: Das Wunderhorn, 1978), 237-41. Another clear example of his hostility towards the capitalist-imperialist system is provided by the following extract from an article of his from 1925 on the situation facing child labourers in China:

> Der kapitalistische Kindermord in China. Wirklich. dieser Titel ist keine Übertreibung politischer Tagesphrase. Aus den Kommissionsberichten des Gemeinderats in Shanghai [...] aus Berichten englischer Konsuln formt sich ein erschütterndes Bild. Fünf, sechsjährige Kinder, oft tuberkulös, werden zwölf, dreizehn Stunden in Textilfabriken, Seidenspinnereien, Streichholzfabriken in erbärmlichen Verhältnissen, bei erbärmlichen Löhnen tags, nachts, beschäftigt. Als in England zu Beginn des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts die Zustände in Fabriken und Manufakturen nicht länger verheimlicht werden konnten, fanden sich Männer aus dem bürgerlichen Lager, die die öffentliche Meinung Englands aufrüttelten und die Regierung zum Eingreifen zwangen. Was wird heute geschehen? Sage nicht, was ginge dich China an, du seiest für Chinas Arbeiterkinder nicht verantwortlich! Da du Europäer bist, da Europas Imperialismus Schuld trägt an den Scheußlichkeiten in China, ist es, auch wenn du nicht Sozialist bist, deine menschliche Pflicht, zu helfen. Unterstütze die Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe bei ihrem Werk, so hilfst du dem chinesischen Volk, den chinesischen Kindern.

'Der kapitalistische Kindermord in China', *Die Weltbühne*, 21 (20 October 1925), 621.

14. It is interesting that some critics have chosen to interpret 'Weltliche Passion', a *Chorwerk* for mass performance Toller wrote about the beginning of 1934, as a reflection of his commitment to the *Volksfront*. Richard Dove, for instance, maintains that it 'reflects both the history and the mood of the emerging Popular Front' the policy of 'active collaboration with other anti-fascist forces' advocated by Moscow, citing as evidence both the work's publishing history and the fact that it was performed by theatre groups in Britain in connection with the Peace Ballot and at the General Election in 1935. Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism in the Work of Ernst Toller* (New York, Berne and Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 442-44. Yet there is no evidence to support this view in the text. The work is unambiguously revolutionary in tone, praises the toiling masses in the struggle for emancipation and depicts imperialism as the enemy of the world revolution, as the system responsible for the war which had turned the peaceful fields of Europe into a graveyard. Written either during or just after his visit to the Soviet Union and clearly inspired by what he had seen there, this is, in essence, a hymn of praise to all the fallen victims of the world revolution, but in particular to the two murdered leaders of the German workers' movement, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, their names invoked as an example to be emulated by the enemies of Hitler. Once woken form their slumber, the masses are shown on the road of revolution, fighting for 'ein Deutschland der schaffenden Hände, für ein Deutschland der Gerechtigkeit'. However, the old order, 'Die Wucherer und Volksbetrüger', 'Die Räuber der Armen', recognise the enormous importance of the revolutionary leadership and put a price on the head of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. In a scene bearing strong echoes of the one in *Eine*

Jugend in Deutschland in which Toller describes his own arrest after the collapse of the *Räterepublik*, the poem depicts the betrayal, arrest and murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. One from among the ranks of revolutionary masses, some Judas, leads the soldiers to the place where the leaders are sleeping 'Heimlich und wie Verbrecher':

CHRONIST: Und führte die Soldaten
zum Haus, darin
Liebknecht und Luxemburg
Schliefen den flüchtigen Schlaf
Des Gejagten

The poem then describes how these two, like so many of Toller's own comrades, were brutally mishandled before being murdered, how the soldiers who took them prisoner mocked them and asked 'Wo sind Eure Genossen, Wo ist Euer Himmel auf Erden?, und spien in ihre Gesichter und schlugen mit Kolben die Wehrlosen'. Initially, the revolutionary masses are left leaderless and impotent, but not for long. For while the flag of battle, the flag of freedom, may have fallen to the earth, 'Zum Schoß der Mutter', there are many other hands ready to pick it up and carry on the fight. The 'Großer Chor' takes up the chorus from the *Internationale* and is then followed by a 'Sprechstimme' which honours the dead fighters all over the world, those who died under the 'Fahne der Revolution' the flag of hope for all the 'Unterdrückten und Erniedrigten', the 'Namenlosen' who had been 'gefoltert, gerädert, gehängt, erschossen, erschlagen auf den Kampffeldern der Revolution'. The work ends with an appeal to the masses to honour the dead pioneers of the revolution by joining in the struggle for a better world. While not a work of great literary merit *Weltliche Passion* does provide a good indication of the state of Toller's political thinking at that moment and reveals that Toller the poet at least was still firm in his commitment to revolutionary socialism. 'Weltliche Passion. Ein Chorwerk', *Internationale Literatur*, 4 (1934), pp. 3-8. Also in *Die Sammlung*, 2 (December 1934), pp. 3-8.

15. Toller, 'What Means this Liberty?', *Reynolds Illustrated News*, 2 August 1936, p. 13. Further references to this article given after quotations in text. Toller's contact with *Reynolds* was through his friend, the Labour M.P., H.N. Brailsford, one of the paper's leader writers. See F.M. Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter: H.N. Brailsford and his World*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 226.

16. The difficulties Toller had in suppressing completely his socialist convictions are clear from the following article written in 1934:

But there is one condition which must be observed: you must not forget what the professors of history tell us about the past and what the politicians say about the present. Or do you believe the fair speeches of a dictator concerning the freedom of his subjects — Herr Hitler on peace, the European war ministers on disarmament? Do you believe that past events really happened in the way that history books would have us think? There you will find that all wars were fought exclusively for the great ideals of mankind, for liberty, democracy and justice. Never a word is said of the ambitions of kings, their lust for power, just as never a word is said to-day of the vested interests, the fight for oil, and coal, and iron. Oil and coal and iron are dirty things, they are unaesthetic. Our historians

and politicians prefer the people to wear clean collars and shirts and to preserve clean souls. But anyone wishing to understand the past and the present must look behind the scenes and not be afraid of coal dust, of the fumes from oil, the heat of iron. Only then will he be able to catch a glimpse of the truth.[...] Everywhere in Europe there is unemployment and social hopelessness. Everywhere in Europe we find empty larders and filled ammunition dumps. The old political war cries are once more the faith of the nations. There is only one hope for Europe — the realisation that no one people can be free without the freedom of its fellows, the realisation that political justice must be complemented by social justice. One cannot suppress one's own subjects and at the same time talk of freedom. One cannot condone social justice within one's own frontiers and ask for world justice.

'The Modern Writer and the Future of Europe', *The Bookman*, 85 (January, 1934), 380-81.

17. *Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist: Christiane Grautoffs Autobiographie — Ihr Leben mit Ernst Toller*, edited by Werner Fuld and Albert Ostermaier (Bonn: Weidle, 1996) p. 99.

18. For Toller's lecture tour see Martha Gustavson Marks 'Ernst Toller: His Fight Against Fascism', (unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980), Chapter 14.

19. John M. Spalek and Wolfgang Frühwald 'Ernst Tollers amerikanische Vortragsreise 1936-37', in *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, 6 (1965), 267-311. Referred to below as *LWJB*. Reprinted in the *LWJB* are 3 versions of Toller's speech 'Sind wir verantwortlich für unsere Zeit?', and the typescript of his article 'Das Versagen des Pazifismus in Deutschland'.

20. 'Unser Kampf um Deutschland', in *GW*, I, 198-209. Further references are given after quotations in text.

21. See John E. Wiltz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (London: Routledge and K Paul, 1967), pp. 43-66.

22. Grautoff, *Die Göttin*, p. 106.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

25. 'Unser Kampf um Deutschland', *GW*, I, 206.

26. 'Sind wir verantwortlich für unsere Zeit', *LWJB*, 283.

27. *Ibid*, p. 289.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-7.

30. 'Mann and the Masses: The Problem of Peace', *GW*, I, 78-85. Further references given after quotations in text.

31. In a letter to the *New York Times*, Toller vigorously denied a report printed there which had claimed he was in favour of the democracies uniting to declare war on Germany:

> One must always make allowances for the necessary haste of interviewing visitors arriving from foreign shores. But there are several inaccuracies in the account of the interview with me published in *The New York Times* of Oct 13 which I feel require correction.
>
> I did not say: 'The democracies must unite together and make war on Hitler'. I said: 'The democracies must unite together to preserve peace'. That is the only way to fight the danger of war which threatens the world today.
>
> I did not say: 'Supporters of democracy in Germany are cowards not to call the bluff of the Hitler dictatorship.' I said: 'Supporters of democracy in Germany are today persecuted and imprisoned. Among them Carl von Ossietsky, Thälmann, Mierendorff, and many Protestant and Catholic priests. These people are not cowards, but the most courageous men who suffer for their opinions.' One of the reasons why I come to this country is to appeal for help for these people who for political, racial and religious reasons are persecuted by Hitler.

'Mr. Toller's Views on Hitler', *The New York Times*, Monday, October 19, 1936.

32. 'Sind wir verantwortlich für unsere Zeit?', *LWJB*, 287.

33. 'Man and the Masses', *GW*, I, 84.

34. Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1941* (London: Methuen, 1976), pp. 589-625.

35. John F. Naylor *Labour's International Policy: The Labour Party in the 1930s* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 214-60.

36. 'Ansprache auf der außerordentlichen Konferenz der Internationalen Schriftstellervereinigung zur Verteidigung der Kultur', Paris, 25 July 1938, in *Zur Tradition der deutschen Sozialistischen Literatur: Eine Auswahl von Dokumenten*, II, 775-81. First published in *Das Wort*, October 1937.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 775.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 775.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 776.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 776.

41. 'Spanisches Tagebuch', *Exil. Forschung, Erkenntnisse, Ergebnisse*, No 1, Maintal 1990, p. 12. Edited and with an introduction by Richard Dove.

42. See Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War 1931-1939* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 98-102.

43. 'Spanisches Tagebuch', p. 16.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

45. *Nie wieder Friede! Komödie*, in *GW*, III, 185-243. This is the first published German version based on the typescript in the Toller Collection at Yale University. The first published version of the play was the English translation, *No More Peace! A Thoughtful Comedy*, trans. by Edward Crankshaw, lyrics adapted by W. H. Auden, music by Herbert Murill, (London: The Bodley Head, 1937). References here are to the *GW* version and are given after quotations in the text.

46. Cecil Davies, for instance, recognises fundamental weaknesses in the play and shares the general critical view that it is Toller's poorest work. Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), p. 411.

47. *Nie wieder Friede!* received its premiere on 11 June 1936 at the Gate Theater in London in a production by Norman Marshall. The general critical reception was quite poor and it seems that the play has never been performed on a German stage. See Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller*, pp. 409-10. Christiane Grautoff, however, who played Rachel, writes that the play was 'gut aufgenommen' and that the critics had praised in particular her good English and pleasing voice. Indeed, such was the level of admiration for her acting qualities that, following this appearance in this production, Christiane was offered a year-long contract to appear at the Westminster Theatre, an offer she readily and gladly accepted. Toller, however, chose precisely this moment to announce that he was going to America to undertake his lecture tour and that, in all likelihood, he would not return to England. Christiane decided to go, but with great reluctance, and this incident seems to mark the beginning of the deterioration in their relationship. See Grautoff, *Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist*, pp. 93-94.

48. Christiane Grautoff recalls how troubled Toller's mental state was at the time he wrote *Nie wieder Friede!* and how in particular he feared he might have lost entirely his creative ability:

> Ich wußte von ET's Angst, daß die Muse ihn verlassen hat. So wie man beim Kreuzworträtsel die gefundenen Worte durschtreicht, so strich ET jedes einzelne Wort, das er auf das blanke Papier schrieb, wieder aus and starrte schließlich auf den weißen Bogen Papier, bis seine Augen sich mit Tränen füllten.

Grautoff, *Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist*, pp. 92-93.

49. Toller explained his reasons for writing the play in a letter to Barrett Clark in 1937:

> When I wrote *No More Peace* I was fed up with the soap- box effusions against war, having experienced that they did not help one bit. People became bored but not with war, but with the effusions. Then there was the experience of the anti-war films in Germany, which had quite a contrary effect, especially on the young people. They were not influenced by the

> horror depicted but rather by the romance, which was always mixed up with it, and by the solidarity of comradeship which accompanied the senseless adventure (The audience seldom grasps the senselessness but only the adventure). So I decided to show im a little comediette the stupidity without the background of heroism. There is a surfeit of heroism with which our dictators gorge themselves and starve the people.

Letter to Barrett Clark of March 11 1937, quoted by Martha Gustavson Marks, in 'Ernst Toller: His Fight against Fascism', (unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1980), p. 309.

50. The following review of the production of *No More Peace* performed in London's Gate Theatre in the summer of 1936 shows the kind of barriers of prejudice and conservatism facing Toller's works in England. Though the critic makes some fair points about the play's artistic merits, his hostility towards everything that Toller stood for, both as a writer and a politician, is the most notable feature of his review:

> CHEAP SKIT ON WAR ERNST TOLLER "COMEDY"
>
> Ernst Toller describes "No More Peace", presented last night at the Gate Theatre, as a comedy. In reality it is a blatantly obvious satire of things on earth and in Heaven. Some of the lines are in doubtful taste and many of the jokes are cheap.
>
> In construction it resembles a charade in which the climaxes come in the wrong places. Amusing lyrics by W. H. Auden with music by Herbert Murill, are thrown in at the odd moments, and these provide some amusement, but the piece itself is a silly rehash of the most elementary satire about war and peace.
>
> The scene opens in Olympus, with a pert angel at a switchboard and Napoleon and St. Francis in conversation. The Emperor bets the saint that he can cause a war in the peaceful earthly paradise of Dunkelstein, and, of course, wins.
>
> There is no need to recite more of the story. It has all been said before — and so much better. I liked Socrates's song about reason, but much of the rest of the stuff was sheer tedium.
>
> The company included Christiane Grautoff, the wife of the author, who acted well as a pacifist young woman, and there were good performances by Alexander Sarner, Clement Hamelin, Warren Jenkins, George Benson and Gavin Gordon.

Review by G.W.B. in unnamed journal, 12 June 1936, reprinted in Grautoff, *Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist*, p. 94.

51. Toller seems to have worked on *Nie wieder Friede!* from about the end of 1934 onwards, completing it in the course of a 6-week journey to Spain and Portugal in the Spring of 1936. See Grautoff, *ibid.*, pp. 87-93. This period saw, of course, the founding of the *Volksfront*, in which Toller was heavily involved, and its almost immediate shipwreck on the reef of the Show Trials in Moscow.

52. In an unpublished manuscript Toller wrote:

> All of us who experienced the horror of the war, saw it with our living eyes, and felt the burden of its tragic knowledge — we all want the peace of Europe. Shall we attain it merely by being passive? Today war and peace are for the ruling powers two eternally alternating functions of government. War is declared to obtain peace; peace is to be obscured by more war. What then is the activity of the politicians and busy-bodies in the history of the nations? The living threads between nations are so tangled by them, and knotted together, that eventually the knots must be cut through. And since the majority of men are too lazy to think and have such short memories, they allow themselves to be persuaded that life has created this confusion that cannot be disentangled, and they forget that it has been artificially introduced by politicians and busy-bodies. And the bewildered people say: "It cannot go on any longer. We want the *ultima ratio*, the last argument, namely: war". But after the war the desolation is but greater, everything is worse, and after a little while, men forget that the war is guilty of the chaos and confusion, of hunger and misery, and once again peace is made the scapegoat. Then the game begins over again.

'The Twentieth Anniversary of War', July 1934, 12 type-written pages in the Meloney Collection, Columbia University Libraries, New York. Quoted in Sigurd Rothstein, *Der Traum von der Gemeinschaft. Kontinuität und Innovation in Ernst Tollers Dramen* (Frankfurt am Main, Berne, New York and Paris: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 377.

53. See, for instance, Toller's speech 'Gegen Kolonialimperialismus' in *Quer Durch*, pp. 237-41 and his article 'Der Brüsseler Kolonial-Kongress' in *GW*, I, 63-68.

54. See his speech 'Das Versagen des Pazifismus in Deutschland' in *GW*, I, 182-89. First published in *LWJB*, pp. 305-11. *GW* gives only an approximate date for this speech of 1934/35.

55. Toller's uncertainty on the question of the use of violence, his reluctance to say he was in favour of its pre-emptive use even against Hitler, is clear from the above-quoted letter to the *New York Times of 19 October 1936*. See p. 377.

CHAPTER 10

TOLLER AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

In those studies which have examined in detail Toller's relationship to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), attention has quite understandably tended to focus on the ambitious campaign he organised to send humanitarian aid to the civilian victims of the conflict, a campaign which came to consume practically all of his time and energy during the final months of his life.[1] What is often lacking in such studies, however, is a precise definition of where Toller stood on the major political questions raised by the war. Yet if there was one feature above all others which lent the Spanish Civil War its particular character, it was the fact that it was a political war, one in which the issues at stake were of vital importance not just to the war against Franco, but to the struggle against fascism in general. Precisely because of this, therefore, Spain provides the perfect foil for a study of the development of Toller's political views at this crucial point in his life.

