1993

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San Jose State University

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.rdpn-zdc4>
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German history**

Domenici, Paul J., M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106

OVERCOMING THE PAST:
WOLFGANG J. MOMMSEN AND
THE WRITING OF GERMAN HISTORY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Paul J. Domenici
May 1993

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Irma Eichhorn

Prof. Irma Eichhorn

Charles Kesperich

Dr. Charles Kesperich

John Wintterle

Dr. John Wintterle

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

M. Lou Lewandowski

ABSTRACT

OVERCOMING THE PAST: WOLFGANG J. MOMMSEN AND THE WRITING OF GERMAN HISTORY

by Paul J. Domenici

This thesis analyzes the historiographical works of Wolfgang J. Mommsen in light of recent debates within the German historical community. These controversies illustrate a central problem in the post-war era, namely, the treatment of Hitler and National Socialism within the larger context of German history. The study examines the issue of continuity in relation to Mommsen's writings on Max Weber's political philosophy, the Fischer Controversy, and the idea of a German Sonderweg.

The study demonstrates that Mommsen's works exhibit a balanced appraisal of the German past while exemplifying the importance of impersonal social forces and individuals in history. Mommsen acknowledges the existence of certain continuities but cautions against viewing German history as a straight line stretching from Bismarck to Hitler.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several people have assisted me in the preparation of this thesis. I am most indebted to Irma Eichhorn for being the first reader. Her constructive criticism, constant encouragement and advice have benefitted me every step of the way. I am especially thankful for her generous commitment of time.

I also wish to thank Charles Keserich and John Wintterle, second and third readers, respectively, for their time and effort in critiquing my work. Their stylistic and contextual comments have been very helpful. Needless to say, any inaccuracies which might remain are my responsibility alone.

Thanks are also in order to all of my other professors at San Jose State University--Robin Brooks, Ursula Moessner, Stan Underdal and David McNeil--for their encouragement and for the knowledge that I derived from their courses. Along these lines, I am deeply grateful to Irma Eichhorn and John Wintterle, whom I have gotten to know best over the past few years. In their own ways, they have demonstrated by personal example the qualities of outstanding teachers and mentors.

I would like to thank the staff at Inter-Library Loan

for securing much-needed source materials. Similarly, I am grateful to Stanford University for the privilege of the use of Hoover and Green Libraries.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their patience during the course of this project. I especially want to thank my wife, Regina, for her criticisms and comments regarding the various chapters, and her unceasing encouragement and support. As a result of her efforts, she too has developed a deep admiration for Wolfgang J. Mommsen.

PREFACE

The history of German historiography is a part of a general German history. It is not a history in itself but rather touches general and social relationships at every point.

Eckart Kehr (1902-33)

This thesis examines the historical works of Wolfgang J. Mommsen in light of certain controversies that have arisen within the West German historical community since the 1960s. These debates stemmed from a central problem in the post-war era, namely, the treatment of Hitler and National Socialism within the larger context of German history. Should the Third Reich be viewed as a culmination of deeply-ingrained German traditions or an aberration, a European phenomenon rather than a specifically German one? The challenge of coming to grips with the recent past touched a nerve in every West German historian, and consequently the entire historical community became involved in the debates. For this reason, an understanding of West German historians in general, and Mommsen in particular, must begin with an understanding of these controversies.

At the onset of the 1960s, West German historiography

was defined by a statist, conservative paradigm¹ which had been entrenched since the early years of the twentieth century. As a result, West German historians eschewed most methodological innovations evolving at that time (e.g., social history). But within a generation, all this had changed. The monolithic paradigm was toppled, largely due to the efforts of Mommsen and other leading members of the then younger generation of West German historians. The community gradually opened up to new ideas, and West German historical writing became a pluralistic, international discipline.

This transformation made the past several decades an exciting time for students of German history. When the idea for this thesis was initially suggested to me (in an undergraduate methodology class some years ago), it seemed perfect because I have always been interested in German histo-

¹The word "paradigm" is used throughout this thesis in Thomas Kuhn's sense. He defined it as "... universally recognized achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners." Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), viii. Paradigms provide a common language for a community and are a manifestation of the shared knowledge of a group. The meaning of Kuhn's concept for history poses specific questions. To what extent can a paradigm function as a methodological postulate in disciplines other than natural sciences? What are the normative implications of Kuhn's theory for the attempt to improve the quality of knowledge that historians produce? The relevance of the paradigm theory is explored in detail in David A. Hollinger, "T.S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and its Implications for History," American Historical Review 78(April 1973): 370-93.

riography. As I began my research, I quickly was overwhelmed by the prolific amount that Mommsen has written on a number of topics. An indefatigable author, he has published on German history (all periods), British history, comparative studies, European history, imperialism and historiography. In addition, Mommsen is widely recognized as a leading authority on Max Weber.

Because of the enormous amount of material available, I chose to limit my investigation to Mommsen's writings dealing with Weber's political philosophy, the "Fischer Controversy" and the debate about the German Sonderweg, the common denominator being Imperial Germany.² Even within

²There is a useful summary of all the various debates in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," in Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives, ed. Juergen Habermas, trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1984), 231-41. Mention should be made of the most recent controversy, the so-called Historikerstreit. The "historians' conflict" centers upon "... whether Nazi crimes were unique, a legacy of evil in a class by themselves, irreparably burdening any concept of German nationhood, or whether they are comparable to other national atrocities, especially Stalinist terror." Charles S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1. Maier's book provides an excellent introduction to the controversy. A shorter, but still sufficient, treatment of the topic may be found in Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation, 2d ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 150-91, and Konrad H. Jarausch, "Removing the Nazi Stain? The Quarrel of the German Historians," German Studies Review 12(May 1988): 285-301. The literature on the Historikerstreit is enormous. Extensive bibliographical references are contained in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit"

this limited framework, I was able to treat certain topics (e.g., imperialism) only in an ancillary manner. The reader, however, will find an extensive listing of Mommsen's works in the bibliography.

Having limited the topic, I then tackled the problem of organization. A chronological approach was not possible because Mommsen's works overlap and encompass nearly a thirty-five year period. I therefore settled on a topical scheme, in spite of certain pitfalls (e.g., unavoidable repetition, which I have tried to minimize).

Chapter One outlines Mommsen's professional career and pertinent biographical information. The aim here is to illustrate the influences and events which have not only molded his standpoint as an historian but also determined the direction of his work. The chapter is also intended to provide a rationale for this thesis, in the sense that Mommsen's professional achievements have been staggering and he arguably has done more than any other West German historian to make the discipline a truly international one.

(Munich: Piper, 1988), 212ff. and Richard J. Evans, In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989). For Mommsen's views, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Weder Leugnen noch Vergessen befreit von der Vergangenheit: Die Harmonisierung des Geschichtsbildes gefaehrdet die Freiheit," in Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung, Serie Piper (Munich: Piper, 1987), 300-21.

A lifelong interest of Mommsen has been the study of Max Weber. Chapter Two analyzes his writings that deal with Weber's political tenets. Contrary to the then accepted view of Weber (to perceive him as a precursor of German democracy), Mommsen depicted him as having simultaneously embraced liberal and nationalistic ideals. His balanced appraisal of Weber's dichotomous thought constituted an important first step among West German historians to view their past in a critical fashion.

The polemical works of Fritz Fischer also spurred the development of this trend. Chapter Three looks at the "Fischer Controversy" in German history, the debate about Imperial German war aims. Mommsen's intermediate position is assessed in light of the extreme theses of Fischer and Gerhard Ritter. The significance of the controversy stemmed from its impact upon subsequent historical research involving continuities in German history (e.g., antecedents of National Socialism present in Imperial Germany).

Chapter Four explores the debate regarding the German Sonderweg, the unique pattern of historical development which facilitated the rise of Hitler. Hans-Ulrich Wehler led the defense of the Sonderweg in West Germany against an attack headed by Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn, two British social historians. Integrating valid points from both sides of the debate, Mommsen constructed a persuasive

compromise position advocating a qualified acceptance of the Sonderweg. Although quite different in context and methodology than the "Fischer Controversy," the Sonderweg continues the debate that the former precipitated: must the Third Reich be seen as an integral part of German history?