Like millions of other socialists, liberals, and people of progressive opinion in general, Toller had found the struggle of the Spanish Republic against General Franco a great and much needed source of inspiration, about the only ray of hope in the otherwise bleak decade of the 1930s. He believed that Spain could mark a turning point in international relations, bringing to an end the seemingly inexorable spread of fascism and preparing the way for its overthrow. Significantly — and this is clear from all his writings and speeches on the war — he also saw the Spanish Republic as the living embodiment of the spirit of the Popular Front. Spain, he believed, provided the workers' movement with the chance to overcome its internal divisions, divisions which had done so much to undermine the opposition to Hitler, and to unite with all people of progressive opinion in the struggle against a common enemy.[2] He was firmly convinced, or seemed to be convinced, that there reigned perfect harmony within the Republican camp, with the various strands of opinion, from Communists on one side to Liberals on the other, all united in the defence of democracy against fascist barbarism. Unfortunately, the war

in Spain turned out to be a far more complicated affair than Toller and others like him suspected and soon after Franco's failed *coup* attempt, unity, or more accurately, the illusion of unity on the Loyalist side gave way to deep division as a bloody war — a civil-war within the civil-war — erupted over the question of precisely what the conflict was about.[3] Some, foremost among them the POUM, Partido Obrero Unificación Marxista, a small leftist party often erroneously described by its enemies as Trotskyist, and the anarchist FAI, Federación Anarquista Iberica, insisted that the war against Franco was a revolutionary war the goal of which was to overthrow the capitalist-feudal state and replace it with either a form of socialism or anarchism.[4] Others, in particular the Spanish Communists, the PCE, Partido Comunista de España, but strongly supported by their allies on the right-wing of the Socialist Party, PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español, argued that what was at stake was simply the defence of parliamentary democracy and that any attempt to carry out a socialist revolution would only upset the unity of the Republic and so aid Franco.[5] Toller — and it is this which is often overlooked in studies of his political outlook — shared the conservative interpretation of the conflict advanced by the Communists and argued that the notion that this was a revolutionary war was a lie spread by the enemies of the Republic in order to discredit it in the eyes of the Western democracies.

At first glance, it seems something of a paradox that Toller of all people should have sought to deny the reality of a revolution in Spain. It will be demonstrated below, however, that his views on Spain were not an aberration but the logical and inevitable consequence of his support for the *Volksfront*. His desire to help build a broad coalition of anti-fascist opinion, though understandable in the circumstances, blunted the edge of his commitment to socialism and caused him to close his eyes to what was the most promising revolutionary situation to have arisen in Western Europe since the end of the

First World War.[6]

Before analysing in depth Toller's view of the Spanish Civil War, it is necessary to go back a few years, to the Spring of 1932, to take a look at some articles he wrote for *Die Weltbühne* on the Second Spanish Republic which had come into being after a stunning and largely unexpected victory of a Socialist-Liberal alliance at the General Election held in June the previous year.[7] This short series of articles and thumb-nail sketches displays Toller's genuine and deep affection for the Spanish people as well as his familiarity with the detail of the country's politics. Like his writings on Weimar Germany, they are characterised by sober, penetrating insight and draw attention to many of the problems which would lead to the collapse of Spain's first real experiment in democracy. They forestall, therefore, the argument which might be brought forward in his defence that his distorted view of the Civil War was the result not so much of his attachment to a particular political interpretation, but of ignorance of the facts.

While supportive of the government and keen for it to succeed in its huge task of dragging Spain out of its social and economic backwardness, Toller was acutely aware of the dangers threatening the country's new democracy. Even at this early stage he could see that the government was losing support because of its failure to tackle the most pressing social and economic problems and was creating, thereby, conditions favourable for a regeneration of reaction. 'Die Konflikte, die sie [die Regierung] nicht lösen können', he wrote, 'verschärfen die soziale Situation und rufen die Faschisten auf den Plan'.[8] In particular he drew attention to what he perceived was a widespread mood of disenchantment and impatience among the Spanish workers and poor in general, among those people, that is, who had given the Republic its victory and who had placed so much faith it in it. The root cause of the degeneration of Weimar, Toller knew, had been the inability of its leaders, above all of the leaders of the Left, to create a wide and stable

basis of support for the democratic system among the lowest sections of society. The German working-class, for most of the Weimar period the most reliable pillar of the state, finally grew tired of a system which had given it so little and turned its back on the Republic, leaving the way free for Hitler's Brownshirts. What Toller believed was that for the poor and dispossessed, civil liberties and democratic rights, while manifestly important, take second place to the more pressing problems of social and economic justice. Where wealth and power are concentrated in a few hands, he maintained, then the word democracy takes on a rather hollow ring:

> Der Arbeiter fühlt sich getäuscht, er hat rasch eingesehen, daß politische Demokratie ohne soziale nicht genügt, er sieht eine neue Fahne, aber die alten kapitalistischen Gewalten. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 240)

The significance of these remarks to this discussion is perfectly obvious: at that stage, Toller clearly saw and was able to describe the difference between democracy, a political abstraction, and capitalism, a concrete socio-economic system. He knew that the right to vote does not guarantee any other basic human right, such as the right to work or the right to a roof over one's head. A government which claims to represent the lower social classes, he wrote, will stand or fall on its ability to satisfy their basic needs. 'Resolutionen und Gesetze', he argued, 'müssen Wirklichkeit werden, sonst entmutigen sie die Anhänger und stärken die Gegner'. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 241) He appreciated that the ordinary people, having greeted the new Republic with 'einem Rausch chiliastischer Begeisterung', were disappointed by the meagre fruits of victory and were growing increasingly frustrated. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 240) He quotes with obvious approval the words of a prisoner in a jail in Barcelona who had characterised the new government as 'der alte Hund mit einem neuen Halsband'. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 240)

Toller recognised, of course, that the problems facing the new regime were immense and could not all be solved overnight. Yet he also sensed that the coalition of reformist socialists and radical liberals which comprised the new government was too weak, suffered from too much internal division to be able tackle the vested interests retarding Spain's economic and social development. Parliament, he believed had already lost much of its credibility in the eyes of the people, with the deputies to the Cortes seen as remote and interested mainly in furthering their *own* interests and not those of the people they were elected to represent:

> Die Leute erzählten, sie hätten ihre Volksvertreter noch nie gesehen [...] Wen diese Abgeordneten vertreten wissen manche selber nicht. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 243)

The sheer pace of events, Toller wrote, had not allowed the people sufficient time to separate the 'Tüchtige[n] von Hochstaplern, Idealisten von Geschäftemachern', which had led to a situation in which careerists and opportunists could thrive by passing themselves off as revolutionaries and friends of the people. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 243-4) 'Die Revolutionsspekulanten', Toller notes with a degree of resignation, were clever enough 'die Konjunktur ausnutzen' ,('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 244) yet this does not undermine or weaken in any way his faith in the good sense of the common people who have 'ein feines Gefühl' for those swindlers who 'neben dem Abgeordnetenmandat auf ihre breiten Schultern gleich fünf oder sechs Ämter laden, von denen sie nicht eine verstehen, für die sie aber fünf- oder sechsmal Gehalt beziehen'. (L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 244) Toller feared, however, that a unique opportunity to introduce fundamental change was about to be lost and cautioned that 'was eine Revolution in den ersten Tagen versäumt, kann sie später nicht mehr einholen. Der Verängstigte erholt sich'. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 241) He saw clear parallels to the Weimar

experience where, to almost everyone's surprise, the Social Democrats had turned out to be the saviours of an authoritarian state apparatus which appeared about to be engulfed by a revolutionary tidal wave. The new Spanish government, he believed, if it wanted to prevent the rise of a movement similar to Hitler's, would have to strike at the social and economic basis of reaction, to do, in other words, what the Weimar Republic had singularly failed to do.

In this respect, one of the most pressing needs, he maintained, was for radical agrarian reform. Land distribution in Spain was the most unequal in Europe and one of the main causes of the extreme poverty which characterised the country. A relatively small clique of wealthy landowners, the so-called *Latifundi*, owned around one third of all the land under cultivation, another third was divided up among a slightly larger group of landowners, while around 5 million peasants were left with the remaining third of often dry, barren soil on plots barely large enough to support their families and themselves. Added to this was a sizeable group, about one and a half million landless labourers who lived on the very fringes of civilisation, finding only seasonal work and surviving for most of the year as beggars and vagabonds. Not the only visitor to be appalled by the almost stone age conditions of the very poorest people living in the Spanish countryside, Toller wrote that the condition of the 'kleinen Bauern, Landarbeiter und Pachtbauern' was indescribable. (L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 242) The Republican government, however, terrified of antagonising the big landlords, produced a feeble scheme for land reform, which some experts claim would have solved the agrarian problem in not less that a hundred years.[9]

Spanish industry, Toller explained, also needed dragging out of its backwardness, but here too vested interests stood in the way of change. The manufacturing sector, which had profited and expanded because of Spain's neutrality in the First World War, found

itself squeezed out of her new found foreign markets once hostilities had ended, while The Great Depression of 1929 reduced demand still further. The home market, which could have compensated for this to some extent, was weak and underdeveloped, and suffered from insufficient consumer demand which in turn was due to the extremely low income level of the mass of the population. A rise in wages, which would have led to an increase in overall demand, was fiercely resisted by the bosses who, as individuals, were concerned only about their own level of profit:

> Spaniens Wirtschaft könnte von den Folgen der kapitalistischen Weltkrise unberührt bleiben, die Konsumkraft des Volkes ist so gering, daß die kleinste Lohnerhöhung eine deutliche Absatzsteigerung vieler Industriewerke hervorruft. Aber die Arbeiterschaft muß in Streiks um jeden Centimo kämpfen. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 242)

The action of the bosses in holding down wages kept consumer spending firmly suppressed and thus had the unintended and paradoxical effect of reducing the scope for economic expansion and thereby of increasing profits.

Toller realised that the Republic was in grave danger with the ruling elite bitterly opposed to even the smallest step towards a more just and equitable social system. 'Heute', he wrote, 'kämpfen Großgrundbesitz und Industrie um jeden Fußbreit Boden — und mit Erfolg'. ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 241) The government, for all its good intentions, was unable to break the economic, social and political stranglehold of the wealthy elite and was forced to look on impotently as the masses began to turn their backs on the Republic. In one of his articles he records how he sat in one of the Bohemian cafes of Madrid watching a demonstration of monarchist students degenerate into a confrontation with the police. When the customers in the cafe replied to the students calls of 'Es lebe der König' with Republican slogans, the Guardia-Civil, a reactionary, semi-military force over which the government had little control, rushed to

the scene and meted out treatment appropriate to the political affiliation of those at whom their blows were aimed:

> Die Guardia-Civil [...] zerstreut mit harten Zurufen die Monarchisten und zersprengt mit sanften Gummiknüppelhieben die Republikaner, die nicht aufhören wollen, die Republik hochleben zu lassen. Wo habe ich das doch schon gesehn? ('L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 245)

Toller's fears for the future of the Republic proved to be well founded. Within a year of his visit the forces of the right had mustered sufficient strength to put an end to the democratic experiment, ushering in what came to be known as the *Bieno Negro*, two black years of bitter reaction and semi-civil-war conditions in which most of the gains of the previous period were undone.

Toller's articles on the Second Republic, then, are significant not so much because they act as a reminder of his sometimes underestimated perspicacity, but primarily because they provide a stark contrast with the views he expressed on the Civil War and reveal with great clarity the extent of the change his political outlook had undergone during the years in exile. For by far the most striking feature of his account of the Spanish Republic of 1936-39 is the complete absence of the sort of socialist and class analysis which had characterised his earlier writings on Spain. In 1932 he had sought to focus attention on the limitations of the democratic system, to show that political liberation could not be separated from the question of social and economic liberation. By 1938, however, he was no longer interested in making this distinction. Like all the other advocates of the *Volksfront* he was now content to describe the war against Franco quite simply as a 'war for democracy' and to ignore the fact that what the Spanish masses — or a good proportion of them at least — were struggling for was not democracy but socialism.

Toller's first visit to Spain following Franco's insurrection did not occur until July

1938. By this time the Civil War had been raging for two years and the prospect of an outright victory for the Republican side was now, if not entirely forlorn, becoming more remote with each day. While naturally concerned about the weak military situation and the long-term consequences of a fascist victory, Toller was so distressed by the sheer scale of human suffering he witnessed that he decided to devote himself entirely to organising a relief campaign. As indicated above, this campaign has been well covered in previous studies, and it is not proposed to discuss it again here. More revealing are his views on the political issues raised by the war and these he expressed most fully in the course of a speech he gave over Radio Madrid, a Communist controlled station in the heart of the embattled Loyalist capital, Madrid.[10]

Intended as the beginning of his relief campaign, this speech was aimed primarily at liberal opinion in America, in particular at the American President, Roosevelt, with Toller appealing to his audience to come to the defence of the Spanish Republic, reminding them that the struggle against Franco was not, or should not be, the concern of the Spanish people alone, but of the friends of democracy and freedom everywhere. 'Liebe Freunde in Amerika', he said, 'lebende Zeugen eines Krieges, bei dem es nicht nur um Spanien, bei dem es um die Demokratie der Welt geht — ich frage Sie, haben wir das Recht, blind und taub zu verharren? Ist uns nicht eine Verantwortung auferlegt, die zur Hilfe verpflichtet?' ('Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 213) Viewed in the context of his attempt to win as much support for his aid project as possible, it is understandable that Toller should have sought to appeal to his audience in the name of democracy. Where this speech becomes more problematic is when it addresses the question which divided the Republican camp, that of whether or not the war against Franco was a revolutionary war or one merely for the defence of parliamentary democracy. As far as Toller was concerned, the answer to this question was quite straightforward. 'Man soll

es immer und immer wieder aussprechen' he maintained 'Es ist eine Lüge, daß es in Spanien um den Kampf zwischen Kommunismus und Faschismus geht. Die spanische Republik ist ein demokratischer Staat'. ('Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 212) Contrary to what many people believed, he continued, private property was not under any kind of threat inside Loyalist Spain, a statement he sought to support by quoting the Prime Minister, Juan Negrín, who had declared 'daß das private Eigentum in Spanien beschützt wird'. (Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 212) The Spanish government, Toller claimed, was taking action against the abuse of economic power in the political sphere, but this was no different from what President Roosevelt was doing in America: liberating the country from the power of 'die ökonomischen Könige'. ('Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 212) Apart from these necessary restrictions, he said, life on Republican territory was quite normal, with people free to go about their lawful business, whether this was running a farm or a textile factory. Turning to the question of the relationship between the political parties, Toller asserted that none of the various groupings on the Loyalist side was even thinking about pursuing its own individual political aim; all, he insisted, were working together in 'weiser Selbstbeschränkung' towards the common, unifying goal of maintaining Spain's freedom and independence. ('Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 212) No-one, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, Democrat or Socialist, Trades Unionist or Revolutionary Syndicalist, Communist or Liberal, needed to worry about proclaiming publicly his or her political or religious convictions, for, he said, 'die stärkste, eindrucksvollste Erfahrung, die der Fremde in Barcelona macht, ist das lebendige Wirken der Demokratie'. ('Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 211) The Republican government, he concluded, was doing a good job under the most difficult of circumstances, indeed it was 'bewunderungswürdig', he declared, 'wie sehr die spanische Regierung darauf bedacht ist, die zivile Freiheit der Bürger zu beschützen'. ('Am Sender

von Madrid', *GW*, I, 212)

In essence Toller's speech is a condensed version of the so-called '13 Points', the war aims Negrín's government had proclaimed in order to convince a sceptical West that the Spanish Republic really was pursuing a moderate social and economic policy.[11] And indeed, what makes Toller's interpretation so interesting is its absolute insistence on the strictly democratic, non-revolutionary nature of the conflict.[12] Yet the truth was that Spain *had* experienced a revolution — or at least the beginnings of one — in the aftermath of Franco's failed coup, a revolution which according to some visitors was on a scale comparable to that which had convulsed Russia in 1917.

Space does not permit a full discussion of the background to the Spanish Revolution, but there are one or two points with a direct bearing on this discussion which require some comment. The Popular Front government, elected in the Spring of 1936 following the *Bieno Negro*, turned out to be yet another weak and ineffectual coalition of Liberals, Socialists, Nationalists and Communists, and showed itself to be just as incapable of solving Spain's problems as had its predecessor in 1931. During the crisis period leading up to the fascists' rebellion, a period in which almost every day brought a political murder or outrage of some sort, the government sat on its hands and failed to take any effective measures against the reactionary Generals who, as was commonly known, were busy plotting to overthrow the Republic. When it came, therefore, Franco's rising was thwarted not by resolute action on the part of the government — it temporised and sought an agreement with the insurgents right up to the coup — but by the ordinary workers who, acting primarily under the leadership of the Trades Unions, seized the initiative, armed themselves and crushed the rebellion in almost two-thirds of Spain.[13] What Toller's analysis overlooks is that the Spanish workers and peasants had not risked their lives in order to defend an abstraction called democracy, to save a Republic which

had done little or nothing to bring about a fundamental improvement in their living conditions; what they were fighting for was their economic liberation, in other words, for socialism.[14] In any case, bitter experience had taught them that the Spanish bourgeoisie was not, as the apostles of the *Volksfront* proclaimed, liberal or progressive in outlook. Quite the reverse. As was only to be expected, the overwhelming majority of Spain's ruling elite sympathised with Franco and had either fled to his camp or was in hiding.

In this situation, with the old state machine paralysed and power in their own hands, the Spanish masses saw their chance to do what their allegedly more advanced comrades in Germany had failed to do and took the first faltering steps on the road towards socialism. Acting in the main through their Trades Unions and the newly emerged workers' and peasants' committees — embryonic Soviets — they took over industry and transport in large parts of Spain, appropriated the big estates and redistributed the land among the poor peasants, formed their own militia units and in Catalonia, for instance, set up a revolutionary government based on the local committees. This process was far from uniform and went deeper in some places than in others. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that in the first weeks and months after the fascists' failed coup, Republican Spain stood poised on the brink of a genuine socialist revolution.[15] The question is, why did Toller choose to ignore these developments? Why, for instance, did a man who, since 1919 and his involvement in the Bavarian Soviet Republic, had been a consistent and enthusiastic advocate of the *Räte* form of government not notice the development of precisely this feature in Spain, albeit in a rudimentary, unfinished form?[16] Why did he attempt to conceal from the outside world the fact that there had been a revolution? The answer lies in his allegiance to the *Volksfront*.

In previous chapters it has been demonstrated that the *Volksfront* was the fruit of

Moscow's alarm at the rise of fascism and the means by which it hoped to break out of its isolation by seeking to forge a defensive alliance with the capitalist democracies in the West, primarily with Britain and France. But all this was put in jeopardy by the Spanish Civil War, for Britain and France, quite rightly, saw a 'Red' Spain as a direct threat to their political, economic and strategic interests. They were determined, if they could not intervene directly to crush the revolution, at least to ensure that victory for the Republican side was made as difficult as possible.[17] Thus was born the policy of non-intervention by means of which the Republic was starved of arms and support from the so-called democracies whilst Hitler and Mussolini were free to supply Franco with all the war materials he needed. Though Stalin initially lent his name to this policy of sham neutrality, he could not afford to sit back with arms folded and watch as a nominally left-wing government was crushed by the combined forces of European reaction.[18] For one thing, if Franco won in Spain — which was as good as certain if the Republic did not receive foreign aid — this would simply add to the prestige and strength of fascism in Europe and thereby increase Moscow's isolation. Moreover, most ordinary Communist Party members as well as many other people on the Left in general, those who were as yet unaware that Communism had become a non-revolutionary doctrine, fully expected the Soviet Union to intervene on the side of the Republic. The dilemma facing Stalin was that if he supported the Republic he ran the risk of being accused by the West of fostering revolution, thus weakening the chances of an anti-fascist pact; if he refused to support it, he would be accused by the Left of an act of gross betrayal, something he could not afford if he wanted to maintain his position at home. When the Soviet Union finally did intervene in Spain, then, it did so not out of a sense of duty, or to express its comradeship and solidarity with the Republic (though it tried hard to create this impression) but purely out of self interest. It intervened not with the intention of fostering

revolution but of eradicating every trace of the one which had already taken place. Naturally, it was not possible to proclaim this goal openly and the Communists were obliged to take refuge in the 'democracy versus fascism' argument employed by Toller and all the other supporters of the *Volksfront*. Spain, they asserted, was not ripe for socialism, it was a semi-feudal country which would have to undergo a long period of capitalist development before the conditions for socialism had matured. In the meantime, the single, overriding aim should be the defence of the democratic Republic, for which an alliance between the working-class and the progressive bourgeoisie was absolutely indispensable.[19] Anything which potentially weakened or undermined this alliance — an alliance which existed only in the imagination of the Communists and their allies — any infringement of the rights of private property, for instance, was opposed and condemned as an act of counter-revolution. Every effort was to be bent towards convincing the possessing classes, both in Spain and abroad, that their economic interests were not threatened by the democratic Republic.[20] Those who opposed this policy and sought to defend the gains of the revolution, the POUM, for instance or the anarchist rank and file, in fact anyone of even moderately left-wing opinion, were categorised as traitors, fascists or, to use the Stalinists' favourite term, Trotsky-fascists. José Diaz, leader of the Spanish Communists, declared that at a time in which the *Volksfront* government was concentrating all its resources on the fight against fascism any attempt at socialisation would not only be premature and undesirable but absolutely impermissible, denouncing those who sought to realise such goals as 'enemies of the people'.[21] Yet the revolution was a concrete fact and could not simply be talked out of existence. Physical force was necessary to make reality correspond to the *Volksfront* theory. And so in a brief and bloody struggle which culminated in the notorious May Days of 1937 every vestige of opposition to the Communist Party was crushed and with it any lingering hope of a

socialist revolution . The POUMists, like with the anarchists, were denounced as 'Trotsky-fascists', 'enemies of the people', 'agents of Franco', driven out of the Republican Government, the party suppressed and the leaders either imprisoned or murdered. Less than a year after the outbreak of the Civil War, Republican Spain had been transformed into a virtual dictatorship ruled by an unsteady coalition of Communists, right-wing Socialists and Liberals.[22]

Clearly, it would be wrong to imply that Toller was in some way responsible for the crimes committed by the Communists in the name of the *Volksfront* and the 'defence of democracy'. However, it is legitimate to point to his silence on the reign of terror inside Republican Spain, a silence which becomes all the more remarkable when it is remembered that the chief victims of Communist persecution were mostly people with whom Toller might have been expected to sympathise. In the aforementioned articles on the first Spanish Republic, Toller had also written of his deep admiration for Spanish anarchism, the only anarchist movement in Europe, he noted, to have won significant support among the mass of the working class.[23] Why, then, did he not speak out when the CNT leaders were being imprisoned and murdered? The same question can be asked in relation to the POUM, whose brand of revolutionary socialism was in may ways similar to that which Toller himself was supposed to be committed.[24] In his radio speech, he had expressed his deep admiration for the workings of Spanish democracy, contrasting Spain with the fascist states, in which, he said, people were ruled by fear, fear to think, fear to speak, fear to write. Republican Spain, on the other hand, was, 'frei von Furcht'.[25] Yet these remarks were made *after* the suppression of the POUM and *after* the murder by Soviet agents of its leader, Andrés Nin.[26] It could be argued, of course, that Toller was unaware of the persecution of these and similar organisations. Yet while not impossible, this seems highly unlikely. The arrest of the leaders of the POUM

provoked a furious response among the Left internationally and an organisation was quickly set up to campaign for their release, a campaign which received a great deal of press attention, both inside and outside Spain, and included a high-profile visit to the country by a group of British Members of Parliament. If Toller was unaware of this campaign, then he was unique amongst those who visited Spain in that period or who knew anything at all about the war.[27] More importantly, the man at the centre of the POUM's defence campaign, Fenner Brockway, chairman of the London Bureau, the international socialist organisation to which the POUM was affiliated, was an old friend of Toller's, one of his closest political acquaintances during the latter's exile period in London.[28] If Brockway knew what was going on is there any reason to suppose that Toller did not?[29]

Spain was a watershed for the Left in the inter-war period. It drew a dividing line between those who opposed all forms of totalitarianism, people like Brockway, and those, like Toller, who thought they could oppose one form, fascism, without opposing another, Stalinism.[30] It calls for a reassessment, therefore, of the view expressed by John Spalek and others that, towards the end of his life, Toller abandoned socialism to become a champion of liberal democracy and eventually became as critical of Communism as he was of National Socialism.[31] There is no evidence at all to support such a view. Toller's espousal of the values of democracy, his admiration for 'New Deal' America, his portrayal of the Spanish Civil War as a conflict between democracy and fascism, all this was fully in line with the *Volksfront* approach and does not in any way conflict with his continued support for the Soviet Union. In any case, when one considers Spain, it is simply naive to talk of Toller and his support for democracy: there was no democracy inside Republican Spain after May 1937, only a brutal dictatorship headed by the Communists aimed at thwarting the revolutionary ambitions of the Spanish masses. Spain

also demands, therefore, a revision of the view expressed by Richard Dove, that Toller remained firm in his commitment to revolutionary socialism.[32] If this really had been the case, he would have lent his support to the revolution instead of seeking to deny its very existence. Toller was not responsible for the actions of the Comintern in Spain and his whole approach, his support for the *Volksfront*, was clearly guided by the best of motives: namely, the desire to defeat fascism. Yet there is no escaping the fact that he helped propagate the Communist interpretation of the war, added his voice to the loud chorus of those who claimed Spain was merely a war for democracy, and in so doing helped prevent the outside world from forming a true picture of what was going on inside the Republic. That he did so may or may not be a matter for regret. It is, however, a fact which must be taken into account in any discussion of his politics.

1. For an account of Toller's relief campaign see Dieter Distl, *Ernst Toller: Eine politische Biographie* (Schrobenhausen: Benedikt Bickel, 1993), pp. 166-74.

2. For Toller's fullest views on the political side of the Spanish War see his speech 'Am Sender von Madrid', in *GW*, I, 209-15. This speech appeared in English under the title 'Madrid -Washington', in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 16, no. 398 (1938), 521-22. See also his *Spanisches Tagebuch*, an incomplete and unpublished manuscript dealing mainly with his relief campaign in *Exil. Forschung, Erkenntnisse, Ergebnisse*, special edition, no. 1, Maintal 1990, with an introduction by Richard Dove.

3. For a comprehensive account of the Civil War, in particular of the divisions on the Republican side, see Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

4. For the POUM's position see Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* (London: New Park, 1976), pp. 43-46. For the anarchists' position see Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 57-61. The POUM was formed in 1935 when the Spanish Trotskyists, under Andrés Nin, Trotsky's former secretary, fused with the Workers' and Peasants' Block, a semi-nationalist Catalan grouping led by Joaquin Maurin, a founder member of the Spanish Communist Party. The FAI, formed in 1927, was the political wing of Spanish anarchism and controlled the much larger CNT (*Confederación National del Trabajo*) the anarchist Trades Union Federation.

5. For the Communists' position see Bolloten, *Civil War in Spain*, pp. 83-86. It is interesting to note that the simple anti-fascist interpretation put forward by the Communists, the only one to get a fair hearing in the world press, found favour right across the political spectrum. Compare, for instance, Frank Jellinek, *The Civil War in Spain* (London: Gollanz, 1938) and Katharine Marjory, Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938). Jellenik was a Communist and the Duchess of Atholl a Conservative.

6. Probably the best eye-witness account of the conflict within the Republican camp can be found in George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938). See especially chapters 10 and 11.

7. Toller's articles on Spain, first published in *Die Weltbühne*, are reprinted in *GW*, I, 240-67:

> 'L'Espana es Republica. Das neue Spanien', *Die Weltbühne*, 28, no. 15 (1932), 550-554. (*GW*, I, 240-45).
> 'Männer und Frauen. Das neue Spanien', *Die Weltbühne*, 28, no. 17 (1932), 622-25. (*GW*, I, 246-51).
> 'Spanische Gefängnisse. Das neue Spanien', *Die Weltbühne*, 28, no. 18 (1932), 667-71. (*GW*, I, 251-58).
> 'Spanische Arbeiter. Das neue Spanien', *Die Weltbühne*, 28, no. 20 (1932), 749-51. (*GW*, I, 258-61).
> 'Spanische Miniaturen. Das neue Spanien', *Die Weltbühne*, 28, no. 25 (1932), 929-33. (*GW*, I, 261-67).

8. 'L'España es Republica', *GW*, I, 240-45 (p. 241).

9. Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, p. 225.

10. 'Am Sender von Madrid', in *GW*, I, 209-15. It should be noted that Radio Madrid was under the control of the Communist Party, also that Toller's guide on his tour of the war region, the man who gave him permission to make this broadcast, Foreign Minister, Alvarez del Vayo, though a member of the Spanish Socialist Party but strongly pro-Communist. He was in charge of appointments to both the foreign press bureau and the propaganda department and as such was able to prevent news of the revolution from reaching the outside world. See Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 139. Bolloten describes Toller as a 'fellow traveller' of the Soviet Union, *ibid.*, p. 645.

11. Negrín had become Prime Minister after the Communists had engineered the fall of Largo Caballero, considered by them as being too left-wing. Negrín was a right-wing Socialist and, arguably, the man who did more than any other to help the Communists consolidate their control over the state apparatus. See Bolloten, *Civil War in Spain*, pp. 642-49. Interestingly, Negrín gave a funeral oration at Toller's memorial service in New York on 27 May 1939.

12. It is interesting to compare Toller's views on Spain with those an acquaintance of his and another prominent supporter of the *Volksfront*, D. N. Brailsford. As the following shows, he too swallowed whole the Communist line that what was at stake was democracy not socialism:

> I have before me a pamphlet by its [the Communist Party's] secretary, José Diaz, which defines its objective as the creation of a "democratic and parliamentary republic of a new type". The novelty of this conception is not easy to grasp, for Diaz goes on to explain that the chief task is to destroy the material foundations of Spanish feudalism [...] Something is added, in much vaguer words, about the need for breaking up the financial oligarchy and nationalising the Bank of Spain, but it is obvious that industry will be socialised, if at all, only partially and with extreme caution. The enemy, in short, is feudalism and less certainly big business, but small property, whether in town or country, need have no fear [...] the support of the small middle class is essential, if the war is to be won [...] the Republic dare not throw away potential support from any quarter. Secondly, it dare not antagonise the Western democracies by unfurling the flag of proletarian revolution. This had the ring of everyday common sense, though I reflected that Lenin brushed aside very similar arguments in 1917. As one listened to Franco's guns in Madrid. this prudent moderation was intelligible.

H. N. Brailsford, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 May 1937, pp, 837-38.

13. For a good account of the extent of the changes wrought by the revolution see Frank Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937).

14. For the views of the ordinary Spanish worker and peasant on this question see Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: The Experience of the Civil War, 1936-1939* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981). Fraser quotes Miguel Nuñez, a militiaman, as saying:

> It was a thorough-going revolution. The people were fighting for all those

> things which the reactionary forces of this country had for so long denied them. Land and liberty, an end to exploitation, the overthrow of capitalism. The people were not fighting for a democracy, let's be quite clear about that.

Similarly, Timoteo Ruiz a young peasant who joined the Communist Party:

> Fighting and dying, we sometimes thought: 'All this - and for what?' Was it to return to what we had known before? If that was the case then it was hardly worth fighting for.

Blood of Spain, pp. 324 and 328.

15. See George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, pp. 84-98.

16. Like so many others, Elsasser fails completely to understand the nature of the struggle within Republican Spain, does not seem to perceive the counter-revolutionary role played by the Communists and writes:

> [Toller] viewed the Republic as an attempt to create a society based on freedom and justice, a state above parties and petty personal conflicts, a true democracy [...] In short, *the Spanish Republic was attempting to build the same society Toller had sought for Germany during the Bavarian Revolution*. (my emphasis)

As already explained, the truth was that the Spanish *masses* were trying to build such a society, but that the Communists and their allies set out to crush it. Robert Bruce Elsasser, 'Ernst Toller and German Society: The Role of the Individual as Critic, 1914-1939', (unpublished dissertation, Rutgers University, 1973), p. 334.

17. See Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 2-16. Winston Churchill stated the thinking of the British ruling class on this question quite bluntly:

> A revived fascist Spain in closest sympathy with Italy and Germany is one kind of disaster. A Communist Spain spreading its snakey tentacles through Portugal and France is another, and many will think the worse.

Quoted in Bolloten, *Revolution and Civil War in Spain*, p. 210.

18. Significantly, though Toller himself was fully aware of the real reasons why the western capitalist powers would not come to the aid of the Spanish Republic, he continued to hope they would eventually change their minds. In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru dated 30 March 1937 he wrote:

> In der spanischen Frage haben die Demokratien aus wirtschaftlichen Gründen einen Fehler gemacht, den eine kommende Welt kaum verstehen wird.
> Statt daß sie sofort begriffen hätten, welche Folgen ein Sieg Francos und seiner Nazi-Freunde auf die Lage in Europa haben müßte, erklärten sie sich für "neutral" und verschärften dadurch nur die prekäre Lage der

> europäischen Demokratien. Hoffen wir, daß die Intervention der Demokratien in dieser Episode — wie es auch bei so vielen Episoden der Vergangenheit der Fall gewesen ist — nicht das Motto tragen wird: "Zu spät!".

Jawaharlal Nehru, Ernst Toller. Dokumente einer Freundschaft 1927-1939, edited by Joachim Oesterheld (Halle and Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1989) pp. 132-41, (p. 139).