The intent of Chapter Five is to examine briefly the current pluralistic paradigm of German historical writing and Mommsen's place in it. This chapter discusses the dominant themes which have shaped his research and attempts to assess Mommsen's standpoint and legacy in the writing of German history.

The last three decades have witnessed the disintegration of the statist, conservative West German historical paradigm. Perhaps change was inevitable, but historians such as Wolfgang J. Mommsen certainly expedited the process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

THE "SHAPING" OF WOLFGANG J. MOMMSEN

The national state can no longer be the exclusive and undisputed norm of our political activities. We must overcome, once and for all, the impulse to view the power of our own national state as an ultimate ideal.

Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber und die deutsche Politik (1959)

Since 1945, West German historians have grappled with an especially compelling problem--to determine the place of Hitler and National Socialism in history. During the immediate post-war era (1945-60), they confronted the idea of having been "... silent witnesses or unwitting accomplices to the atrocities of the Third Reich."¹ The dominant, older members of the historical community maintained that the recent past constituted an aberration in Germany's historical tradition. A younger group of West German historians, emerging during the 1960s, soon challenged this position. Unlike their venerable colleagues, they felt no responsi-

¹Theodore S. Hamerow, "Guilt, Redemption, and Writing German History," American Historical Review 88(February 1983): 64.

bility for Hitler and had no emotional stake in the recent past. Inspired by a nascent West German historiographical trend (Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung--coming to grips with and overcoming the past),² the younger historians preferred to view their history in a critical manner.³ Perhaps no member of this generation of historians has confronted the specter of the past more successfully than Wolfgang J. Mommsen, whose writings reveal a balanced appraisal of the German past while exemplifying the importance of impersonal social forces and individuals in history. Instead of either condemning or exonerating the German nation for the rise of National Socialism, Mommsen has opted for a middle ground that most nearly succeeds in viewing the past in a critical fashion.

The task of assigning Hitler a place in history has produced an unending deluge of books and scholarly articles. Unable (or perhaps unwilling) to resolve differences in interpretations, West German historians have become embroiled in several controversies since the 1960s which

²Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation, 2d ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 1; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," in Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives, ed. Juergen Habermas, trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1984), 229.

³Roger Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and its Critics," German Studies Review 7(October 1984): 464-65.

generate interest even today. In order to appreciate the impact these debates have had upon West German historiography (and Mommsen's research in particular), one must understand the monolithic historical paradigm which governed the discipline until the 1960s.⁴

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Prussian School was the dominant historical group in Germany. Its members had been effective in mobilizing the nation to accept the victory of Bismarck and Prussia in German unification. The Prussian School subsequently aimed at solidifying the idea of a Prussian-dominated Germany in the minds of its subjects.⁵

By the turn of the century, a rival school of historians had emerged. This group objected to the Prussian School's glorification of Bismarck's Prussia and wanted to establish a state-oriented, German historiographical tradition. Members of this school looked back to Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) as the supreme historical authority.⁶

⁴For a detailed analysis of the evolution of historical thought in Germany, see Georg G. Iggers, The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present, rev. ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

⁵John A. Moses, The Politics of Illusion: The Fischer Controversy in German Historiography (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975), 12-13.

⁶Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Ranke and the Neo-Rankean School in Imperial Germany: State-Oriented Historiography as a Stabilizing Force," in Leopold von Ranke and the

The Neo-Rankeans, as this group came to be called, espoused Ranke's "... orientation in history which combined the critical examination of evidence with the narrative reconstruction of a course of events."⁷ The basic unit of historical development was the state, whose function was to assert power and overcome opposition to its existence.⁸ Closely related was the Neo-Rankeans' belief in the supremacy of national interests and foreign affairs over domestic considerations.⁹

During the Weimar Era, the Neo-Rankean ideal of a powerful state dominated the writing of German history.

Shaping of the Historical Discipline, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 124; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Historical Study in Western Germany," in Historical Study in the West, Boyd C. Shafer et.al. (New York: Meredith, 1968), 84.

⁷Georg G. Iggers, New Directions in European Historiography, rev. ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 12.

⁸Mommsen, "Ranke and the Neo-Rankean School," 125-26; Mommsen, "Historical Study in Western Germany," 83-84; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, ed., Leopold von Ranke und die moderne Geschichtswissenschaft (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 1-10.

⁹Mommsen, "Ranke and the Neo-Rankean School," 132-39. Mommsen has questioned the Neo-Rankean claim to have been Ranke's legitimate heirs. Their "objective" history was tainted by adulation of Imperial Germany and disdain of the Weimar Republic. Mommsen argued that the Neo-Rankeans had misconstrued Ranke's notion of the state to justify their position. The state embodied more than power to Ranke; it also represented a particular national culture. The influence of Ranke is discussed further in Chapter Four.

The trend was for historians to cultivate public opinion favorably towards the "happy days" of Imperial Germany and denounce the Weimar Republic as an alien system which the victorious powers had imposed upon Germans.¹⁰ There were historians who opposed this line of thought, but they remained a minority. Most of them were ostracized by the mainstream historical community and later forced to emigrate after the National Socialists assumed power in 1933 (usually settling in the United States).¹¹ Writing in a new environment and with a fresh perspective, historians such as Hans Rothfels (1891-1976) and Hajo Holborn (1902-84) began to bridge the German and Anglo-Saxon historical traditions. They also provided a much-needed counterbalance to the conservative, statist Neo-Rankean methodology which would remain unchallenged until the 1960s.¹²

Such was the state of German historical writing when Wolfgang J. Mommsen was born, on 11 November 1930 in Marburg-an-der-Lahn. He is the great-grandson of Theodor

¹⁰Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "German Historiography during the Weimar Republic and the Emigré Historians," in An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 32.

¹¹Ibid., 32-33. A notable émigré historian was Eckart Kehr (1902-33), whose "primacy of domestic policy" thesis greatly influenced the work of Hans-Ulrich Wehler. See below, Chapter 4.

¹²Mommsen, "German Historiography during the Weimar Republic," 32-37.

Mommsen (1817-1903), whose History of Rome still endures as a definitive work of ancient history. Mommsen's father, Wilhelm (1892-1968), was a professor of History at Marburg University. His writings include Versagen des deutschen Buerkertums (1949) and Stein-Ranke-Bismarck (1959).

During the 1920s, Wilhelm Mommsen was an active member of the Deutsche Demokratische Partei (DDP). He met his future wife, Marie Iken, while giving a lecture for the DDP in Bremen. When Hitler came to power, Mommsen's father outwardly accepted National Socialism because he feared losing his job. Mommsen, and his twin brother Hans,¹³ therefore grew up very much within the existing system (both of them, for example, became members of the Jungvolk).¹⁴

Mommsen's father got into serious difficulties after 1945. Due to an alleged engagement with National Socialism, he eventually lost his professorship at Marburg University. Because the family soon was in extreme financial straits, he was initially against Mommsen's decision to enter the historical profession in the 1950s.¹⁵

The problem facing the West German historical

¹³Hans Mommsen is a noted German historian whose field is twentieth-century Germany, particularly the era of the Third Reich.

¹⁴Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Munich, to Paul J. Domenici, San Jose, 24 February 1993. The Jungvolk was an organization for youngsters from ages ten to fifteen.

¹⁵Mommsen, to Domenici, 24 February 1993.

community at this time was an apparently unbridgeable rift between past and present. All of the positive traditions of German history appeared to have disintegrated. Where was there firm ground on which historical re-examination might begin?¹⁶

Mommsen recently has observed that Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954) and Gerhard Ritter (1888-1967) first recognized the need for a new historical orientation.¹⁷ In The German Catastrophe, Meinecke called for "... a thorough revision, in order to differentiate between the assets and liabilities of our history."¹⁸ At the first German historical conference after World War II in 1949, Ritter similarly pleaded for "... a trenchant, critical examination of our traditions...."¹⁹ But despite their intentions, Meinecke and Ritter were unable to liberate themselves from past historical and historiographical (i.e., statist, conservative) beliefs. Their assessments of the recent past assumed an

¹⁶Mommsen, "Historical Study in Western Germany," 122-23.