19. For a good description of the Communist Party's attitude towards the revolution see Rudolf Rocker, *The Tragedy of Spain*, (New York: Freie Arbeiter Stimme, 1937), pp. 20-24.

20. In a letter to Largo Caballero, the Spanish Prime Minister, dated 21 December 1936, Stalin advised the Republican government to attract the lower and middle bourgeoisie by 'protecting them against confiscation'. See *The New York Times*, 4 June 1939, p. 43.

21. José Diaz, *Communist International*, May 1937, p. 3. Harry McShane, at one time a leading Communist in Scotland, spoke with great candour about the deceit which underlay Moscow's policy in Spain:

> As well as communists, there were socialists and anarchists fighting in Spain. The ILP supported the POUM in Spain and kept up a continuous barrage of criticism against the Communist Party. We got the impression that they were fighting for the interests of their party instead of the interests of the Spanish people [...] We thought that, whereas the POUM, the CNT and others were fighting for the restoration of the Spanish parliamentary democracy, we were fighting for something beyond that. In Spain itself the communists looked upon everyone who was not supporting them as a deadly enemy.
>
> Years later I realised that the Russian policy had helped bring about the defeat. They were not fighting for a proletarian revolution and appealing for other classes to follow the proletariat; they were fighting for the unity of all the classes in defence of the 'democratic government'. At the same time, they were also fighting the people nearest to them, the anarchists and the socialists.

Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 224.

22. See George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Chapters 10 and 11. The bloody role played by the Communists in Spain has, of course, been fully exposed over the years. In a recent study of the war, however, Alexander Ostmann uses the same defamatory language to describe the anarchists and Trotskyists as the Communists had used in 1937. Discussing the role of the political commissars he writes uncritically:

> [...] contentious issues such as combating defeatism and fending off ideological subversion by anarchists and Trotskyists formed part of their duties, though only a few regarded this as their main function

He then goes on to excuse the actions of the Communists and their fellow-travellers by putting forward the quite incredible view that they did not know what was going on, only

finding out about it after they returned home:

> Throughout the Spanish Civil War all the writers-in-arms stood firmly by their Marxist commitment. The political commissar and the whole machinery set up to control subversive ideological influences, the attitude to anarchists and the fear of spies and saboteurs have to be judged in the context of the actual events. Though exaggerations were criticised a fundamental consensus did exist and reflected concrete problems in a very difficult military situation. Only later, when that had returned from the front to the realities of exile where they had access to newspaper information did they begin to have doubts.

Alexander Ostamann, 'Adventurism, Propganda or Commitment? German Writers in the Spanish Civil War'. in *German Writers and Politics, 1918-1939*, edited by Richard Dove and Stephen Lamb (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 207-19 (pp. 212 and 217).

23. 'Männer und Frauen', in *GW*, I, 246-51 (p. 247).

24. The POUM was a sister party of the British Independent Labour Party (ILP), belonged, like it, to the so-called London Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Parties, an international grouping made up of those socialists who opposed both the timid reformism of the Social Democracy and the stalinism of the Communist Parties. See G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969). Toller had maintained close links with the ILP and its leaders from the twenties and had provided advice on how the party could carry out illegal work in Hitler's Germany. See Richard Dove, 'The British Connection: Aspects of the Biography of Ernst Toller', *German Life and Letters*, 40 (4 July 1987), 319-36 (p. 323). On Toller's relationship with the ILP, Dove also writes:

> He had enjoyed close contact with the ILP, the party corresponding most closely to the USP, of which he had been a member until 1924. He had been a guest of honour at a lunch given in the editorial offices of the party's paper *The New Leader*, attended by H. N. Brailsford, Bertrand Russell and others. He had taken a personal interest in the work of ILP drama groups, and his visit had certainly stimulated a lively interest in his work, resulting in several performances of *Masses and the Man* and *The Machine Wreckers*.

Richard Dove, 'Fenner Brockway and Ernst Toller: Document and Drama in *Berlin — Letzte Ausgabe!*', *German Life and Letters*, 38 (1984/1985), 45-56 (pp. 47-48).

25. 'Am Sender von Madrid', *GW*, I, 211.

26. For details of Nin's murder see Julian Gorkin, *Stalins langer Arm: Die Vernichtung der freiheitlichen Linken im spanischen Bürgerkrieg* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1978), pp. 164-87.

27. One man who did know about the suppression of the POUM and the anarchists was Brailsford. In his articles about Spain, however, he helped the Communists cover their tracks by arguing that, through their lack of discipline, the extreme left had brought

repression down on their own heads. This indiscipline, he observed, had to be stamped out for it provided 'an excuse for an Italian or even an international occupation of Barcelona, on the plea that this great city with its many and wealthy foreign concerns is a prey to anarchy'. 'The prompt action of the Valencia government', he wrote, 'has removed both these dangers'. The anarchists could contribute to the new Spain, he concluded, if their gunmen can be 'weeded out', which meant killed though he was too squeamish to say so. H. N. Brailsford, 'Anarchists and Communists in Spain', in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 May 1937, pp. 837-38.

28. Toller first met Brockway when he made his first visit to England 1925, the PEN Club having invited him there to give lectures and readings from his work. See Richard Dove, 'Fenner Brockway and Ernst Toller', *German Life and Letters*, 45-56. Toller went on to use a famous incident in the British House of Commons involving Brockway in his radio play, *Berlin - letzte Ausgabe!*. Reprinted in *Frühe sozialistische Hörspiele*, edited by Stefan Bodo Würffel (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1982), pp. 95-115. For a discussion of Toller's use of this incident in his play see Richard Dove 'The Medium and the Message: Some Reflections on Ernst Toller's Hörspiel *Berlin - letzte Ausgabe!*, *German Life and Letters*. 37 (2 January 1984), 112-17. For Brockway's list of people imprisoned by the Republican government on charges of Trotskyism, reason etc, see Gorkin, *Stalins langer Arm*, pp. 286-88.

29. Unlike Toller, Brockway was bitterly critical of the *Volksfront* policy and of the role of the Comintern in Spain:

> The whole working-class movement, with the Communist Party particularly active, was carrying on a vigorous agitation 'Against War and Fascism.' We in the ILP accepted the slogan, but opposed the policy by which it was expressed [i.e., the *Volksfront*] and sought also to extend it. The policy advocated by the Labour Party and the Communist Party was a military alliance between Britain, France and Russia against Germany and Italy. We took the view that this division of Europe into two antagonistic groups would provoke rather than prevent war. We sought to extend the slogan by including 'Against Imperialism.' We held that the liquidation of British Imperialism was essential to peace.
>
> This did not mean that we underestimated the evil of Fascism [...] But we could not identify ourselves with our own ruling class in their imperialist rivalry with Italy and Germany. Such surrender of the class struggle would in our view be an invitation to Fascism to penetrate Britain, for we held that Fascism was at bottom the political and economic structure of unity in a class state. We believed that our best service against War and fascism was to intensify the struggle against Capitalism and Imperialism in Britain.

Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1941), pp. 381-82.

30. Carel ter Haar accepts this point but does not draw any conclusions from it:

> Sein Verhältnis zur Sowjetunion blieb völlig unberührt von tagespolitischen und polemischen Akzenten: Die Sowjetunion blieb für ihn das Land der erfolgreichen Revolution. Dies erklärt seine konsequente, später auch

> durch Schweigen zum Ausdruck gebrachte Loyalität [...] Es war ein Zeichen dafür, wie groß und verheerend er die Gefahr des Nationalsozialismus einschätzte, daß er sich während der Exilzeit nicht zu den Ereignissen in der Sowjetunion äußerte.

Carel ter Haar, 'Ernst Tollers Verhältnis zur Sowjetunion', *Exilforschung. Ein Internationales Jahrbuch* (1983), 109-19 (pp. 111 and 119).

31. John M. Spalek, 'Ernst Toller: The Need for a New Estimate', *German Quarterly*, 39 (1966), 581-98 (p. 590).

32. Richard Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism in the Work of Ernst Toller* (New York, Frankfurt am Main and Berne: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 427-53.

CHAPTER 11

PASTOR HALL

Toller began work on *Pastor Hall* in New York early in 1938 and, according to the inscription on the first page, finished it in Barcelona and then in Cassis, the latter a small fishing village in the South of France where he stayed for a time after a visit to war-torn Spain.[1] The first published edition, however, an English translation by Stephen Spender and Hugh Hunt, did not come out until a month after his death,[2] and it was only in 1970 that the play finally appeared in a German language version, this being published in East Germany by the *Henschelverlag* in a volume entitled *Stücke gegen den Faschismus*.[3] Until recently it was thought that the first stage performance of *Pastor Hall* was the German premiere, which took place in 1947 in the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin,[4] but Cecil Davies has established that it enjoyed a brief but quite successful run in the Manchester Repertory Theatre shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War.[5] At about the same time the British film-producers, the Boulting Brothers, sensing its potential as an anti-fascist propaganda piece, made a film of *Pastor Hall* which in the United States was shown incorporating a special prologue spoken by Eleanor Roosevelt.[6] Endorsement by such a popular figure, however, did not prevent the film running into difficulties, and in some American cities screenings were disrupted by protests organised by American Nazi sympathizers, protests which were so effective that in Chicago, for instance, the local authorities banned the film on public safety grounds.[7] Clearly, Toller's capacity to provoke political controversy continued undiminished even after his death.

According to Willibrand, who concurs in the author's assessment,[8] Toller believed that *Pastor Hall* one of his best plays, a view, it must be said, not shared by many critics. Malcolm Pittock, for instance, while conceding that it has much to interest the modern reader, calls *Pastor Hall* 'dated propaganda' and argues that it suffers from the fact that 'Toller did not know Nazi Germany at first hand'.[9] Wolfgang Rothe takes much the same view and describes the play as 'konstruiert' and 'unerlebt', full of

'unstimmige Dinge' and 'blanke Unwahrscheinlichkeiten' which betray the author's 'geographische Entfernung ebenso wie die innere Entfremdung [...] vom Schauplatz'.[10] Rothe argues that Toller failed to present a realistic and convincing portrait of German society and that this was mainly due to his unfamiliarity with conditions in his former 'Heimat'. *Pastor Hall*, he maintains, is little more than 'raschelndes Papier', a drama 'über Hitler-Deutschland, nicht aus dem Hitler-Staat'.[11] It is true, of course, that Toller was unfamiliar with conditions in Nazi Germany when he wrote *Pastor Hall*, but this by itself is not a satisfying or adequate explanation for the distorted portrayal of reality or for the play's artistic failure. While it does account for some factual discrepancies — Toller's uncertainty, for instance, as to who was responsible for the administration of the concentration camps, SS or SA — these are minor points which would disturb only those fully acquainted with the historical detail. It will be argued here that the main reason why *Pastor Hall* presents such an unconvincing picture of Nazi Germany, in particular why the account of the nature of the opposition to Hitler is so skewed, was not Toller's unfamiliarity with conditions there but his attempt to mould the play so that it might reflect the idea of the *Volksfront*.

The broad anti-fascist front depicted in *Pastor Hall* ranges from revolutionary workers on the extreme Left, such as Peter Hofer, to conservative elements of the Prussian aristocracy on the Right, in the shape of General von Grotjahn; it includes a liberal-minded clergymen, Pastor Hall himself, and even a disillusioned National Socialist, one Heinrich Degen, a former parishioner of Hall's who helps him escape from the concentration camp where his opposition activities land him. By and large, Toller's opposition is made up not of revolutionary socialists, but of civilised and educated men and women, people of moderate political opinion who found Nazi ideology and practice abhorrent. The problem with this, however, was that in framing his characters in such

a way, in a way, that is, which would appeal to a middle-class audience, Toller sacrificed much in terms of credibility. As he himself was well aware, Germany's conservative elite, unremitting opponents of the Weimar Republic, had not become converted to a belief in the virtues of democracy in the years since Hitler came to power. Far from it. By the end of the 1930s they were more enthusiastic than ever in their support for the Nazi regime. It was this, the contradiction between what Toller knew about Germany's middle classes and how he felt obliged to portray them on stage which forms the central weakness of *Pastor Hall*. It is this which undermines the play's credibility and turns most of the central characters into unbelievable and unconvincing portraits of the social types they are supposed to represent.[12]

The most striking example of this is Pastor Hall himself, a Lutheran minister whose opposition to the Nazi state leads to his being sent to a concentration camp. Previously, Toller's clerical figures were shown in a negative light, as preachers of a perverted gospel, representatives of a Church firmly wedded to the authoritarian state, a Church whose function was to provide divine sanction for inequality, exploitation and war. Pastor Hall is the opposite of this type of reactionary clergyman, being not only a steadfast opponent of National Socialism but a champion of liberty and democracy too. At first glance, it might seem that there is nothing to object to in this. Is it not the case, after all, that the Evangelical Church became a centre of opposition to the Nazi state quite soon after the *Machtergreifung*?[13] And were there not real-life models for Pastor Hall, people like Martin Niemöller, for instance, the Berlin-Dahlem Pastor jailed for his opposition to the attempted *Gleichschaltung* of the Evangelical Church, a man whose name, together with those of fellow preachers and theologians such Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhöfer, has come to symbolise religious opposition to Nazi tyranny?[14] In other words, can it not be argued that Friedrich Hall is a historically accurate figure? The

short answer is no.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the relationship between the Evangelical Church and National Socialism, but it necessary to point out that the image of this institution conveyed in *Pastor Hall* is deeply flawed.[15] The majority of clergymen were nationalist, conservative and anti-republican in outlook, people who had never reconciled themselves to the Weimar Republic and who longed for a return to some form of authoritarian government.[16] One may cite the example of Niemöller himself. He voted NSDAP as early as 1924, welcomed Hitler to power and raised not a murmur of protest as parliamentary democracy was smashed and along with it the opposition parties and Trades Unions.[17] Like the majority of the Protestant clergy he saw National Socialism as a powerful bulwark against atheistic Marxism and the degenerate liberalism which flourished under Weimar.[18] Even the *Bekennende Kirche*, the Protestant opposition group he led, was set-up to prevent the Government's attempt to subordinate the Church to the state, in other words, it opposed Hitler not because it was committed to democracy and human rights, but to protect its own power and influence.[19] Toller, as already indicated, was aware of the true nature of official German Protestantism. Pastor Hall, however, is supposed to embody the kind of cultured, civilised and moderate opponent of National Socialism with whom, Toller hoped, middle-class audiences would be able to identify. Hence the rather idealistic and misty-eyed portrait of this figure.

In part, of course, Friedrich Hall is a self-portrait of Toller, for like him, he too had been at one time a German nationalist, one who, like millions of others, had been swept along by the tide of patriotism which accompanied the outbreak of the Great War. In Act 1, in a scene involving Ida, Hall's wife, and Fritz Gerte, a local Nazi who is threatening to have the Pastor arrested on charges of sedition, Ida refutes Gerte's claim that, by preaching for peace in 1919, her husband had stabbed the German army in the

back, (a reference to the *Dolchstoßlegende*). Friedrich, a good patriot, had volunteered for service at the very beginning of the war, even though as a clergyman he was not obliged to do so:

> *IDA HALL*: Er war ein tapferer Soldat, er wurde sogar einmal im Kriegsbericht öffentlich erwähnt und belobt. Später haben ihn seine Nerven im Stich gelassen und er wurde Pazifist, das bestreite ich gar nicht. (p. 251)

While there is a clear parallel to Toller's own pattern of experience here, there is also a crucial difference. After his *Wandlung*, Toller came to see war as a product of the capitalist-imperialist world order and became not only a militant pacifist but also a revolutionary socialist. Friedrich Hall, by contrast, though genuine in his rejection of National Socialist ideology, remains conservative in his political outlook. The Pastor — and this is what Toller was keen to emphasise — does not belong to the left. His opposition to the Nazis is based not on any socialist theory of the class struggle and does not embrace anything radical in either economic or political terms; quite simply it is a function of his religious and humanitarian beliefs. When he criticises the government he does so not from a revolutionary but from a liberal standpoint and his actions, at least initially, are guided by the moderate, allegedly non-political doctrine of rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. While he believes he has the right and the duty to criticise the government, he does not seek to challenge its legitimacy. He thinks it incumbent upon every citizen to obey the law, even Nazi laws, however repellent and inhumane they may be. When he learns, for instance, that Ida with the help of his old friend, General von Grotjahn, has attempted to circumvent Nazi currency regulations, he declares that this was a foolish act and upbraids both, arguing that this was wrong in principle. The following exchange between Hall and the General reveals the limits of the Pastor's opposition to the state:

PAUL VON GROTJAHN: Die Herren können mir den Buckel herrunterrutschen mit ihren Gesetzen. Ich mache mir sogar einen Götterspaß daraus, ihre 'Gesetze' zu umgehen.
FRIEDRICH HALL: Verzeih, so könnte ein Anarchist sprechen.
PAUL VON GROTJAHN: In welchem Zustand, nach deiner hochgeschätzten Meinung, befindet sich denn Deutschland heute? Von dem ehemaligen Gefreiten lasse ich mir keine Gesetze vorschreiben, ich nicht.
FRIEDRICH HALL: Es ist nicht unser Geschäft, die Güte oder Ungüte von Gesetzen zu beurteilen. (pp. 267-68)

Despite his critical stance, Friedrich has not grasped the true nature of the Nazi regime, for if he had, he would have realised — as the General has — that Germany had already sunk into a state of lawlessness, albeit behind a cloak of spurious legality provided by a corrupt parliament. His opposition, though honest and courageous, does not and cannot pose a serious threat to the fascist regime. It is experience, the experience of the concentration camp, which teaches Hall that National Socialism demands conformity from all its citizens on all questions, be they political, social, economic or moral. What is expected of him is a yes or no answer to the question as to whether or not to resist oppression or to compromise with it. To compromise, to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, means, in effect, to accept the regime and hence to betray his own fundamental beliefs. Eventually, he realises that there is no impenetrable barrier between religion and politics and comes to see the need to move from partial towards outright opposition. Before he can take this step, however, the question Hall has to answer is whether or not he has the moral and physical courage to challenge the state.