¹⁷Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Schlussbetrachtungen: Zur Veraenderung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in den sechziger Jahren," in Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (1945-1965), ed. Ernst von Schulin (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1989), 286-88.

¹⁸Quoted in *ibid.*, 286; Friedrich Meinecke, The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections, trans. Sidney B. Fay (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 5.

¹⁹Quoted in Mommsen, "Schlussbetrachtungen," 286.

apologetic stance which tended to criticize Hitler from a conservative rather than a democratic standpoint.²⁰ Both Meinecke and Ritter emphasized that the ideological basis of National Socialism stemmed from Western Europe (i.e., the movement had been the heir of mass politics and a totalitarian version of democracy and nationalism) rather than Germany.²¹

Mommsen concluded that their efforts amounted to little more than "... a sort of intellectual crusade in order to rescue German history from what appeared to be a wholesale condemnation... [which was] the dominant line of thought in much Western history writing about Germany after 1945...."²² Mommsen turned away from the traditional methodology that prevailed in West Germany when he began his professional training, opting for a fresh approach in which "... the concept of the nation is no longer regarded as the guiding idea for historical thought, but is

²⁰Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism: Recent Trends in West German Historiography," Storia della Storiografia 11(November 1987): 105; Meinecke, The German Catastrophe, 1-7; Gerhard Ritter, "The Fault of Mass Democracy," in The Nazi Revolution: Germany's Guilt or Germany's Fate, ed. John Snell (Boston: Heath, 1959), 76-84.

²¹Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 105; Hamerow, "Guilt, Redemption, and Writing German History," 62-63.

²²Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 105.

subjected to a critical, comparative analysis... in European and non-European development and related to social movements."²³ At the very least, he was drawn towards the idea of writing history away from national lines.

Rather than studying under one of the older, conservative historians, Mommsen decided to earn his doctorate at the University of Cologne. Quite by chance, he came into contact with Theodor Schieder (1908-84) when he arrived there in 1953.²⁴ Deeply moved by the catastrophe of National Socialism and defeat in 1945, Schieder too had been cognizant of the need for a re-examination of German intellectual, political and historiographical traditions.²⁵ But unlike Meinecke and Ritter, Schieder rejected the narrative, statist, "objective" methodology which had been dominant since the early twentieth century. He saw the inevitability of subjectivity in the historical process, the influence of the historian's standpoint in assessing the past.²⁶

²³Mommsen, "Historical Study in Western Germany," 124.

²⁴Mommsen, to Domenici, 24 February 1993.

²⁵Mommsen, "Schlussbetrachtungen," 290; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Vom Beruf des Historikers in einer Zeit beschleunigten Wandels. Theodor Schieders historiographisches Werk," Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte 33(Juli 1985): 388.

²⁶Ibid., 389.

Perhaps most importantly, according to Mommsen, Schieder worked toward giving the writing of German history a new direction. He cited Jacob Burckhardt (1818-97) as having written history free from the influence of politics and ideology of a nationalistic type.²⁷ Schieder's belief in a universal human history led him away from a concern with individual cultures and states. He pleaded for an opening of the historical profession to comparative studies, social history, and a recognition of the power of impersonal social forces in history (e.g., imperialism and industrialization).²⁸

Mommsen has acknowledged the profound influence that Schieder exerted upon him, both in terms of his methodological convictions and research guidance.²⁹ Schieder helped pave the way for the new generation of historians, such as Mommsen and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, to widen the horizon of history, both by systematically examining society and by transcending the nationalist approach (either by writing German history in a comparative perspective or by

²⁷Ibid., 392-94.

²⁸See, for example, Theodor Schieder, "Grundfragen der neuen deutschen Geschichte," Historische Zeitschrift 192(Februar 1961): 1-16; Theodor Schieder, "Strukturen und Personalitäten in der Geschichte," Historische Zeitschrift 195(Oktober 1962): 265-96.

²⁹Mommsen, "Theodor Schieders Historiographisches Werk," 389.

writing history from a European vantage point). Schieder singled out Max Weber (1864-1920) as a pivotal intellectual figure whose writings foreshadowed these ideas.³⁰ Because of this (and for reasons discussed below in Chapter 2), Mommsen chose Weber as the topic of his doctoral dissertation. Mommsen's research became the basis of his first book, which he published after receiving his Ph.D. in 1958.³¹

In 1959, Mommsen became a research assistant at Cologne. Later in the same year, he received a grant for post-doctoral research at the University of Leeds, England. Mommsen originally had planned to do a comparative study of German and British liberalism in light of their respective attitudes toward imperialism. He never completed this project, but he did substantial work on British liberalism and imperialism in the nineteenth century.³² The direct result of this research was a small book examining the impact of imperialism upon the rise of nationalism in Egypt.³³

³⁰Mommsen, "Schlussbetrachtungen," 290; Mommsen, "Theodor Schieders Historiographisches Werk," 395-96.

³¹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920 (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1959).

³²Mommsen, to Domenici, 24 February 1993.

³³Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Imperialismus in Aegypten: Der Aufstieg der aegyptischen nationalen Bewegung, 1805-1956 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1961).

During the 1961-62 academic year, Mommsen was a visiting professor at Cornell University in New York. He received this position largely through the efforts of Felix Gilbert, an emigré historian who then was at Cornell. Mommsen taught a course on European intellectual history and a seminar in historiography.

As had been the case in England, Mommsen was exposed to Western cultural, political and intellectual traditions during his stay at Cornell. These British and American influences significantly affected Mommsen's intellectual development by solidifying his liberal views and strengthening his belief "in a fundamentalist version of democracy."³⁴

After returning to Cologne in 1962, Mommsen resumed his duties as a research assistant. He also began to work on his Habilitationsschrift (a second dissertation), a necessary step in earning a chair in history at a German university. Mommsen completed this in 1967 (an examination of Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and the problem of political leadership on the eve of World War I) and became a Professor of Modern History at the University of Duesseldorf in 1968.³⁵

³⁴Mommsen, to Domenici, 24 February 1993.

³⁵Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Bethmann Hollweg und das Problem der politischer Fuehrung, 1909-1914" (Habilitationsschrift, University of Cologne, 1967).

Over the next decade, Mommsen settled into his position at Duesseldorf. He published an impressive array of books and articles, establishing a solid reputation as a leading West German historian. It was also during this time that Mommsen began his long and fruitful association with the German Historical Institute at London.

Dr. Karl Haase, keeper of the Archives in Lower Saxony, initially had suggested the idea of the Institute in 1968.³⁶ Haase believed that it would promote much-needed interaction between British and West German historians and stimulate comparative research of the two countries. He sent a memorandum to fourteen West German historians which outlined tentative proposals for staffing and financing the Institute. These fourteen historians, one of whom was Mommsen, were contacted because they had spent time in England, had published works on British history, and greatly admired England's culture and political heritage.

Nearly eight years would pass, however, before the idea of the Institute came to fruition. Problems with funding in particular hampered the project. The Institute did not even appear on the annual budget of West Germany until 1975 (there were more pressing concerns such as meet-

³⁶For a history of the Institute, see German Historical Institute, London: 1976-1986 (London: German Historical Institute, 1986), 9-16.

ing the soaring costs of energy). The Institute at last opened its doors in November of 1976, under the direction of Dr. Paul Kluke. It began very modestly, with a skeleton staff that occupied two floors of a small building on Bloomsbury Square.

On 1 August 1977, Mommsen succeeded Kluke as Director of the Institute (Kluke resigned due to failing health). Mommsen's achievements during his tenure were very impressive. Largely due to his efforts to secure additional private funding from the Volkswagen Foundation, the Institute was able to move into its current, palatial building at 17 Bloomsbury Square. Every year since 1978, the Institute has held approximately fifteen seminars and two international conferences. By 1985, the library holdings had increased to 35,000 volumes of German and British history and nearly 200 periodical subscriptions. As of 1988, the Institute had produced more than thirty-five books, thirteen of which Mommsen wrote, edited, or co-edited. The international respect that the Institute commands today is due primarily to Mommsen's success in meeting every academic and administrative challenge. In 1985, Mommsen stepped down as Director and returned to Duesseldorf to devote more time to research and writing.