From the beginning of the play, Friedrich seems to be without fear of persecution. He sees himself as 'ein Prediger in der Wüste', a man called upon to defend, 'die Lehre Christi gegen die Lehre seiner Widersacher', to defend true Christianity, that is, against National Socialist attempts to subvert it. When Ida trys to persuade him to cede to Gerte's demand that he should persuade Christine to call off the marriage he replies:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Ich wußte seit langem, daß die Prüfung kommt. Nun ist es soweit, und ich werde nicht klagen: Herr, warum wählst Du mich. (p. 260)

When she reproaches him for endangering the whole family by his outspoken criticism of the government he tells her that 'der Mensch ist nicht auf dieser Welt, um der Gefahr auszuweichen' (p. 256) asking if she did not feel that her 'krankhafte Furcht' was humiliating. (p. 258) In a discussion with a member of his Parish Council, Traugott Pipermann, Hall displays the same unyielding adherence to principle. Pipermann, a shoemaker, comes to explain that he and other business colleagues are concerned about the possible damage to trade caused by the Pastor's public opposition to the regime. He informs Hall that local Nazis are threatening a boycott and wants to suggest that the Pastor should keep his criticisms to himself. Pipermann, however, lacks courage, and has to find a roundabout way of saying this to Hall:

> *TRAUGOTT PIPERMANN*: Zwar glaube ich, in aller Bescheidenheit ein guter Christ zu sein ... jedoch sind wir auch dem Staat Gehorsam schuldig, und gegen den Regen muß ich mich mit einem Mantel und wetterfesten Stiefeln schützen, sonst werde ich naß, und wenn die Tatsachen gegen uns sind, können wir nicht ewig gegen die Tatsachen anrennen, sondern sollen, bevor es zu spät ist, die Lippen versiegeln und das Wort im Herzen behalten. Dort wird es Gott schon sehen. (p. 263)

Hall replies to Pipermann's half-expressed suggestion that he should yield to reality by saying:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Wir sollten zuerst an das Kirchendach denken, meinen Sie, und erst dann an das Fundament, auf dem die Kirche ruht ... Das Kirchendach in Ehren, aber erst kommt das Fundament. Da lasse ich mir nicht dreinreden, von niemandem als meinem Gewissen. (p. 264)

Pipermann is a cowardly, unethical petty-bourgeois, a man of shallow religious faith prepared to sacrifice whatever beliefs he may have for the sake of expediency,

someone more interested in profit and loss than in defending truth and justice. His brand of Christianity, which seeks to compromise with National Socialism, stands in contrast to Hall's, though it is significant that the argument Pipermann uses to justify his quiescence and his desire to keep out of politics, is the same as that used by the Pastor himself in his conversation with von Grotjahn. In an important sense, however, Hall's bravery is fraudulent, for it is predicated on the knowledge that Gerte is there in the background protecting him from arrest no matter how outspoken he is in his criticisms. This is a fact of which the Pastor is dimly conscious but also one which he seeks to sweep to one corner of his mind:

> *IDA HALL*: Was du am Sonntag in der Kirche redest, muß ich am Montag vertuschen. Und wer hilft mir dabei? Gerte.
> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Sage noch, daß er mich mit seinem Leben gedeckt hat.
> *IDA HALL*: Ohne ihn wären wir schon alle im Konzentrationslager.
> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Mir wäre es lieber, er beträte dieses Haus nicht. *(Öffnet die Fenster.)* Und parfümieren tut er sich auch. (p. 256)

Hall is unable to respond directly to Ida's charge for he knows that she is right. Here Toller provides the first indication of the crisis which will overtake Hall later on, in the concentration camp, when he is brought face to face with the fact that he is, after all, afraid of physical pain and not as well equipped to challenge tyranny as he had previously believed. The concentration camp scene, which climaxes in a confrontation with Gerte during which Hall describes the latter as a 'Henkersknecht', highlights the nature of the dilemmas the Pastor faces in his opposition.

As he is led off to receive his punishment of 25 lashes, Hall becomes acutely aware of his lack of courage and pleads with the guard, Heinrich Degen, to help him in some way. Already disillusioned with the Hitler government, Degen takes pity on his old Pastor and leads him to a place at the perimeter fence where he can escape, a brave act

— and a highly improbable one — for which he pays with his life. In the final Act, set in the home of General von Grotjahn to where Hall has fled following his escape, the Pastor finds himself in a state of depression and despair, one brought by the knowledge that his weakness has caused the death of an innocent young man. His despair soon evaporates, however, as he draws inspiration from Degen's act of selflessness and comes to the conclusion that he will not flee from his pursuers but face them. When Gerte turns up in the final scene to arrest him, Friedrich, who could still complete his escape, gives himself up voluntarily, declaring:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Auch ich war feige. Ich wollte der Prüfung, die mir auferlegt war, ausweichen. Ich stelle mich Ihnen. Die Zelle wird meine Stimme nicht ersticken. Noch der Block, auf den Sie mich spannen, wird eine Kanzel sein, und die Gemeinde so mächtig, daß keine Kirche der Welt sie fassen könnte. (p. 313)

What Toller gives voice to in this final scene is an idea which he repeated often during his years of exile, the idea of 'die Überwindung der Furcht'. This, Toller believed, was the essential first step on the road to defeating tyranny. Once the individual has overcome his fear, he then becomes a potential threat to the system for his bravery would have an exemplary effect, encouraging others to join the struggle for freedom. Though he knows that he is inviting almost certain death, Hall is so intoxicated by his own rhetoric that he tells Gerte:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Ich werde trotzdem leben. Es wird wie ein Feuer sein, keine Macht wird es ersticken, die Ängstlichen werden Mut fassen, einer wird es dem anderen sagen, daß der Antichrist regiert, der Verderber, der Feind des Menschen ... und sie werden Stärke finden und werden meinem Beispiel folgen. (p. 316)

Hall's plea is, of course, a piece of pure theatre, an empty gesture reverberating in a void. For brave words and heroic gestures were impotent in the face of National

Socialism; it could be defeated or overthrown only by the use of extreme force. Toller was, of course, aware of this; he had, after all, abandoned his pacifism and now looked instead towards the West to take action to thwart Hitler. In *Pastor Hall*, however, as in real life, he is reluctant to state openly that violence is now an unavoidable necessity and instead takes refuge in the idea that fascism could be defeated by peaceful means if only enough people were prepared to follow Hall's example and express their opposition publicly.

This reluctance to face facts is apparent too in the conversation in the concentration camp between Hall and the Communist inmate, Peter Hofer, in which they discuss the question of the legitimacy of the use of violence. Hall asks Hofer whether or not his party, if it were in power, would takes revenge upon their enemies, 'würden Sie ... Ihre Feinde martern und quälen?' Hofer replies that they would certainly kill their enemies if necessary but would never torture them, would never, that is, use violence simply for the sake of it. Having heard this, Hall goes on to describes the incident in the Great War which led to his transformation from conservative nationalist to pacifist:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Im Hospital lag ein französischer katholischer Pfarrer, gleich mir ein Soldat. Wir sprachen miteinander. Wir sprachen dieselbe Sprache. Aber ein paar Wochen vorher hatten wir uns gehaßt und wollten einander töten. Er starb. In seiner Todesstunde bat er mich um Verzeihung. Ich glaube heute nur an den Weg des Verstehens und der Liebe. Es gibt keine Frage auf Erde, die nicht gewaltlos gelöst werden könnte. (p. 290)

Reminiscent of the scene in *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* in which Toller finally realised the inhumanity of war, these words reveal that Hall is still not able to endorse violent resistance. He believes there is room for compromise, that it is possible to struggle effectively against the Nazi dictatorship using peaceful methods. Hofer's reply reveals the conflict raging within Toller himself as he sought to find an answer to this question:

> *PETER HOFER*: Zur gewaltlosen Lösung gehören immer zwei, Herr Pastor. Wir beten die Gewalt nicht an, das tun die andern. Soll ich mir mein Recht rauben lassen und noch Danke schön sagen? Lieber sterben. (p. 290)

Hall finds this argument difficult to refute and avoids a direct answer by saying that the courage to die for a cause has become cheap, asking whether or not this is 'eine Flucht vor dem Leben'. (p. 290) Hofer maintains that Hall is throwing the baby out with the bath-water, arguing that it all depends on 'wofür man lebt und wie man stirbt', (p. 290) citing as an example the true story of Erich Mühsam, Toller's comrade from the *Räterepublik*, who was imprisoned and finally murdered by the Nazis.[20] Forced to dig his own grave and then ordered to sing the Horst Wessel Lied before being shot, Mühsam, unaware that this was the guards' idea of a joke, that he is not to be executed — at least, not yet — sings instead the Communist anthem 'Die Internationale'.[21] The story of Mühsam's defiance inspires Hall and is in part responsible for his decision to fling defiance in the face of Gerte. Yet it has to be said that the scene ends on an inconclusive note, Toller still finding himself unable to give the better part of the argument to the advocate of violence. What is perhaps even more significant about this scene, however, is that in it Toller succeeds in realising in dramatic form something that was never realised in practice: the anti-fascist *Volksfront* as the Communist worker and the Evangelical Minister, formerly bitter enemies, recognise each other as comrades in the struggle against a common enemy:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: In Mühsam lebte der Geist, Sie haben mir Mut gemacht, Herr Hofer, ich danke Ihnen.
> *PETER HOFER*: Sie Sind ein Rebell, Herr Pastor, Sie wissen es nur nicht.
>
> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Vielleicht Sind Sie ein verirrter Christ und wissen es auch nicht. (p. 291)

Nothing could better express the central message contained in *Pastor Hall* nor the

distance Toller had travelled from the revolutionary socialism, however muddled and confused, of *Hoppla, wir leben!* or *Feuer aus den Kesseln!*.

Like Pastor Hall, General von Grotjahn too is a representative of the other Germany, that section of the population which, Toller believed, had not succumbed to Nazi ideology and which was dedicated to holding aloft the torch of freedom. Toller chose a member of the conservative-military caste to symbolise this other Germany because he wanted to emphasise how wide the opposition to the Nazi state was, to show that it encompassed even those normally thought of as the regime's natural supporters. He took pains, therefore, to depict von Grotjahn as an educated, cultivated, almost avuncular figure, a man of liberal opinion who is deeply committed to freedom and democracy despite his conservative background. He makes him, in other words, a model of the progressive bourgeois, a figure reflecting perfectly — or so Toller hoped — the social and ethical values of those people at whom his play was aimed.

Von Grotjahn's opposition to the Hitler regime is made explicit from the moment he appears in the play, his first words being a quotation from what he mistakenly believes to be a poem by Heine, who, as a Jew, belonged to the list of banned authors. When Friedrich points out that the words are actually by Goethe, von Grotjahn replies, 'Der Goethe war auch nicht stubenrein. Erstens war er Freimaurer, zweitens war er Kosmopolit'. (p. 266) Goethe's support is enlisted here to help emphasise the point that Nazism as a creed represented the antithesis of civilisation and culture and that the educated classes, people like von Grotjahn, were to be found on the other side of the political divide. Through von Grotjahn Toller seeks to create the impression not only that the opposition embraced a wide social and political spread but that it had deep roots and was not afraid to express itself openly. Von Grotjahn takes great relish, for instance, in pointing out that Goebbels is described by 'das Volk' as 'den Vater der Lüge', (p. 266)

the clear implication of the use of the words 'das Volk' being that, not a minority but the mass of the German people was in opposition to the state and could see through the lies and deceit perpetrated by their new rulers. As von Grotjahn says, they, 'das Volk', may be cowed, 'aber Bescheid wissen sie', (p. 268) a point he seeks to illustrate by relating the following incident:

> *PAUL VON GROTJAHN*: Heute früh stehe ich beim Zeitungshändler und blättere in den Zeitungen. Oben hat er den *Völkischen Beobachter* liegen, damit man sieht, daß er Nazi ist. Sagt er, Herr General, warum wählen Sie denn solange, zwölf von die gehen auf's Dutzend, die Lügen sind schwarz und die Wahrheit ist weiß gedruckt, damit sie keiner lesen kann. (p. 268)

If a simple newspaper vendor is prepared to risk revealing his anti-government opinions to a man who for all he knows is a devout Nazi, then the widespread support the regime enjoys may be more apparent than real. What Toller reveals here is his unwillingness to accept that Hitler enjoyed the support of a substantial section, if not a majority of the German population. To do so would have been to undermine the belief in the other Germany upon which was predicated all of his political views and activities in exile. In *Pastor Hall* he ignores reality and tries to create the impression of widespread opposition when there was practically none.

This misleading impression is compounded by the choice of von Grotjahn to represent what opposition there was. The General is too much the defender of justice and freedom to be credible. Almost every line he utters contains either criticism of the National Socialist dictatorship or praise for democracy. It is he, for example, who mentions the name of Martin Niemöller, citing him as an example and inspiration:

> *PAUL VON GROTJAHN*: Wir sollten uns ja alle wirklich ein bißchen schämen, daß wir nicht im Gefängnis sind. Ein anständiger Mensch ist heute im Gefängnis. (p. 267)

He has only contempt for what he regards as the parvenus now in control of the state. In words which echo those used by President Hindenburg to describe Hitler shortly before he made him Chancellor, the General refers to the Führer as 'den ehemaligen Gefreiten', asserting that he at least will not take orders from such a person. (p. 268) Moreover, in contrast to Friedrich who, as we have seen, is prepared to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, who believes it is not his business to determine, 'die Güte oder Ungüte von Gesetzen', (p. 268) von Grotjahn refuses to be cowed into silence or compliance:

> *PAUL VON GROTJAHN*: Gehorchen und Maulhalten, wie? Das möchte den Brüdern so passen. Dann hätten sie uns, wo sie uns haben wollen. So tief sind wir Deutsche nicht gesunken. (p. 268)

He even extols the virtues of liberal democracy, quoting with approval a letter from Werner, who has gone to America on his own, Christine having called off the wedding because of his less than fulsome support for her father:

> *PAUL VON GROTJAHN*: Er schreibt, New York sei ein Dschungel. Die Menschen laufen herum, als ob sie jeden Tag neue Wege durchs Gestrüpp schlagen müßten. Sie verwechseln die Wolkenkratzer mit dem Himmel und die Börse mit der Jakobsleiter. Aber das Maul lassen sie sich nicht verbinden. Das ist ja wohl die Hauptsache, wie? (p. 305)

This quote sums up one of the central ideas in *Pastor Hall* as well as highlighting the change in Toller's own view of democracy. Despite its imperfections, democracy, the system he had once criticised so bitterly, is infinitely preferable to fascist dictatorship and it is the duty of all people of good will to unite together in its defence. General von Grotjahn is supposed to be one of these people of good will, the living embodiment of the spirit of the *Volksfront*. At the end of the play, inspired by Friedrich's defiance, the General too is transformed from a verbal to an active opponent of the Nazi state and

when Fritz Gerte turns up to arrest Friedrich, he not only disarms him but — rather preposterously — gives him 'eine Ohrfeige' before ordering him out of his home. As Hall prepares to go to Church the General declares that he wants to accompany him, saying:

> *PAUL VON GROTJAHN*: Mein Leben lang war ich stolz auf diesen Rock, und so war es mein Vater und Großvater ... Wem diene ich heute? Wo sind Treu und Glauben und Anstand? *(Leicht)* Wenn Du nichts dagegen hast, stell ich mich, wie ich da bin, neben die Kanzel. (p. 316)

What is remarkable about these words is not so much the General's insight into the way in which the Nazi government has abused his loyalty to the army, but the transformation in Toller's view of the military establishment. His former hostility towards this institution, like his hostility towards the Church, has vanished and he now finds room to pay homage to its virtues, to its loyalty and bravery. Declaring that he is not afraid of the government, Von Grotjahn describes himself as 'ein Mensch vom alten Schlag' adding 'mir können sie das Maul nicht verbinden'. (p. 266) The impression created here, that the values of the Prussian aristocracy were somehow admirable or that they had anything in common with those of democracy, is given added emphasis in the conversation between the General and Hall about the latter's 'Spieluhr', which when wound up plays Ernst Moritz Arndt's 'Vaterlandslied', the revolutionary-patriotic song from the Napoleonic Wars. Utterly delighted, Von Grotjahn describes this as 'eine hochverräterrische Spieluhr'(p. 274) and when it refuses to play declares:

> *GENERAL VON GROTJAHN*: Selbst die Spieluhr hat Angst vor Denunzianten. Sie weigert sich, ein Lied zu spielen, in dem das Wort Freiheit vorkommt.
> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Warum? Von Freiheit sprechen unsere Herren auch. Man sollte neue Begriffe erfinden, die alten haben die Diktatoren gestohlen und um ihren Sinn gebracht.
> *GENERAL VON GROTJAHN*: Heute bin ich frei, wenn die anderen Furcht vor mir haben.
> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: So ist es. Freiheit heißt ihnen: den anderen Völkern Furcht einflößen. (p. 274)

What is so inappropriate about all this talk of freedom is that the type of person von Grotjahn represents normally held the exact opposite view of the liberal sentiments expressed in this song. The army officer corps, bitter opponents of the Weimar Republic, did their best to ensure the restoration of some form of authoritarian government after 1918.[22] Admittedly, they adopted a wait-and-see approach in the end game which decided Weimar's fate and did not come out openly for Hitler until after the 'Machtergreifung'.[23] Afterwards, however, their support was crucial in the consolidation of the dictatorship and, as the 'Night of the Long Knives' demonstrates, they were prepared to tolerate any crime, even the murder of their own Generals, so long as their position of authority was guaranteed.[24] Yet with General von Grotjahn Toller tries to suggest that such people could be relied upon in the struggle against National Socialism.