As Director of the Institute, Mommsen had to represent the whole of German historical writing in Great

Britain. This certainly broadened his understanding of the discipline and made him acutely aware of its great achievements during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. But it also heightened his knowledge of the rifts within the profession. The controversies among West German historians, which began during the early 1960s, signalled the downfall of the statist, Neo-Rankean paradigm. One of the earliest challenges to this dominant line of thought was Mommsen's monumental work on Max Weber, which rocked the West German community in 1959.

CHAPTER 2

MAX WEBER:

CHAMPION OF POWER POLITICS OR LIBERAL IN DESPAIR?

For me, "democracy" has never been an end in itself. My only interest has been and remains the possibility of implementing a realistic national policy of a strong, externally oriented Germany.

Max Weber, Gesammelte Politische Schriften (1920)

For more than thirty years, the study of Max Weber has stimulated the intellectual curiosity of Wolfgang J. Mommsen. His controversial interpretation of Weber's political tenets, initially unveiled in Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920, elicited a lively debate among historians and sociologists.¹ Rejecting the extreme posi-

¹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920 (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1959). For the purpose of this essay, I have used Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920, rev. ed., trans. Michael S. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). According to Mommsen, this English edition carefully followed the second German edition, published in 1974. In the preface to the English edition, Mommsen also noted that, although the second German edition was revised to include additional research on Weber, he did not have to make any significant revisions of his analysis of Weber's political views in the 1959 edition.

tions of Weber as either a "Machiavelli of the Steel Age"² or as a social theorist whose ideas had been unaffected by political currents in Imperial Germany, Mommsen formulated a middle position. He depicted Weber as having been simultaneously committed to the values of German liberalism (e.g., individualism and personal integrity) and an unceasing advocacy of a strong national government. Mommsen's revisionist approach to Max Weber remains the most important political analysis and the pivotal research on Weber in the post-war era.

The questions arise as to what had been the prevalent view of Weber during the 1950s and what originally had aroused Mommsen's interest in him. According to Mommsen, Weber's liberal convictions and his strict adherence to the principle of rationality made his writings unacceptable in Germany during the Third Reich. But Weber's ideas became influential abroad, especially in the United States. One of the individuals who did the most to make Weber known outside Germany was Talcott Parsons. In his presentation of Weber's works, Parsons emphasized above all their theoretical side while virtually ignoring their historical

²J.P. Mayer, Max Weber and German Politics (London: Faber & Faber, 1956; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 16.

dimension.³ Following his example, American sociologists, such as Reinhard Bendix, tended to portray Weber in a harmonious way and gloss over the contradictions in his thought.⁴ This American interpretation of Weber--to view his ideas as intellectual absolutes--became fashionable in West Germany during the post-war era. Weber was perceived as a theorist, and his political writings, because of their contradictory and controversial elements, were largely ignored.⁵

In addition to this image of Weber as a social theorist, West Germans during the 1950s viewed Weber as a forebear of their democracy. The establishment of the German Federal Republic (West Germany) in 1949 had given them a second chance at democracy, an opportunity to atone for its initial demise in 1933. Haunted by events of the recent past, West Germans examined their history in search of democratic ancestors. One such person appeared to be Weber, since he trenchantly had criticized the government of

³Wolfgang J. Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays (Cambridge: Policy Press, 1989), 178-85; Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory and Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937; reprint, New York: Free Press, 1968).

⁴Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960).

⁵Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber, 185.

Kaiser Wilhelm II and had staunchly supported the establishment of a parliamentary government in Germany before World War I. This general interest in Weber, as having been a precursor of German democracy, led Mommsen to examine Weber's political writings, speeches and personal correspondence in light of their historical context.

Besides the general renewed interest in Weber, personal reasons motivated Mommsen's research. His great-grandfather, Theodor Mommsen, had been a close friend of Max Weber and his wife Marianne. Relations between the two families had continued down to the 1950s. This had two significant effects upon Mommsen's investigation. Because he had grown up intimately involved with the Weber family, it was probable (and indeed very likely) that Mommsen was favorably disposed towards Max Weber. Mommsen also had access to Weber's surviving private papers, since he personally knew Marianne Weber. The appropriate inference was that Mommsen would write a thorough but flattering monograph, but this did not prove to be the case. In the preface to Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, Mommsen wrote:

The first idea for this book was born while the author was reading Max Weber's most effective indictment of Wilhelmine Germany and, in particular, of the Kaiser's personal rule. However, a closer analysis of Weber's political writings was to reveal, initially to the author's own irritation (my emphasis), that Max Weber had been not only a staunch liberal but at the same time a strong German nationalist, and, furthermore, that at least in his earlier years he had been a determined advocate of a German imperialist policy on a grand

scale.⁶

By focusing on Weber's liberalism and nationalism and his subjugation of democratic reform to the erection of a strong, national state, Mommsen's thesis ignited a controversy because it robbed "... the New German democracy of a 'founding father,' a glorious ancestor, and a spokesman of genius."⁷

Utilizing Weber's voluminous writings and other pertinent primary sources, such as correspondence and newspaper accounts of his speeches,⁸ Mommsen argued persuasively that Weber's political views had crystallized early in his life and that in many ways he reflected the age in which he lived. To illustrate Mommsen's interpretation of Weber's political views and the significant trends of the Imperial

⁶Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, vii-viii.

⁷Raymond Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought (New York, 1967), 2:248, quoted in Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 416. Mommsen's book on Weber predated Fritz Fischer's Griff nach der Weltmacht (1961), the book which has been generally credited with sparking the German historiographical revolution of the 1960s and beyond. In light of traditionalist interpretations of Max Weber and Imperial Germany, Mommsen's research had to appear somewhat extreme.

⁸Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, xix. In the preface of the first German edition, Mommsen candidly admitted that despite his access to Weber's private papers, the available sources had to be supplemented by newspaper accounts of Weber's speeches and his articles that appeared in the Frankfurter Zeitung. Mommsen stated that he made every conceivable effort to reduce potential errors from such sources by corroborating evidence whenever possible.

Era which he embodied, this chapter will focus on the following topics: Weber's concept of nationalism; his assertion (at least before 1908) that imperialism was a logical and desirable consequence of nineteenth-century nationalism; Weber's pragmatic liberalism, as shown by his advocacy of a parliamentary form of government; and his highly controversial notion of charismatic leadership.

According to Mommsen, two people made a strong impression on Max Weber's nationalistic outlook. Weber's father belonged to the National Liberal Party, whose members included big business and industrial interests, upper bureaucrats and the educated middle class. The National Liberals supported German nationalism and (after the 1880s) a course of imperialism. The elder Weber was quite active in party affairs, and young Max consequently was exposed to this line of political thought in his formative years.⁹ Heinrich von Treitschke's ideal of a powerful state and his endorsement of overseas imperialism further helped to mold Weber's thought.¹⁰

Weber's nationalistic outlook initially had taken

⁹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy: Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 96; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1-7. Officially constituted in 1867 from a split in the Progressive Party, the National Liberals were less concerned with a true constitutional order than national unity and economic power.

¹⁰Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 8-10.

shape over the issue of Polish migrations into eastern Germany during the 1880s. In 1890, the Verein fuer Sozialpolitik, an association of social scientists, commissioned Weber to survey the effects of the influx of Poles upon eastern Germany's socio-economic development.¹¹ Weber's study revealed that the Polish migration was occurring because the powerful forces of capitalism had undermined the region's ancient feudal system. Capitalism wrought changes which forced the Junkers (large, wealthy landholders) to alter their operational procedures. Simply stated, the Junkers had to extract more labor from workers at a lower rate of compensation to offset rising costs. The ensuing harsh conditions prodded the German peasants into seeking a better living in the western regions of Germany. Accustomed to low wages and a meager standard of living, Polish immigrants quickly filled the void created by this internal German migration.