Recognising that von Grotjahn is an implausible figure, some critics have argued that he is an anticipation of the opposition which subsequently arose in conservative circles, with the name of Klaus von Stauffenberg often mentioned in this connection.[25] But this is hardly a convincing argument. Firstly, those involved in the 20 July plot were far from typical of the conservative elite, most of whom stood firmly behind the *Führer* right to the bitter end. Secondly, many oppositionists only began seriously to oppose Hitler once it was clear that to continue the war was the surest way of bringing the Red Army to the Elbe.[26] The attempt to overthrow Hitler was undertaken, therefore, not to restore democracy and freedom but in order to save Germany from the spectre of Bolshevism and to maintain her position as an imperial power.[27] It would be wrong, of course, to imply that there were no von Grotjahn figures in the ranks of the opposition. But that is not at issue here. What is important is that Toller created von Grotjahn not because he seriously imagined that his views and actions were typical, but simply because he fitted the conception of the *Volksfront* and aided the task of convincing a bourgeois

audience that conservatism and anti-fascism went hand in hand.

Pastor Hall reveals not only Toller's changed view of German conservatism and its institutions but also sheds an interesting light on his attitude towards the working class, being particularly revealing of his understanding of the relationship between the workers and National Socialism. With the exception of Friz Gerte, there are only two figures of any significance in the play who could be described as working class. The first is Heinrich Degen, the young SS man who allows Hall to escape from the concentration camp, and the second is Peter Hofer. Though described merely as 'ein Roter', he is clearly intended to be interpreted as a member of the Communist Party. In the brief conversation between Degen and Hall in Act 2, Friedrich asks why he had become a supporter of the NSDAP, to which Degen gives the following interesting reply:

> *S.S.-MANN*: Wie ich aus der Schule entlassen wurde, ging ich auf Arbeitssuche, vier Jahre ging ich auf Arbeitssuche, wohin ich kam, hieß es, wir stellen Arbeiter aus, nicht ein. Der Mensch braucht was, woran er sich halten kann, eine Hoffnung. Die Jahre vergingen, das einzige, was ich lernte, war stempeln ... Dann hörte ich den Hitler sprechen. Der Hitler hat gesagt, so wirds gemacht und basta, und wenn Du dabei stirbst, sei stolz darauf, viele werden sterben und Deutschland wird leben.
> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Lebt Deutschland?
> *S.S.- MANN*: Es ist verdammt anders, wie ich's mir vorgestellt habe. Ich hätte nicht geträumt, daß ich Sie bewachen müßte ... *(unterdrückt, wild.)* Man kann ja nicht mehr atmen! (pp. 294-95)

Toller is right to stress the importance of economic distress in radicalising large sections of the German people and in making them susceptible to Hitler's propaganda. He is also right to suggest that by the end of the Weimar period many young people, particularly those most affected by the crisis such as the long-term unemployed, were turning in increasing numbers towards the NSDAP. The problem here, however, is not whether or not Degen can be regarded as a historically credible or accurate figure, but rather one of context. In choosing him, a young worker, to represent National Socialism in his play —

he is, after all, one of only two Nazis delineated here — Toller adds to the impression already created that it was mainly the working class which was attracted by Hitler's promises. Yet as he knew, this was the group in Weimar society most impervious to Nazi blandishments and which even after the *Machtergreifung* remained overwhelmingly loyal to its traditional parties and organisations. In Toller's inverted portrait of the Third Reich, those who were among the most fervent National Socialists — reactionary monarchists of the Paul von Grotjahn stripe, conservative clergymen such as Pastor Hall — are in opposition, while the ordinary workers — the most consistent opponents of National Socialism and its first victims — are depicted as Nazis.

The other working-class figure, Peter Hofer, is a Communist and forms the extreme Left flank of the emerging *Volksfront* described here. Hofer is a tough-minded class fighter, a man who has remained loyal to his party at a time when many former comrades have gone over to the enemy. When one of the inmates asks what point there is in remaining loyal to an idea when 'keiner zuhört', Hofer replies, 'Ich höre mir zu, genügt das nicht?'. (pp. 288-89) It is interesting to note, however, that while Toller takes a sympathetic view of Hofer as an individual worker, he is much more critical of the working class as a whole for the way it responded, or rather didn't respond, to the rise of National Socialism. In Act 2 Hofer describes the former party comrades who denounced him to the authorities as 'arme Teufel', a remark which, for obvious reasons, arouses Hall's curiosity, and prompts him to ask why he uses this expression:

> *PETER HOFER*: Weil sie sich mehr zugetraut haben, als sie aushalten konnten. Der Geist war willig, aber das Fleisch schwach (p. 289)

He then goes on to make some interesting comments on why the Left failed to respond adequately to the challenge posed by Hitler:

> *PETER HOFER*: Ja, wenn wir gewußt hätten, wie es kommen würde. Wir haben gelacht und geprahlt und an nichts geglaubt, weder an die Freiheit, noch an den Kinderschreck vom Dritten Reich. Die Freiheit haben wir eine kleinbürgerliche Phrase geheißen, so wenig wußten wir, was Sklaverei ist. (p. 289)

Hofer's criticisms of the Left here — its underestimation of the fascist threat and failure to make a distinction between democracy and dictatorship — are legitimate and point back to the timely and prescient warnings Toller had issued before Hitler became Chancellor. What is striking, however, is that Hofer attaches at least part of the blame for the Left's flawed strategy to the workers themselves not just to the leaders of the movement:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: War das nicht die Schuld Ihrer Führer?
> *PETER HOFER*: So leicht mach ich mirs nicht, Herr Pfarrer. Wir haben alle schuld, die Führer und das Volk. Wir haben geglaubt, wenn einer Arbeiter ist, dann ist er weiß was, der liebe Gott selber, entschuldigen Sie schon. Arbeiter sind auch nur Menschen, und wenn einer die Lohntüte am Sonnabend zu Muttern heimbringt, ist er darum noch nicht klüger. Manchmal sogar dümmer, weil er nichts gelernt hat und auf jeden Schwindel hereinfällt und nicht drei Meter weit sieht. (p. 289)

What is interesting here is not that Toller trys to make the ordinary workers responsible, or partly responsible, for the failure to stop Hitler, but that he makes no mention of the much greater responsibility of the KPD whose theory of Social Fascism did so much to split the labour movement and smooth Hitler's path to power. In *Pastor Hall*, as in his other writings and speeches in exile, Toller was unwilling to criticise either the German Communists or Moscow. They, after all, were the founders and mainstay of the *Volksfront* and as such beyond reproach. This is why Hofer hedges his criticism of the leadership and seeks to unload responsibility onto the shoulders of the ordinary workers.

One of the most disappointing aspects of *Pastor Hall* is that it makes no serious attempt to explore the social basis of National Socialism, to show what kind of people

were attracted by its philosophy and why. The only devoted Nazi, Fritz Gerte, is as unconvincing as almost every other figure and, as a character, provides little or no insight into the social pathology of the Hitler movement. Creating a believable portrait of a Nazi was, of course, always going to present Toller with particular difficulties, but he did at least try to observe his own edict that the artist should strive for balance and objectivity in his treatment of those characters with whom he does not sympathise. While it would be going too far to say that Gerte is a portrait of Toller, it is interesting to note that his relationship to Christine Hall reflects, at least partially, the author's troubled relationship to his own wife. When Gerte demands to know why Ida had not taken steps to prevent her daughter's engagement to Werner von Grotjahn, she replies that the young women of today, rather than seeking financial security and a good home, which Gerte could no doubt provide, are more inclined to follow, 'die Stimme ihres Herzens':

> *FRITZ GERTE*: Stimme des Herzens! Quatsch! Und wer bin ich?
> *IDA HALL*: Sie sind kein Jüngling mehr. (p. 253)

According to the text, Gerte is 'in seiner Eitelkeit getroffen' by these words, for he is aged around 35 while Christine is only 18. Toller himself was almost 46 when he started work on *Pastor Hall* while his wife, Christiane Grautoff, whom he married in 1935, was less than half his age, 21. It is curious that Toller should have chosen to make such a thinly disguised reference to his own failing marriage in this way and, moreover, through such an entirely disagreeable character. Perhaps he thought that doing so would help him overcome the antipathy he must have felt towards this figure and enable him to take a more sympathetic view of Gerte. This, of course, is why Toller creates the association between Gerte and Christine Hall in the first place, so that the audience might see that even hard-bitten members of NSDAP have human feelings too. Ultimately, however, Toller is unable to retain any real sense of objectivity in respect of Gerte, and the

background he creates for him shows that he possesses not a single redeeming quality.

Gerte comes from a very poor family, his mother having been a low-paid 'Heimarbeiterin'. Before she died, Frau Gerte had pleaded with Friedrich, her Pastor, to look out for her son, knowing him to be a dishonest and untrustworthy person. Indeed, according to Hall, Fritz stole from his mother every penny she had ever earned. When he finds employment it is as a salesman in a tailor's owned by a certain Herr Levi, as the name implies, a Jew. Gerte, however, is lazy, unreliable and dishonest and suffers from what the Pastor describes as 'Großmannssucht', only managing to retain his position thanks to Hall's frequent intercessions on his behalf:

> *FRIEDRICH HALL*: Was war aber der Dank an Levi, der nicht ein Auge, der beide Augen zugedrückt hat? Er hat ihm ein Plakat ans Fenster kleben lassen: "Wer beim Juden kauft, kauft beim Teufel." Ihn hat die Hölle jedenfalls nicht gestört, Geld riecht und brennt nicht. Und wo ist Levi heute, dank Gertes "erwachter" Gesinnung? Als Bettler lebt er mit seiner Familie irgendwo in Whitechapel und kann seinem Schicksal danken, daß er überhaupt lebt. (p. 257)

Gerte's anti-semitism is typical of a majority of the NSDAP, particularly of those, like himself, who had joined at an early stage, out of conviction, that is, and not out of opportunism. From the point of view of his social position too, Gerte was a fairly accurate National Socialist for, as Toller knew, the party drew its support mainly from among the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie, those brought to the verge of despair by economic chaos and who recoiled in horror at the prospect of a Communist revolution; 'Angestellte' like Gerte, *Beamte*, teachers, civil servants and the like, were precisely those groups who, in percentage terms, were over-represented in the NSDAP — at least in the years immediately before and after the 'Machtergreifung'.[28]

Given Toller's knowledge of the social composition of the Nazi Party, why did he not portray Gerte as coming from a traditional middle-class instead of a poor working-

class background? The obvious answer is that Toller had in mind the bourgeois character of his intended audience and was disinclined, therefore, to be too precise in his description of the nature of Nazi support. In Gerte, Toller sought to define National Socialism purely in terms of its brutality and overlooked or consciously ignored its socio-economic roots, thus reducing the struggle against it to a simple clash between good and evil.

Ida Hall, Friedrich's wife, is one of the few half-way convincing characters in the play. She is, at least, about the only one whose views and actions could be said to bear any resemblance to those of the type she represents. In many ways she is typical of those millions of Germans who were not fanatical Nazis and did not become party members — not even as a form of protective camouflage — but who saw little or nothing to object to in what the government did, nothing at least which would lead them to adopt a position of outright opposition. Although her husband is a fierce critic of the regime, Ida herself does not share his negative assessment of National Socialism. She leaps immediately to Gerte's defence, for instance, after what she felt was an unjust attack on him by Friedrich:

> *IDA HALL*: Du bist ungerecht. An seiner Gesinnung darfst du nicht zweifeln. Hat er sich nicht als Soldat bewährt? Hat er sich nicht gleich den Nationalsozialisten angeschlossen, als es noch eine Gefahr war, Nationalsozialist zu sein? Hat er sich nicht einsperren lassen, aus Treue für den Führer, damals, im Jahre dreiundzwanzig, als Hitler den ersten Versuch machte, Deutschland zu retten? (p. 257)

These remarks reveal that Ida holds the same reactionary views as other members of the conservative class to which she belongs. In her eyes, the fact that Gerte joined the NSDAP at such an early date is not a vice but a virtue. So too is his having being jailed for his participation in the so-called Beer-Hall Putsch of 1923. Moreover, it is telling that she chooses to refer to Hitler respectfully as 'der Führer' and describes his attempt to

overthrow the democratic republic as an attempt to 'save' Germany. Ida's favourable estimate of the Nazi state is a source of conflict between her husband and herself and it is quite clear, as she reveals to Fritz Gerte, that she would like Friedrich to drop his opposition activities:

> *IDA HALL*: Ich kann mir den Mund fußlich reden, er hört nicht auf mich. Er wird uns noch alle eines Tages ins Unglück stürzen mit seinem Fanatismus. Fritz, ich beschwöre Sie bei unserer Freundschaft, er versteht die Zeit nicht. (p. 251)

At this stage, Ida has neither the strength of conviction or character to want to defy the state. When Gerte threatens her with prison should she fail to order Christine to call off her marriage, she is willing to obey and reprimands her husband for his stubborn refusal to cooperate, describing him as an egotist who has no thought for the damage his actions may inflict upon his family. Ida's understanding of what constitutes true Christianity is at odds with Friedrich's, for he sees it as his Christian duty to speak out against injustice, irrespective of the consequences. On a number of occasions Ida criticises him for taking God's word too 'wörtlich' and complains that his dedication to preaching love and peace has almost driven them all over the edge of the precipice. 'Wenn das Christentum ist', she tells him, 'dann will ich lieber Heide sein'. Later on, in the concentration camp, she tries to persuade Friedrich to renounce his opposition and sign an oath of loyalty to Hitler. When he repeats the view that he has always rendered unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and 'so will ich es weiter halten' she pleads with him thus:

> *IDA HALL*: Sei nicht starrköpfig, Friedrich, ich flehe dich an, weißt du so genau, was Gottes und was des Kaisers ist? (p. 293)

In Ida's view there is an impenetrable barrier between matters spiritual and secular. Religious faith to her is a private affair and she would like to persuade her husband to

stay out of politics altogether. She knows, of course, that the Nazi regime represents the antithesis of Christ's teachings, but like so many Christians at that time, she uses this argument to justify her lack of opposition to Nazi atrocities. Like Werner, Ida believes it is possible to escape into a private sphere and so avoid any form of responsibility or blame for what is going on.