Weber objected to the "Polonization" of eastern Germany, a process he believed would jeopardize the ethnic homogeneity and culture of the German nation. Although Polish laborers did provide the Junkers with a more viable

¹¹Ibid., 21-22. Weber's inaugural dissertation (post-doctoral research) explored an issue of Roman agricultural history. Mommsen suggested that this most likely piqued Weber's interest in the agricultural problems of eastern Germany and was decisive in the association's selection of Weber.

economic alternative, their influx endangered the primacy of the national interest (i.e., culture) in Weber's view. Taken in its national context, the economic situation of the Junkers became irrelevant.¹²

Mommsen's careful analysis of Weber's reports, which were published in the Schriften des Vereins fuer Sozialpolitik, revealed the essence of his nationalism. For Weber, nationalism entailed the association of political power and culture.¹³ A nation's political power was a prerequisite for cultural development, a means to that end. An autonomous nation-state therefore became pivotal in Weber's thought because it was synonymous with a strong culture.¹⁴

Weber's inaugural address of 1895 at the University of Freiburg further illustrated his nationalistic viewpoint. Weber's speech jarred the audience with allusions to social darwinism, nationalism and even racism (e.g., his

¹²Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 28; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 28.

¹³Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 65; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 30-31. Weber's notion stood out in an era of surging nationalism that rapidly had assumed a political character. On this point, see James J. Sheehan, ed., Imperial Germany (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 1-10.

¹⁴Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 28, 48-49, 64-65; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 31; Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Juergen Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 11.

assertion that Poles were inferior to Germans). Although Weber later referred to this address as an "immature product of youth" (Weber subsequently abandoned his racial attitude regarding Poles), he held fast to the supremacy of national interests.¹⁵ Closely related to this was Weber's belief that the inhabitants of a nation must strive above all to insure the preservation of society and culture: "... we cannot lead our descendants to peace and contentment, but only into the endless battle to maintain and expand our national culture and people."¹⁶

Mommsen argued that it was this element of a relentless power struggle among nations that disturbed Weber's university audience the most. Weber maintained that issues such as the Polish migration clearly exemplified "... the eternal battle of the nationalities for living space and self-determination."¹⁷ For Weber, such conflict was axiomatic of his era, a time in which only the stronger nations would survive. Weber also believed that states or-

¹⁵Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 39; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 28-29; Mommsen and Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries, 111.

¹⁶Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 40; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 29.

¹⁷Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 39. By self-determination, Weber meant popular government that would insure the preservation of culture.

ganized along multi-national lines would perish.¹⁸ In his examination of Weber's inaugural address, Mommsen laid bare Weber's uncompromising stance that a nation, if it were destined to be great, had to preserve its influence and culture by any means.¹⁹

Weber similarly called for a strong German imperial policy as a corollary to nationalism. Mommsen noted two primary reasons for this. First, Weber argued that economic autarky (self-sufficiency) had become an anachronism by 1895.²⁰ Germany quite simply lacked abundant natural resources. Weber had become convinced that, given the economic competition among European nations in the late nineteenth century, Germany had to expand overseas to insure its survival. Second, Weber posited that traditional liberalism (e.g., the rights of the individual and the principle of self-determination) occupied a precarious place in a society characterized by rapid expansion and industrialization. Similarly for Weber, nineteenth-century imperialism appeared to preclude the liberal notion of society limiting

¹⁸Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 37. Weber's prediction was born out by the fate of Austria-Hungary in 1918, as he would then point out.

¹⁹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Theories of Imperialism, trans. P.S. Falla (New York: Random House, 1980), 7; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 65; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 31.

²⁰Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 68-69; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 30-31.

the power of the state. The goal of a nation was to become strong. Weber consequently supported imperialism as a prerequisite for the survival of the German people and their culture.²¹

Mommsen contended that for Weber an empire embodied the triumph of a nation in the power struggle. Weber repeatedly pointed to the example of Great Britain as a justification for his position regarding imperialism. Germany had to emulate Great Britain or be condemned to the status of a menial nation.²² But the road to dominion was not without risk. Weber candidly admitted the possibility of war resulting from Germany's pursuance of imperialistic aims. He thought this was a logical conclusion of the struggle for national existence.²³

Weber, despondent after 1908 with the irresponsibility of the Kaiser's diplomacy and rightist rhetoric, began to favor the idea of "economic German imperialism" in central and eastern Europe. This "softening" did not reflect

²¹Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 52-53; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 98.

²²Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 140.

²³Ibid., 79; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 30-31; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology and his Philosophy of World History," International Social Science Journal 17(May 1965): 39. Continental expansion involved more of a risk that branching out overseas in Weber's opinion. By the late 1880s, therefore, he stood in direct opposition to Bismarck's Realpolitik of the 1860s.

any change in Weber's attitude regarding world power status.²⁴ Mommsen noted that Weber never abandoned his nationalistic fervor. As defeat loomed in 1918, Weber sadly conceded the end of Germany's role as a world power. But at the same time he reiterated his view that the war had been necessary to insure "... a favorable basis for a future German world policy."²⁵ Weber characteristically reflected that "... we had to be a power state and had to take the risk of this war, in order to have a voice in the decisions about the future of the globe."²⁶

Mommsen suggested that Weber's nationalism was characteristic of his era and therefore not really controversial per se. What did set Weber apart from the majority of his contemporaries, however, was his insistence that what was best for the nation was clearly the most desirable (and indeed the only viable) course of action for its citizens.²⁷ Weber's belief had justified his position against

²⁴Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 196-208.

²⁵Ibid., 193.

²⁶Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 34. Mommsen pointed out that Weber vehemently objected to the wave of annexationism that swept over Germany during the First World War. At that time, he believed the goal of Germany should have been simply to achieve equality with the world powers. See also Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 139.

²⁷Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 26.

the Junkers and further provided him with a rationale to criticize the government of Wilhelm II.

Weber chided the Kaiser because his much-touted policy of Weltpolitik had failed to elevate Germany to the level of a world power.²⁸ Mommsen noted that Weber blamed Wilhelm II for his inept handling of the Moroccan Crises of 1905 and 1911 and the Daily Telegraph incident of 1908.²⁹ These events reinforced Weber's opinion that the Kaiser's "dynastic vanity" had denied Germany a place alongside the

²⁸Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 137, 157.

²⁹The First Moroccan Crisis of 1905 stemmed from Morocco's strategic position. Bordering on French Algeria and lying across from Gibraltar, the country aroused both British and French interest. Furthermore, France, Germany, Italy and Spain all had significant economic investments in Morocco. Early in 1905, France proposed an arrangement that would have made the country a virtual French protectorate. Wilhelm (at Chancellor Buelow's insistence) went to Morocco and made a speech calling for an open-door policy there. His interference precipitated a crisis resolved at the Algeciras Conference. All of the European powers supported France, which was granted the most influence in a nominally-independent Morocco. The Kaiser added to the growing German isolation with the Daily Telegraph incident. The London newspaper published an interview in which Wilhelm II affirmed his sincere friendship with England, but that the German people in general were hostile to the English people. Following in the wake of a new German navy bill, the incident created a furor in the British and German newspapers which increased Anglo-German tensions. The Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911 was a continuation of the first. Germany protested when France sent troops to the Moroccan capital. France subsequently compensated Germany with land adjacent to the Cameroon colony, in return for a free hand in Morocco. This incident, however, did little to bolster Germany's international prestige or ameliorate her relations with France, Great Britain and Russia.

great nations of the world.³⁰ Weber also attributed Germany's encirclement by the Triple Entente (the redoubtable coalition of Great Britain, France and Russia) to Wilhelm II's lack of diplomatic skills.³¹

Despite the Kaiser's shortcomings, the system of government had functioned adequately while Bismarck was chancellor. Weber contended that German foreign policy had begun to go awry only after Bismarck's forced resignation in 1890. In Weber's opinion, Wilhelm II simply could not competently fill the leadership void. As the government became more decentralized after Bismarck's departure, the bureaucrats who ran the government proved to be indifferent to national interests.³² In Weber's estimation, their only

³⁰Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 141, 156-57. In a letter to Friedrich Naumann in 1908, Weber wrote: "The political structure is to blame... a dilettante has the threads of policy in his hands." Quoted in Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 287.