In Christine and Werner von Grotjahn Toller presents two very different responses to the challenges posed by the totalitarian state. Initially little interested in 'die dumme Politik', Christine is categorical in her support for her father and at the end of the play joins him in his opposition to the regime. Werner, by contrast, believes that he can turn his back on external events and seeks to draw a strict dividing line between public and private affairs. When it comes to the decisive moment he refuses to take Pastor Hall's side and leaves to take up a job in America without Christine. The collapse of Christine's and Werner's relationship is foreshadowed in the first act when, in a light-hearted manner, she tells the General of an argument she and Werner had over the apparently inconsequential question of how one should react if it were known that, 'morgen die Sonne erkaltet':

> *GENERAL VON GROTJAHN*: Eine zeitgemäße Frage.
> *CHRISTINE HALL*: Ich habe gesagt, ein solcher Mensch würde gefaßt und fröhlich sein und zärtlich zu seiner Frau.
> *PAUL VON GROTJAHN*: Und er?
> *CHRISTINE HALL*: Er sagte, es sei seine Pflicht als Astronom, die Ereignisse auf der Erde aufzuzeichnen, solange er dazu imstande wäre, für künftige Lebewesen. (p. 269)

The opposing outlooks expressed here seem unimportant at first sight, mere differences in character and temperament between Werner, the 'trockener' scientist, and the 'fröhliche' Christine. In fact, they turn out to be of great significance and condition their contrasting responses to the question of opposition to the state. Christine's reaction to the

news that her fate — all their fates — are in the hands of Fritz Gerte is simple and forthright: she will not bow down to blackmail. 'Wo es sich um mich und mein Leben handelt', Christine says, 'entscheide ich' and she tells her mother to let Gerte know that, 'er mir grenzenlos unsympathisch ist'. When her father asks her if she is prepared to accept all the consequences which flow from this she shows great determination answering simply, 'Ja, Papa, alle'. Where Werner is guided by cold, rational analysis, she reacts quite spontaneously to events allowing her feelings to tell her what is 'gut' and what is 'böse'. Werner's reaction shows that he is out of touch with reality, that he has simply not grasped the all-pervasive nature of the National Socialist state. For example, he asks what Gerte has against him, pointing out that he has never uttered a word against the *Führer*. It is Ida who tells him that he is a figure of suspicion in the eyes of the authorities because he has never spoken in favour of the regime and, moreover, because he is the son of his father. Werner's reply to this reveals the fundamentally reactionary nature of the so-called non-political attitude:

> *WERNER VON GROTJAHN*: Ich bin nicht wie Vater. Ich mache nicht mit, aber ich schimpfe nicht. Ich halte es mit den Engländern: Right or wrong my country. (p. 271)

Werner cannot see that there is no longer any room for impartiality or neutrality, and that his quietism as well as his attempt to differentiate between support for the regime and love for his country provide indirect support to the Nazis. When he asks how it is that the party is able to intervene in the private sphere, his father describes him as a 'verkappter Reaktionär', pointing out that, 'im totalen Staat gibt es nur eine private Affäre, den Tod'. To retreat into some imaginary private sphere, Toller is saying, is to surrender to tyranny for he who is not actively involved in the struggle against fascism is part of the problem itself.

Christine's and Werner's relationship illustrates that it is impossible to escape the immense influence of politics, that it is an illusion to imagine that one can avoid taking a stance. Politics has forced itself through the keyhole and is corroding the bonds between a man and woman. Werner and Christine go their separate ways not because they are no longer in love but because events have forced them to reconsider the foundation of their feelings for one another. Before her father's arrest Christine had scolded the others for continually talking about politics:

> *CHRISTINE HALL*: Ihr streitet immer nur um Worte und jeder meint was anderes. Ich weiß schon gar nicht mehr, was Ihr alle meint. (p. 274)

At this point, Christine could not have conceived that a difference of opinion on a political question could lead her to break off her engagement. Afterwards, she is of a different opinion:

> *CHRISTINE HALL*: An dem Abend, an dem sie Papa verhafteten, und Werner zu mir sagte, Papa sei wirklich unvorsichtig gewesen, und er hätte an die Leute denken sollen, die ihm die Briefe geschrieben haben, gabs mir einen Stich, es war gerade als wenn ein Fremder zu mir spräche. (p. 305)

Werner, she complains, had not only refused to support her father in his time of need, he had spoken of the injustice perpetrated against him as if he had been speaking about an 'astronomische Formel'. Christine now understands that there are situations 'wo man entscheiden muß, entweder für oder wider' and she denounces Werner's 'Objektivität' as heartless. In the last scene, when Friedrich goes to Church, Christine does make an effort to talk him out of what she correctly perceives to be suicide, but finally decides to accompany him, thus placing herself firmly on the side of the opposition.

Pastor Hall is a weak and unconvincing drama, the main weakness lying in its inverted portrait of German society under National Socialism, most manifest in the

description of the opposition to Hitler, a description which bears hardly any relation to reality. Keen to win middle-class opinion to the idea of the anti-fascist alliance, Toller set out to demonstrate that Hitler was the enemy not just of the revolutionary left, but of all those who were committed to freedom and civilisation. The opposition in his play, therefore, consists mainly of decent, respectable and educated members of Germany's middle classes, people who, though traditionally conservative and nationalist in outlook, opposed National Socialism because it represented the very antithesis of the cultural and social values they held dear. The problem here, however, was that, in reality, these people had been the most bitter opponents of the Weimar Republic and had turned in their millions to the NSDAP, seeing in Hitler the last great bulwark against atheistic Communism.[29] Toller, of course, with his keen political insight, knew better than most the precise social composition of National Socialism, but political expedience, his commitment to the *Volksfront*, obliged him to suppress this knowledge, thereby smothering his creativity and leading him to write such an unconvincing and insubstantial work.

1. The version of *Pastor Hall* used here is that reprinted in *GW*, III, 245-316. References to it are given in brackets after quotations in text.

2. *Pastor Hall. A Play in Three Acts* trans. by Stephen Spender and Hugh Hunt (London: The Bodley Head, 1938). *Pastor Hall* was rejected for performance in the USA on the grounds that the language of the English translation was archaic and unidiomatic. In a letter explaining his refusal, Barratt Clark, director of the Dramatists' Play Service, told Toller that at times he felt he was reading a dead language, adding that there was 'very little color in it and none or almost none of that lyric quality which I find in the original text of your other work'. Clark's letter is reprinted in *Der Fall Toller: Kommentar und Materialien* edited by Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1979), pp. 217-18.

3. *Stücke gegen den Faschismus: Deutschsprachige Autoren* (Munich: Henschel, 1970) pp. 137-180. It is interesting that *Pastor Hall*, the least revolutionary of Toller's dramas, is one of the few to have met with anything like a positive response from critics in the former DDR. In the *Nachwort* to the aforementioned volume, Karl Heinz Schmidt describes *Pastor Hall* as Toller's 'herausragendste Werk der Emigrationszeit', a play in which he 'führt seine antikapitalistische, kämpferisch humanistische Position früherer Stücke weiter zur großen Anklage gegen die deutsche Reaktion'. (*Ibid.*, p. 178) Whether or not *Pastor Hall* is a 'herausragendes' work is a matter of personal taste. Yet it is surely perverse to want to see in it an anti-capitalist tendency, for Toller avoids any form of class analysis of National Socialism and defines it instead in terms of its barbarism and the threat it poses to culture, freedom and democracy. Of course, this fitted perfectly with the *Volksfront* approach and was the reason why the play was welcomed by those usually so quick to denounce Toller for his failure to understand the reality of the class struggle.

4. Directed by Thomas Engel, this production opened on 24 January 1947 and had 33 performances. See John M. Spalek, *Ernst Toller and his Critics. A Bibliography* (Virginia: University of Virginia, 1968), p. 888.

5. Cecil Davies *The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), pp. 435-36.

6. The screen play was by Leslie Arliss, Anna Reiner and Haworth Bromley, with Wilfred Lawson in the lead role, Nova Pilbeam as Christine, Hall's daughter, Seymour Hicks as General von Grotjahn, and Marius Goring as Fritz Gerte. See *Der Fall Toller*, p. 237.

7. Richard Dove, *He was a German. A Biography of Ernst Toller* (London: Libris, 1990), p. 249.

8. William Anthony Willibrand *Ernst Toller and his Ideology*, (University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, Vol VII, Iowa City, 1945), p. 111.

9. Malcolm Pittock, *Ernst Toller*, (Boston: Twayne, 1979), pp. 139-40.

10. Wolfgang Rothe, *Ernst Toller in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1983), p. 115.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

12. The picture of Nazi Germany presented in the film version of *Pastor Hall* — for which, of course, Toller was not responsible — is even less convincing. It makes no effort whatsoever to examine the class nature of National Socialism and shows the opposition as consisting entirely of the educated middle classes, Hitler's working-class opponents — the most reliable and consistent — not even deemed worthy of mention. It also leaves the distinct impression that National Socialism was foreign to the German body politic, something imposed on an unwilling people from outside. For instance, the Nazi Stromtroopers stationed in the village where the action takes place do not seem like Germans but like the soldiers of an occupying force.

13. See Armin Boyens, *Kirchenkampf und Ökumene 1933-1939: Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Munich: Kaiser, 1969).

14. Hall is not intended as an exact portrait of any of these figures, but he was based on them, Toller having received information on the persecution of the churches under Hitler from a reliable first-hand source, the author Herman Borchardt, who was himself in a concentration camp, though luckily he was released and went into exile. Later, Borchardt threatened Toller with legal action over Pastor Hall, pointing to the material he had given him and claiming a clear case of plagiarism. See Dove, *He Was a German* (London: Libris, 1990) p. 263 and Georg Grosz, *Briefe 1913-1959*, edited by Herbert Kunst, (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979), pp. 275-79.

For an account of Niemöller's relationship with National Socialism see Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, Gerhard Schulz, *Die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung: Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftsytems in Deutschland 1933-34* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1974), pp. 326-47. On Barth and Bonhöffer, see Clarence Abercrombie, 'Barth and Bonhöffer: Resistance to the Unjust', *Religion and Life*, 42 (1973) pp. 344-60.

15. For a good account of the struggle of the Churches, both Catholic and Protestant, against the Nazi state see Friedrich Zipfel *Kirchenkampf in Deutschland 1933-1945: Religionsverfolgung und Selbstbehauptung der Kirchen in der nationalsozialistischen Zeit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co, 1965).

16. See Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die deutsche Diktatur: Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969), pp. 412-14.

17. On this see Niemöller himself in his autobiography, *Vom U-Boot zur Kanzel* (Berlin: Warneck, 1936).

18. In a joint proclamation of 20 November 1936 the Evangelical Bishops of the *Länder* declared:

> Wir stehen mit dem Reichskirchenausschuß hinter dem Führer im Lebenskampf des deutschen Volkes gegen den Bolschewismus [...] Wir werden unsere Gemeinden unermüdlich dazu aufrufen zum vollen Einsatz der christlichen Kräfte in diesem Kampf in der Gewißheit, daß damit dem deutschen Volk der wertvollste Dienst geleistet wird.

Quoted in Karlheinz Deschner *Mit Gott und den Faschisten. Der Vatikan im Bunde mit Mussolini, Franco, Hitler und Pavelić* (Stuttgart: Hans E. Günther, 1965), p. 176.

19. Klaus Mommach, *Widerstand 1933-1939: Geschichte der deutschen antifaschistischen Widerstandsbewegung im Inland und in der Emigration* (Berlin: Akademie, 1984), p. 140. The nature and limit of the opposition of the *Bekennende Kirche* to the Nazi state can be judged from the following quote from a report of the chairman of the organisation in Hannover from February 1936:

> Wir wiederholen es an dieser Stelle ausdrücklich, was wir unzählige Male seit dem Anbruch unseres nationalsozialistischen Staates öffentlich und feierlich erklärt haben: daß wir in Opferbereitschaft und Treue für diesen Staat einzutreten bereit sind. Die Glieder der Bekennenden Kirche haben es nicht an Bezeugungen in Wort und Tat fehlen lassen, daß sie diesem Staat kraft des ihm verliehenen Amtes der Obrigkeit mit Ehrerbietung und Einsatzbereitschaft unerbittlich in der Wahrheit gegenüberzutreten ehrlich gewillt sind und für selbstverständlich halten. Es ist also bis auf diese Stunde die Verdächtigung politischer Unzuverlässigkeit unbegründet und, von wo aus sie auch versucht werden sollte, nachdrücklich und feierlich abzuweisen.

Quoted in Wilhelm Niemöller *Die evangelische Kirche im dritten Reich: Handbuch des Kirchenkampfes* (Bielefeld: Bechauf, 1956), p. 48.

20. Mühsam was murdered in Oranienburg concentration camp North of Berlin in the summer of 1934. His captors tried to make his death look like suicide. A fellow prisoner reported:

> Am 9. Juli wurde Erich Mühsam zu dem neuen Lagerkommandanten des Konzentrationslagers Oranienburg, Eicke, gerufen. Kreideweiß kehrte er zu den Kameraden zurück. Eicke hatte ihm in aller Ruhe befohlen, sich binnen 48 Stunden zu erhängen. Einige Stunden später eröffnete man ihm, man wolle nicht länger warten, die Sache müsse bereits heute abend geschehen. Mühsam erhielt den Auftrag, abends nach 9 Uhr, d.h. zu einer Zeit wo die anderen Schutzhäftlinge bereits schlafen mußten, im Zimmer des Kommandanten zu erscheinen. Er kehrte nicht wieder zurück. Am nächsten Morgen war sein Strohsack leer. Beim Wecken fragte der SA-Mann 'Himmelstoß' auffälligerweise nach Mühsam. Als man ihm mitteilte, er sei nicht wiedergekommen, nahm er sich ein paar Gefangene und ging mit ihnen spornstreichs über den Hof zum Klosetthaus. Dort hing Erich Mühsam, tot, gelb, an einen Balken geknüpft, längst einer der Holzwände, die Abteil von Abteil trennen. Der Strick war mit einer Kunst geknüpft, wie sie dem manuell sprichwörtlich ungeschickten Mühsam niemand zutrauen konnte. Die Zunge hing nicht heraus, die Fäuste waren geballt. Kameraden hatten beobachtet, daß in der Nacht das Licht auf dem Hof zweimal aus- und wieder angegangen war.

See *Das Deutsche Volk klagt an: Hitlers Krieg gegen die Friedenskämpfer in Deutschland* editor unknown (Paris: Carrefour, 1936), pp. 244-45.

21. Toller told Mühsam's story on a number of occasions including in his speech 'Unser Kampf um Deutschland' at the *Deutscher Tag* in New York in early 1937. See *GW*, I, 198-209 (p. 204).

22. See Francis Ludwig Carsten *Reichswehr und Politik 1918-1933* (Cologne: Publisher, 1964).

23. See Alan Bullock, *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 248-49.

24. General Kurt von Schleicher, former *Reichswehrminister* and *Reichskanzler* was shot by Hitler's men in his villa in Berlin on the morning of 30 June 1934, while his close friend, General Kurt von Bredow, was executed that same evening. The only voices raised in protest in *Reichswehr* circles were those of General von Hammerstein and Field-Marshal von Mackensen. The rest of the Officer Corps was happy to swear total allegiance to the *Führer* only a few months after the Röhm affair, on August 2 1934. See Heinrich Bennecke, *Die Reichswehr und der Röhm-Putsch* (Munich: Olzog, 1964).

25. Cecil Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller. A Revaluation*, pp. 430-31.

26. Ulrich von Hassel, for instance, Ambassador in Rome until 1937, the man who organised contacts between the Goerdeler opposition group and leading industrialists, was one of the first to recognise the probable outcome of a war against the Soviet Union. In a statement from February 1940 he wrote:

> Es ist äußerst wichtig, diesen unsinnigen Krieg so schnell als möglich zu beenden. Diese Notwendigket besteht, weil die Gefahr immer größer wird, daß Europa vollkommen zerstört und vor allem bolschewisiert wird.

Quoted in Bodo Scheurig *Verrat hinter Stacheldraht? Das Nationalkomitee "Freies Deutschland" und der Bund deutscher Offiziere in der Sowjetunion 1943-1945* (Munich: Dtv, 1965) p. 39. Goerdeler himself, in a *Denkschrift* to the Generals in March 1943 on the necessity of a *coup*, wrote:

> Die beiden angelsächsichen Weltreiche haben wie Deutschland ein Lebensinteresse daran, daß der Bolschewismus nicht weiter nach Westen vordringt. Nur Deutschland kann den Bolschewismus aufhalten. Wenn Deutschland durch Kriegsverlust und ungünstigen Frieden geschwächt wird, dann findet der Bolschewismus leichteren, vielleicht allzu leichten Weg nach dem Westen. England hat ein Lebensinteresse daran, daß kein starkes Rußland aus dem Krieg hervorgeht ...

Scheurig pp. 170-96.

27. Here is Goerdeler again on the aims of his opposition group:

> Welche Ziele sind denn noch durch richtiges Handeln erreichbar? Der Bestand des Reiches in den Grenzen von 1914, vermehrt um Österreich und Sudetenland [...] erreichbar ist sogar noch die Wiedergewinnung Südtirols. [...] Dagegen ist der Zeitpunkt, Kolonien zu erwerben, verpaßt [...] Dagegen ist noch zu erreichen, daß man sich darauf einigt, nach einem gewissen Zeitraum im Rahmen der ostasiatischen Bereinigung und eines größeren Weltabkommens auch über die Beteiligung Deutschlands an Verwaltung und Besitz von Kolonien sich zu verständigen.

Scheurig, *Verrat hinter Stacheldraht*, pp. 170-96.

28. For figures on this see *Der Nationalsozialismus: Dokumente 1933-1945*, edited by Walter Hofer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1957) p. 23.

29. It is interesting that, in a sometimes penetrating analysis of *Pastor Hall*, Thorsten Unger does not discuss the question of the accuracy or otherwise of Toller's depiction of Nazi Germany, neither in respect of the attitude towards National Socialism of the Protestant Church nor of the military. See Thorsten Unger, 'Antifaschistischer Widerstand und kulterelle Erinnerung im exilpolitischen Drama: zu Ernst Tollers *Pastor Hall*, *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik* (New York, Berne and Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 289-315.

CONCLUSION

On 22 May 1939, just a few weeks after the end of the Spanish Civil War, Toller hung himself in the bathroom of his New York hotel room.[1] His death at the age of just 46 robbed the anti-fascist side of one of its most passionate, sincere and eloquent spokesmen and, to the delight of Hitler, Goebbels and consorts,[2] added one more prominent name to what would become a long list of suicides among the German exile community.[3] It is difficult to state with any degree of certainty whether or not there was any causal connection between events in Spain and Toller's suicide, for by the end of the nineteen-thirties, his psychological state — never entirely stable, especially after the experience of the First World War[4] — was showing increasing signs of the strains of life in exile.[5] Clearly, however, news of the collapse of the Spanish Republic was a severe blow, first and foremost a personal one, spelling as it did disaster for his relief campaign, with much of the aid he had so laboriously collected falling into Nationalist hands.[6] Franco's victory, however, was above all a political blow, one which laid bare to the whole world the hollowness at the heart of the *Volksfront*. During the Civil War itself, the Stalinists and their fellow travellers had, as we have shown, done their best to strangle the socialist revolution at birth: once the war was over, the liberal democracies in the West finally felt able to reveal where their true sympathies lay. On 1 April, just days after hostilities were officially concluded, the USA announced that it was recognising the Franco regime. Yet at least the White House had the decency to wait until the guns had fallen silent. Great Britain and France, those supposed bastions of democracy, had announced their recognition on February 27, a full month before the end of the war and at a time when the legitimate Republican government was still in control of almost two thirds of Spain.[7]

Did the West's duplicity over Spain along with what many saw as its betrayal of Czechoslovakia lead Toller to revise his attitude towards the *Volksfront*? While there are no written records which would justify such a conclusion, he must surely have asked

himself in his final days and weeks whether his appeals to the democracies to lend their support to the anti-fascist cause had not been so much wasted time and effort? Not without a great deal of inner resistance, Toller had managed to persuade himself that the imperialist leopard had changed its spots, that it was more interested in the defence of democracy than in the defence of its material interests. For the sake of the *Volksfront* he had abandoned his socialism, or, to be precise, put it into temporary abeyance until such times as the common enemy had been defeated. Events, however, had demonstrated that this was a hopeless illusion, and that while Toller and those like him were prepared to take leave of their fundamental beliefs, the ruling classes of the West were not. Prior to his becoming a champion of the *Volksfront*, Toller had viewed the struggle against fascism as part and parcel of the struggle against reaction in general and for socialism. Fascism to him was a product of the crisis in the capitalist-imperialist world system and could be defeated only by the working class brought together in a common organisation, an *Einheitsfront*. Subsequently he believed, or convinced himself he believed, that fascism could not be defeated without the help of those people he had once regarded as the class enemy, the enemy of the socialist movement of which he was a part.

Naturally, the mental contortions this demanded of him as a revolutionary politician — Spain being the prime example — were reflected in his creative work as well. Bourgeois critics always viewed Toller's plays as tendentious, in other words, as simple propaganda pieces. Closer inspection, however, reveals that this was not the case, that they do not present a clear-cut, black-and-white view of social reality, but deal in an honest way with what Toller felt were the most pressing problems facing the labour movement. Toller was, of course, a revolutionary socialist and every word he said or wrote was conditioned by this fact. Yet he always defended the right of the revolutionary artist to deal with political themes in his or her work, arguing that the view that art had

nothing to do with politics was itself a political stance. Irrespective of what one feels about Toller's earlier plays, whether or not they were good or bad artistically, at least one has the feeling that they really do express what he felt at the time, that he was not seeking to flatter this or that strand of opinion, but to give dramatic form only to his own artistic conception. It is much more difficult to say this about the plays he wrote in exile, *Nie wieder Friede* and *Pastor Hall*. In the former, supposedly an analysis of a fascist society, Toller clings stubbornly to his pacifism, but makes no reference whatever to socialism or the class struggle. Fascism is shown not so much as a product of capitalism but of irrationality and unreason. Above all, Toller's appeal here is not for an *Einheitsfront* in the face of the fascist danger, but for a broad coalition of all people of reason and good will. It is this, the lack of revolutionary content, which is the most manifest feature of this play, a play which bears hardly a trace of Toller's hand and might easily have been written by any pacifist, anti-fascist playwright. *Pastor Hall* is even more redolent of *Volksfront* ideology, with Toller seduced into presenting a picture of Nazi Germany, and in particular, of the nature of the forces opposed to Hitler which bears hardly any relation to reality. Of course, Toller, like any artist, enjoyed full artistic freedom and was perfectly entitled to present reality in any way that he saw fit. Yet the critic too is entitled to draw attention to the fact that the play does distort reality, in that it shows the anti-Nazi forces not as they were but as the supporters of the *Volksfront* wanted them to be. *Pastor Hall*, then, though apparently the least tendentious is, in fact, the most tendentious of any of Toller's works, the one which comes closest to being a simple piece of propaganda, in this case *Volksfront* propaganda.

Of course, like Toller the artist, Toller the politician was also entitled to change his mind. However, it is important to recognise that he did change his political views during his exile period, otherwise it is impossible to understand why he took the stance

he did on developments inside the Soviet Union and on Spain. Toller was only one of millions of people, one of millions of socialists, liberals and so-called progressives in general, who kept a discreet silence on the Moscow Show Trials and the purges, fearing that to speak out would damage the prestige of the Soviet Union, which was in their view, the most reliable, indeed the only, bulwark against National Socialism. It is possible to argue, of course, that circumstances left him with no real alternative, and that the defeat of fascism properly outweighed all other considerations. However, it is *not* possible to hold this view and at the same time to maintain that Toller was an ethical socialist, a humanist and pacifist who rejected the immoral, unethical doctrine allegedly advocated by Marxists, of the end justifying the means. In this case, Toller clearly felt that the end, the defence of the prestige of the Soviet Union, justified the means, silence on a series of crimes whose only aim was to protect the privileged position of a bureaucratic elite which had usurped and besmirched the name of Bolshevism. Moreover, it simply is not true to argue that the left had no alternative but to support Stalinism in that period. The example of George Orwell for one shows that there was an alternative. He was as sincerely and actively committed to socialism as Toller but, unlike him, did not feel that this obliged him to unconditional support for the Soviet Union or the *Volksfront*.[8] On the contrary, after his experience in Spain, when he witnessed the struggle of the masses to make a revolution and the attempts by the Communists and their agents to prevent it,[9] he believed that the idea of socialism would make no progress until the cancer of Stalinism had been burnt out from the international workers' movement.[10] It is to Toller's credit that he did not become an apologist for Stalin's monstrous regime. Yet it is impossible not to be struck by the fact that a man whose whole life had been dedicated to a decent and humane from of socialism — what might later have been called 'socialism with a human face'— did not see that nothing good could come of the actions

of the KGB and its agents. This, of course, does not mean that Toller and his works have to be condemned or rejected, but it does mean that it is no longer possible to portray him, as some critics have done in the past, as a saint.[11]

1. Erwin Piscator, Toller's one-time artistic collaborator, described the circumstances surrounding the suicide. Having gone to take lunch at 12 o'clock, Toller's secretary, returned an hour later to complete the packing of his suitcases, he being due to set sail for Europe that very day:

> Als die Sekretärin zurückkam, packte sie ruhig weiter, bis auf unerklärliche Weise plötzlich ein unangenehmes Gefühl sie beschlich. Sie öffnete die Schranktür — da war nichts. Die Badezimmertür — sie war schwer zu öffnen — als sie stärker drückte, baumelte in der Öffnung ein Arm. Ernst hatte sich am Gürtel seines Bademantels aufgehängt, war auf einen Stuhl gestiegen, war dann aber, als er sich von dem Stuhl abstieß, anscheinend gefallen, so daß er jetzt auf dem Stuhle saß. Die Schnur hatte ihn nicht erwürgt, sondern ihm das Genick gebrochen, so daß er also einen schönen und "glücklichen" Tod gehabt zu haben scheint.
> Es gibt Leute, die meinen, daß er ermordert worden sei. Diese fußen auf Untersuchungen vor dem Dies-Committee, wo ein verhafteter Nazi ausgesagt hatte, daß eine hiesige Gruppe eine Selbstmordwelle unter den Emigranten entfesseln will, und Toller sei das erste Opfer gewesen. Man wird nicht recht klug daraus. Seine Sekretärin sagt, das sei nicht möglich, da man nicht mehr in das Badezimmer hinein, noch hinaus konnte. Der Stuhl und der Körper versperrten den Weg so, daß kein Raum für einen anderen Menschen da war.

Erwin Piscator, *Zeittheater. Das politische Theater und weitere Schriften von 1915-1966*, edited by Manfred Brauneck and Peter Stertz (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), pp. 138-39. See also Kurt Pinthus, 'Life and death of Ernst Toller' in *Books Abroad*, 14, no. 1, (1940), pp. 3-8 (p. 3).

2. Surprising moderation was shown by the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger*, which wrote on 23 May, the day after Toller's death:

> Der berüchtigte kommunistische Schriftsteller und Verfasser von zahlreichen Hetzstücken, Ernst Toller, hat jetzt die Konsequenz aus seinem verpfuschten Leben gezogen. In New York, wohin er im Laufe seines Emigrantenlebens verschlagen worden ist, hat er sich in einem Hotel erhängt.

Der Stürmer, however, could not disguise its glee, writing a completely garbled article under the title, 'Jud Ernst Toller hat sich aufgehängt':

> Der jüdische Schriftsteller Ernst Toller war einer der gefährlichsten Agenten des Kommunismus. Vor 1933 "dichtete" er in Deutschland in deutscher Sprache. Bei der Machtübernahme durch den Nationalsozialismus flüchtete er nach England und heiratete dort eine 18jährige Schauspielerin, Miß Lili Randoff. In letzter Zeit wohnte er in einem Hotel in Neuyork. In seinem Hotelzimmer hat er sich nun aufgehängt. So fand ihn sein Sekretär vor, als er am Morgen das Zimmer seines Herrn betrat.

Quoted by Dieter Distl in *Ernst Toller. Eine politische Biographie* (Schrobenhausen:

Benedikt Bickel, 1993), p. 177.

3. One of the first to take his own life was, of course, Kurt Tucholsky, in 1935, while Stefan Zweig would add his name to the list in 1942.

4. Alfred Döblin describes the psychological state Toller was in when he met him at a Pen-Congress in New York in 1933:

> Er [Toller] zog mich sofort aus dem Saal heraus und berichtete draußen, wie es ihm ging, tobte er oder klagte er? Er sagte, er appelliere an mich als Arzt, der ja auch schreibe und darum besser verstehen müsse, wie es sich mit ihm verhielt. Ich wußte schon, als er mich durch den Saal zog, er befand sich in einem psychotischen Zustand, nicht dem ersten, der ihn befallen hatte.

Alfred Döblin, *Autobiographische Schriften und letzte Aufzeichnungen*, edited by Edgar Paessler (Freiburg: Olten, 1980), p. 474.

5. The strains of exile life had proved too much for Toller's marriage which had broken up the previous year with Christiane going to Hollywood to pursue her acting career and Toller devoting all his energies to his relief campaign for Spain. See *Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist. Christiane Grautoffs Autobiographie -ihr Leben mit Ernst Toller*, edited by Werner Fuld and Albert Ostermaier (Bonn: Weidle, 1996), pp. 123-27. Critics and friends of Toller's have long speculated on the precise reasons for his suicide. Kurt Pinthus, for instance, seems to think it was mainly prompted by political disappointments:

> Toller left only a few miserable dollars. Was his poverty the reason for his death? Was it his unhappy marriage to a talented actress, 25 years his junior, who was just as disappointed in him as he was in her? — Here the word "disappointment"occurs for the first time ... and this word, in manifold meanings drove him to his death.
> His life was a chain of disappointments, yet he always remained faithful to the fight for democracy and liberty. But finally he believed that his cause was lost — the cause for which he had sacrificed his whole existence, his health, again and again his savings, and at times his freedom.

Kurt Pinthus, 'Life and Death of Ernst Toller', p. 3. Döblin, however, sees psychological factors as having been most important:

> Hatte ihn der Jammer der Zeit umgebracht, lag sein Fall so wie der von Stefan Zweig? Sein psychotischer Zustand gibt die Antwort. Später erfuhr ich noch, was er mir verschwiegen hatte, daß er bei einem amerikanischen Arzt in Behandlung stand, der bei ihm eine Schockbehandlung versuchte, ein ungeheuer leichtsinniges und fahrlässiges Unternehmen.

Döblin, *Autobiographische Schriften*, p. 475. Whatever the case may be, the fact that Toller was in a state of deep depression was clear to all who had anything to do with him at that time. Fritz Landshoff, for instance, writes:

> Ich war bestürtzt über Tollers Zustand. Er war in einer tiefen Depression.

> Seine Augen entbehrten jeglichen Glanzes, seine Stimme war fast tonlos. Ich schlug ihm vor, mit mir gemeinsam nach Europa zurückzukehren, in der Hoffnung, daß ein völliger Szenenwechsel vielleicht eine Veränderung seines Zustandes bewirken würde. Toller ging zu meiner Freude auf meinen Vorschlag ein, und wir nahmen sogleich eine gemeinsame Kajüte auf der "Champlain", die Ende Mai nach Europa fahren sollte. Ungefähr zehn Tage vor der geplanten Abreise erkrankte ich an einer Fischvergiftung. Am nächsten Tag rief ich Toller von meinem Hotel aus an, er kam sofort und verbrachte mehrere Stunden bei mir. Er war in der gleichen tiefernst-melancholischen Stimmung, in der ich ihn seit meiner Ankunft gesehen hatte. Obgleich ich bereits daran zweifelte, von der recht schweren Vergiftung schnell geheilt zu sein, erwähnte ich nichts von der möglichen Notwendigkeit, den Termin unserer Reise aufzuschieben. Er verließ mich mit dem Versprechen, mich in den allernächsten Tagen wieder aufzusuchen. Am andern Abend besuchte mich Arnold Zweig, der gerade für kurze Zeit in New York war, und eröffnete die Unterhaltung mit der Frage: "Was sagen Sie zu Toller?" Ich erwiderte, daß er am Vortage bei mir gewesen sei, Darauf er: "Aber wissen Sie denn nicht, daß Toller sich heute mittag in seinem Zimmer erhängt hat?"

Fritz Landshoff, *Amsterdam, Keizersgracht 333: Querido Verlag: Erinnerungen eines Verlegers* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), p. 118. On Toller's suicide see also Landhoff's article 'Ernst Toller. Eine Radiosendung', *Germanic Notes*, 15, (1984), 41-42.

6. See Jürgen Serke, 'Ernst Toller: Opfergang für die Vision vom gütigen Menschen', in *Die verbrannten Dichter. Berichte, Texte, Bilder einer Zeit*, edited by Jürgen Serke (Weinheim: Beltz and Gelberg, 1978), pp. 6-21 (p. 21).

7. The refugees who fled Spain for France were held for long periods in concentration camps, conditions in these being so bad that many thousands, among them the poet Antonio Machado, died either of injuries they had already sustained or of neglect. See George Lichtheim, *Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Cardinal, 1974), p. 297.

8. Reviewing *Union Now* by Clarence K. Streit, a book which championed the formation of the kind of anti-fascist block Toller had long advocated, Orwell wrote that the very idea of such a front smelled of 'hypocrisy and self-righteousness', explaining that if Streit's scheme were put into action the:

> British and French empires, with their six hundred million disenfranchised human beings, would simply be receiving fresh police forces; the huge strength of the USA would be behind the robbery of India and Africa. Mr Streit is letting cats out of bags, but *all* phrases like 'Peace Bloc', 'Peace Front', etc. contain some such implication; all imply a tightening up of the existing structure. The unspoken clause is always 'not counting niggers'. For how can we make a 'firm stand' against Hitler if we are simultaneously weakening ourselves at home? In other words, how can we 'fight fascism' except by bolstering up a far vaster injustice?

It was precisely this point, of course, which Toller and all the other advocates of the *Volksfront* and a 'coalition of the democracies' against Hitler refused to address. George Orwell, 'Not Counting Niggers', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of*

George Orwell, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), I, 434-38, (p. 437). First published in the *Adelphi*, July 1939.

9. See George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1937).

10. In a preface to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal Farm*, Orwell wrote that for the past ten years he had been convinced that 'the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement'. See *Collected Essays*, III, 458. For a more detailed comparison of Toller and Orwell, in particular on their respective attitudes towards the Spanish Civil War, see John Fotheringham,'George Orwell and Ernst Toller: The Dilemma of the Politically Committed Writer', *Neophilologus* (forthcoming).

11. Michael Ossar, for instance, writing in praise of Toller's ethical and political beliefs, in particular the belief that 'man must change radically and profoundly within himself or unavoidably suffer disaster', describes him as 'a saintly man, a German George Orwell, a German Eustache de Saint-Pierre'. Michael Ossar, *Anarchism in the Dramas of Ernst Toller*, (New York: Albany, 1980), pp. 13-14.

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