³¹Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 162-63. Mommsen recently observed that Weber was too harsh in attributing Germany's foreign policy failures exclusively to Wilhelm II's "personal rule." His intervention in the First Moroccan Crisis, for example, had been at the insistence of Buelow and Holstein. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," Journal of Contemporary History 25(May-June 1990): 303-04.

³²Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 173, 392-96; Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology," 39; Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber, 10. For a brief overview of the status of the German bureaucracy in the latter nineteenth century, see John C.G. Roehl, "Higher Civil Servants in Germany, 1890-1900," in Imperial Germany, ed. James J. Sheehan (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 129-47.

concern in German affairs was to safeguard their respective positions. Mommsen argued that for Weber the only acceptable solution was to replace bureaucrats with professional politicians who would support the primacy of the nation.

In his various writings on Max Weber, Mommsen repeatedly has taken up the issue of Weber's liberalism. Although Weber unequivocally entertained liberal notions, Mommsen maintained that he did so essentially for reasons of expedience.³³ To grasp Mommsen's point, one must briefly examine the course of German liberalism during the nineteenth century (as Weber perceived it). The aftermath of the French Revolution ushered in the rise of political liberalism in western Europe. The liberal tradition in Germany differed from that of France or Great Britain because its roots did not run as deeply. But Germany did develop a liberal tradition which valued the cultivation of the individual as the paramount goal of society.

What further separated German liberalism from its French and British counterparts, however, was the question (or problem) of national unity. The hopes and aspirations of the liberals were momentarily fulfilled during the initial phase of the 1848 revolution but ultimately were

³³On this point, see in particular the following: Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, especially 389-96 and 416-23; Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology," 39-40; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 95-114; Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber, 3-23.

dashed. The revolution failed for a number of reasons, such as organizational difficulties and the particularism of the larger German states.

The wars of unification during the 1860s dealt a crushing blow to bourgeois liberalism. When the Progressive Party split and the National Liberal Party was formed, its members were especially impressed with Bismarck's accomplishments. After the alliance between the Junkers and industrialists in 1879, the German bourgeoisie seemingly preferred economic and social status quo to a progressive liberal policy. The National Liberals, the heirs of German bourgeois liberalism, thenceforth espoused the goals of nationalism and the grandeur of the German empire rather than constitutional rule.³⁴ At the onset of Weber's "political career,"³⁵ German liberalism in the traditional sense clearly had been on the wane. As early as the 1890s, Weber already had revealed his pragmatism in political matters. While supporting German nationalism and overseas imperialism, he simultaneously called for a "true" parliamentary

³⁴Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 390; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 95.

³⁵It is curious to note that Weber never formally joined any party during his lifetime, although he never masked either his sympathy or disdain for a political group. Mommsen and Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries, 6.

style of government, similar to that of Great Britain.³⁶

Mommsen contended that Weber believed only a parliamentary system of government could provide Germany with its sorely-needed "professional" politicians.³⁷ Weber looked to the success of Great Britain in world affairs as justification, a fact he ascribed to its superior political leadership. Thus, Weber advocated the implementation of a parliamentary government for reasons of national policy rather than humanitarian ones (e.g., the self-determination of people).³⁸ Parliamentary government was a means to an end, not an end in itself. There was nothing humanitarian about politics in Weber's opinion.³⁹

For Weber, Germany's path to world power began with the introduction of a parliamentary type of government. It was desirable because such a system would produce competent politicians and leaders. The latter would be drawn from

³⁶Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber, 24ff.

³⁷Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 172-80; Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology," 34-40; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 104-14.

³⁸Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 145; Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology," 40-42.

³⁹Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 395, 403-04. In The Age of Bureaucracy, Mommsen stated that Weber did not think in practice that popular sovereignty or self-determination were valid. The nature of democracy and the liberal order were accepted by Weber, but he began to see these anachronistically in light of modern industrial society.

the ranks of parliament but ultimately would become independent of it.⁴⁰ The leader, therefore, was the dominant force in Weber's system. According to Mommsen, what Weber desired most was a leader who would articulate the primacy of German interests through his personal goals.⁴¹

Weber believed that the masses would follow a leader who put issues in a convincing and appealing manner. But unlike the "great man" of Nietzsche, who dominated and disdained the masses, Weber's leader won people over with his appeal.⁴² What they essentially found desirable in a leader was his degree of personal magnetism rather than his position on political issues.⁴³ The concept of "charisma" that Weber formulated thus propelled his ideal leader and enabled him to amass a following.

Mommsen contended that Weber perceived charisma as the quality of an individual that identified him as a lead-

⁴⁰Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 79, 114.

⁴¹Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 397; Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology," 40; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Zum Begriff der 'plebiszitaeren Fuehrer-demokratie' bei Max Weber," Koelner Zeitschrift fuer Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 15(Mai 1963): 398ff.

⁴²Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 78-79; Mommsen, "Max Weber's Political Sociology," 36.

⁴³Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 87ff. Weber believed the masses to be incapable of judging political issues on merit alone.

er to others. Charisma also made the masses willing to subject themselves unconditionally to leadership. For Weber, the degree of a leader's success was crucial to his position. The masses would support a successful leader. A leader who failed would lose his following because failure diminished charisma.⁴⁴

Max Weber und die deutsche Politik unleashed a wave of controversy in West Germany in 1959.⁴⁵ Because West Germans tended to view Weber as a critic of the Wilhelmine system, he seemed to provide a justification for the German democratic experiment. Mommsen's research, depicting Weber's paradoxical thought (at once entertaining nationalistic and liberal ideas), therefore had to be irritating to his colleagues. The irony was that Mommsen never intended to denigrate Max Weber but rather to reveal his pragmatism in political matters.⁴⁶

In his review of Mommsen's book, Guenther Roth maintained that Mommsen concentrated too much on Weber, the

⁴⁴Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 78; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 401-10.

⁴⁵For a detailed listing of book reviews, see Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 415-16, n. 1.

⁴⁶Ibid., 417-18. Mommsen wrote: "My goal was to depict Weber's political personality on the basis of careful analysis of the sources. It was not a one-sided ideological interpretation, but an attempt to portray Weber in all his complexity, including his internal contradictions and ambiguities."

person. Specifically, Roth pointed out that Mommsen did not adequately treat the context of intellectual and contemporary history in which Weber lived.⁴⁷ Roth further asserted that Mommsen had treated Weber's theoretical and practical political ideas as one.⁴⁸ In Roth's estimation, this was methodologically inappropriate and amounted to an unfair depiction of Weber.

Mommsen later admitted a degree of justification to Roth's first criticism.⁴⁹ He pointed out, though, that his primary intent in writing the book was to examine Weber's political views within the context of Imperial Germany. Mommsen believed that Roth's second assertion was entirely unfounded. To differentiate between Weber the political scientist and Weber the politician was an impossible task because, for Weber, values and theory were interdependent.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Guenther Roth, review of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920, by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, in Koelner Zeitschrift fuer Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 13(Mai 1961): 265-66.

⁴⁸Ibid., 268-72.

⁴⁹Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 418.

⁵⁰Ibid., 418-19. Mommsen noted: "This objection proves under closer analysis to be an attempt to shield Max Weber's sociological works against any possible criticism based on political aspects.... Weber's political views and his theoretical sociological works... both spring from a common root, the postulate of the self-assertion and self-realization of the personality in an administered world, according to the principles of a rational ethic or respon-

In his critique of Mommsen's book, Karl Loewenstein accused Mommsen of having portrayed Weber the politician without sufficient reference to his scholarly and theoretical side.⁵¹ The end result for Loewenstein was an exaggerated image of Weber as a champion of power politics. While Mommsen disagreed with Loewenstein's one-sided conclusion, he admitted that his study perhaps had been too narrow. Mommsen noted that his intent had been to explore Weber's political position and political thought, and if he had to write the book again "... he would choose a more comprehensive framework, giving equal balance to the theoretical work...."⁵²

The reaction of American scholars generally differed from West Germans. Paul Honigsheim noted that Mommsen's analysis greatly benefitted from his access to Weber's personal correspondence, much of which had been unknown until the 1950s.⁵³ Although Mommsen's research revealed Weber's pragmatic liberalism and nationalistic bent, Honigsheim

sibility."

⁵¹Karl Loewenstein, review of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920, by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, in Koelner Zeitschrift fuer Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 13(Mai 1961): 255.

⁵²Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 447.

⁵³Paul Honigsheim, review of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920, by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, in Rural Sociology 26(Spring 1961): 87.

nevertheless accepted Mommsen's conclusions. Honigsheim evidently was one sociologist who had not turned Weber's ideas into untouchable, intellectual absolutes.

Klaus Epstein lauded Mommsen's book as a "... definitive study which completely superseded J.P. Mayer's superficial Max Weber and German Politics."⁵⁴ The real value of the study lay "... in his [Mommsen's] careful collation of widely scattered materials, his systematic analysis, and his penetrating criticism of Weber from a democratic and antinationalistic viewpoint."⁵⁵

Joseph Bendersky agreed with Mommsen's claim that Weber was, above all, a man of his times. He credited Mommsen with having written "... a quintessential piece of history that successfully juxtaposed a sharp criticism of Weber's political values and admiration for his intellectual rationality, honesty, and consistency."⁵⁶ Bendersky noted that Mommsen has inspired much subsequent research,⁵⁷

⁵⁴Klaus Epstein, review of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920, by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, in American Historical Review 11(October 1960): 155.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Joseph W. Bendersky, review of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920, by Wolfgang J. Mommsen, in The Historian 49(May 1981): 411.

⁵⁷See, for example, Ilse Dronberger, The Political Thought of Max Weber: In Quest of Statesmanship (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971); Stephen P. Turner, Max Weber and the Dispute over Reason and Value: A Study in Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics (Boston: Routledge &

and he concluded his review (published in 1981) with perhaps the supreme compliment: Mommsen's book has withstood the ultimate test, that of time.

One perceives in these (and other) reviews by American scholars certain similarities in their assessments of Mommsen. Regardless of their respective opinions, however, all of his critics agreed that Mommsen's use of sources to support his generalizations was beyond reproach. His reviewers also concurred that his overall interpretation of Weber's political philosophy was valid. From an American, democratic standpoint, Mommsen's conclusion that Weber had mirrored the sentiments of his age certainly appeared inconsequential. But Mommsen's book disturbed West Germany in 1959 because it was a nation desperately trying to rationalize its past.

How valid were (and are) Mommsen's basic arguments? He seemed to be especially convincing in probing Weber's complex nationalistic ideas. Mommsen persuasively demonstrated that Weber was a man of his era, one whose beliefs were totally time-conditioned before 1918 (e.g., Weber's defense of power politics). Mommsen believed that Weber had

Kegan Paul, 1984); David Beetham, Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics, 2d ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Edward Bryan Portis, Max Weber and Political Commitment: Science, Politics, and Personality (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). These authors acknowledge a direct debt to Mommsen in their respective studies.

overestimated the significance of the power principle, but he also asserted that Weber's political views were not simply Realpolitik.⁵⁸ Weber may have placed too much faith in the notion of "power in an ethical context" to justify charismatic leadership, a point Mommsen noted was open for criticism.⁵⁹

Weber was mainly at odds with liberal ideology regarding his notion of charismatic leadership. Did Weber believe that a successful charismatic leader would necessarily have been ethical? According to Mommsen, Weber treated this issue in a cursory manner. Weber did maintain that a leader's actions would be justified because they had to articulate the primacy of the national interests. Failure to do so would erode the support of the masses and consequently lead to the leader's replacement. In Mommsen's opinion, this sequence of events did not necessarily follow

⁵⁸Mommsen argued that this was a crucial concept in Weber's thought, namely, that the exercise of power in an ethical context was desirable (as a means to safeguard the nation's cultural development). One perceives the influence of Nietzsche in Weber's belief that the business of the politician was to exercise power, thereby "making things happen" in an ever-increasing bureaucratizing world. For Weber, power was a necessary ingredient of politics. Its use was justifiable in defense of one's ultimate values. It was a means to an end, not an end in itself. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 42-45; Mommsen, "Zum Begriff der 'plebiszitaeren Fuehrerdemokratie'," 398-404.

⁵⁹Ibid.

and remained the weakest link of Weber's position.⁶⁰

Mommsen pointed out that many Weberian scholars have found it disturbing that Weber failed to distinguish between "... the genuine charisma of responsible leaders, as for instance, Gladstone or Roosevelt, and the pernicious charisma of personalities like Kurt Eisner or Adolf Hitler."⁶¹ Weber's critics attacked his notion of charismatic leadership on two fronts. First, they contended that Weber was inconsistent in his emphasis on charisma because of its inherent irrationality (but this was logical if one recalled Weber's fear of increasing rationalization in a modern, industrial society). Second, Weber's critics accused him of naively assuming that the charisma of a leader would simultaneously qualify and legitimize his position, regardless of his true abilities or intent.⁶² In retrospect, Weber appeared to have come dangerously close to the

⁶⁰Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 84.

⁶¹Arnold Bergstraesser, "Max Weber's akademische Antrittsrede," Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte 5(Juli 1957): 209, quoted in Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 91.

⁶²Ibid., 92; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 408, 426. Mommsen himself criticized Weber on this point: "We need, far more than the great leaders who attract the masses and provide them with goals, statesmen who are capable of integration and compromise between [sic] different political persuasions.... To this extent, Weber's conception of 'plebiscitary leadership democracy' is also subject to criticism from a pragmatic vantage point."

Fuehrerprinzip, the fascist leadership principle.⁶³

But in defense of Weber, Mommsen singled out a crucial element in understanding him. Weber's historical perspective differed markedly from that of West Germany in the post-war era. Weber did not see fascism edging above the horizon of Imperial Germany.⁶⁴ Nor did Weber live to witness the advent of Hitler's totalitarianism. Based on Weber's hard-line stance against the extreme right elements in Germany after World War I, Mommsen posited that Weber would have been an ardent foe of Hitler.⁶⁵ He concluded that one must keep in mind Weber's ultimate political concern: to rid Germany of a monarch he considered inept and replace ineffective bureaucratic officials with professional politicians.⁶⁶

Weber supported a parliamentary-style government because he believed it would produce professional politicians

⁶³Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 93; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 409.

⁶⁴Ibid., 187; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 93; Mommsen and Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries, 34.

⁶⁵Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 410, 422; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 93. Weber, for example, spoke vehemently against the Kapp Putsch of 1919.

⁶⁶Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber, 42.

and charismatic leaders.⁶⁷ Mommsen noted that Weber's pragmatic concerns severely rattled the platform of traditional liberalism by ignoring the leader's need to be responsible to parliament and by diffusing "political will" from above rather than below. Since Weber viewed democracy in purely functional terms (i.e., as a prerequisite for a strong nation), he effectively turned his back upon the liberal elements of democratic reform.⁶⁸

Mommsen pointed out that Weber was a "liberal in despair," deeply troubled by the increasing rationalization of late nineteenth-century society. For Weber, the real threat lay in the rise of impersonal bureaucracies. His solution for reconciling liberal ideology with bureaucratic growth--a parliamentary government headed by a charismatic leader--illustrated a disturbing aspect of Weber's thought to West Germans in the 1950s (the rise of pernicious charismatic leaders such as Hitler). But perhaps, as Mommsen suggested, the controversy stemmed from historical hindsight. Weber's standpoint was molded solely by the personal rule of Wilhelm II and Germany's floundering position in world affairs at the onset of the twentieth cen-

⁶⁷The central function of a democratic government was merely to bring qualified politicians into power. The role of parliament was mainly passive--to "train" these leaders and to check the power of administrative bureaucracies.

⁶⁸Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 22, 87, 114.

tury. For Weber, a "fuehrer democracy" was the only way out of Germany's leadership dilemma.

Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, 1890-1920 created a wave of controversy in 1959 primarily because it challenged the prevailing democratic standpoint and the accepted image of Weber.⁶⁹ But if Mommsen would have written the same book in 1989, it hardly would have made a ripple. The standpoint of (West) Germans has changed. They no longer harbor insecurities about their past, nor do they believe their democratic government to be in jeopardy. An analogous situation is how the American perception of John F. Kennedy has changed since his assassination in 1963. If one were to have written a book exposing Kennedy as a mediocre president and a womanizer shortly after his death, it surely would have created storms of protest. Now, however, most Americans have accepted the reality of his presidency. It is no longer important to disguise Kennedy's inadequacies and faults with a cloak of martyrdom. Similarly, Mommsen was not compelled to rationalize Germany's past as did the older generation of West German historians. Mommsen's emotional stake in the past differed from theirs, and he therefore was able to perceive Weber in a manner which challenged the accepted view. Mommsen's penetrating

⁶⁹Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, vii, 416-424.

criticism of Weber from a democratic standpoint raised the issue of continuity in German history, an issue that exploded during the 1960s with the debate over Imperial German war aims.

CHAPTER 3

BETWEEN INCRIMINATION AND APOLOGETICS:

MOMMSEN'S ANALYSIS OF IMPERIAL GERMAN WAR AIMS

The world knows I was never in favour of annexationism, and the proof is the hatred with which its apostles pursued me.

Bethmann Hollweg, Letter to Prince Max of Baden (1918)

Two years after the appearance of Mommsen's Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, Fritz Fischer (1908-) published an important study of Imperial German war aims.¹ His book subsequently triggered a heated debate among West German historians. The controversy stemmed from Fischer's contention that Germany not only intended to dominate Europe during the war, but that this had been its aim even before 1914. To achieve European hegemony, Germany had steered its ally, Austria-Hungary, into war with Serbia. Germany therefore bore the responsibility for the outbreak of World

¹Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszieldpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914-1918 (Duesseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1961); Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War, rev. ed., trans. James Joll (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967). The English edition is abridged and based on the third German edition, published in 1964.

War I.² Even more alarming to his colleagues was Fischer's suggestion that a continuity existed between German war aims of 1914 and 1939. If this were so, then Hitler and the Third Reich could not have been an aberration of German history.³ Gerhard Ritter (1888-1967) spearheaded the opposition to Fischer's thesis. Ritter maintained that Germany had acted defensively in 1914. He did not deny that during the war German policy assumed an offensive character, but he attributed this to responsible statesmen unable to keep an aggressive military in check.⁴ In his analysis of Imperial German war aims, Wolfgang J. Mommsen formulated a position between the extremities of Fischer's incrimination

²Fischer, Germany's Aims, 88.

³Ibid., xxi-xxii. Fischer noted that his book "... indicates certain mental attitudes and aspirations which were active in German policy during the First World War and remained operative later. Seen from this angle, it may serve as a contribution towards the problem of the continuity of German policy from the First World War to the Second." Fischer's statement was somewhat misleading regarding the content of Germany's Aims because he did not confront the issue of continuity in German history "from Bismarck to Hitler" until a much later date. See Fritz Fischer, From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871-1945, trans. and with an introduction by Roger Fletcher (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

⁴Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany, vol. 3, The Tragedy of Statesmanship: Bethmann Hollweg as War Chancellor, 1914-1917, trans. Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1972).

and Ritter's apologetics. Mommsen asserted that a "polycracy" of forces rendered Imperial Germany ungovernable by 1914. The political crisis precluded a rational foreign policy.

Fischer's book created a stir because it reopened the issue of war guilt in West Germany.⁵ Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, which stipulated that Germany alone had been responsible for the war, was met with universal condemnation in Weimar Germany. The historical community resolved to discredit the clause because it formed the legal basis for German reparations. Fischer's thesis was also controversial because it posed a serious challenge to Germany's political identity, in terms of the past (whether a continuity did exist between the Hitler epoch and earlier eras) and the future (if democracy could endure in West Germany).⁶ For these reasons, the debate captured the atten-

⁵John A. Moses, The Politics of Illusion: The Fischer Controversy in German Historiography (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975), 109-11; Imanuel Geiss, "The Outbreak of the First World War and German War Aims," Journal of Contemporary History 1(July 1966): 75-91. It is ironic that Fischer did cause such an uproar because he built upon earlier works in formulating his thesis. Examples of previous monographs since World War II that depicted Germany as having been primarily responsible for World War I are Hans W. Gatzke, Germany's Drive to the West. A Study of Germany's Western Aims during the First World War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1950) and Luigi Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, 3 vols., trans. Isabella M. Massey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

⁶Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," Journal of Contemporary History 1(July 1966): 70.

tion of every West German historian. This chapter analyzes the main arguments of Fischer and Ritter because Mommsen has devoted most of his attention to them.⁷

Fischer's interest in the subject of Imperial German war aims had been stimulated by official documents available to West German historians only after 1955. Fischer did not intend to initiate a controversy. He believed that the task of the historian was not to accuse or defend, and he clearly wanted his research to be "... the object of dispassionate consideration."⁸ When his investigation revealed incriminating evidence of German aggression, he thought it was his duty to report the "truth" (no matter how unsettling it might have been to West Germans).⁹

In addition to Fischer's painstaking analysis of the documents and his provocative thesis, another important feature of Germany's Aims is the suggestion of a new

⁷Some historians whose works are representative of Fischer's position are Dirk Stegmann, Helmut Boehme, Peter-Christian Witt and especially Imanuel Geiss. The positions of Egmont Zechlin and K.D. Erdmann most nearly approximate that of Ritter.

⁸Fischer, Germany's Aims, xxi.

⁹Fritz Fischer, World Power or Decline: The Controversy over Germany's Aims in the First World War, trans. Lancelot L. Farras, Robert Kimber, and Rita Kimber (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 121; Fritz Fischer, "Twenty-Five Years Later: Looking Back at the 'Fischer Controversy' and its Consequences," Central European History 21 (September 1988): 207-10.

methodological approach. Fischer questioned the pre-eminence of the state in West German historiography by asserting that social and economic factors had been crucial in the development of the war aims. By suggesting an interaction between foreign and domestic policy, he paved the way for writing history away from political lines.¹⁰

In Germany's Aims, Fischer stressed the "totality of the German will" rather than the roles of individuals in the formation of war aims.¹¹ The ruling classes of Imperial Germany had united against rising democratic forces (in particular, the Social Democrats) and taken refuge in an

¹⁰Moses, The Politics of Illusion, 50-51. To assert that Fischer employed a new methodological approach in Germany's Aims is an overstatement on Moses' part. It is true Fischer intimated that social and economic considerations helped shape the war aims of Imperial Germany. But he did not systematically explore this issue in Germany's Aims. Hans-Ulrich Wehler has observed that "... Fischer initially proceeded conventionally, reconstructing political history from actual deeds.... in his other writings, he placed more emphasis on socio-economic factors in explaining political decisions, thereby expanding the parameters of political history." See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," in Observations on the "Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives, ed. Juergen Habermas, trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1984), 234. In the final analysis, the "Fischer Controversy" was argued out largely within the confines of traditional diplomatic history (as this chapter indicates).

¹¹John A. Moses, The War Aims of Imperial Germany: Professor Fritz Fischer and his Critics (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1968), 6.

aggressive foreign policy.¹² Fischer contended that the goal of this policy was world power status, a desire which endured throughout the war. Central to Fischer's position was the documentation of German intent written by Bethmann in 1914, the so-called September Programme.¹³

Formulated before Germany's defeat at the Marne (when victory seemed within reach), the Programme listed far-reaching aims contingent upon the defeat of the Triple Entente. It called for the annexation of Luxembourg and the French iron ore areas of Briey and Longwy; the reduction of Belgium to a satellite state (politically, economically and militarily tied to Germany); the creation of a Central European Economic Union dominated by Germany; and possession of a vast colonial empire in Africa.¹⁴

¹²The process Fischer referred to here would later be termed "social imperialism" by Hans-Ulrich Wehler. See below, Chapter Four.

¹³Fischer, Germany's Aims, 103-06. Both Fischer and Moses pointed out that the Programme had been accessible to West German historians since 1942. But they chose to ignore the document because they did not want to accept the idea that Germany had unleashed the war in 1914. See Fischer, World Power or Decline, 34; Moses, The War Aims of Imperial Germany, 28.

¹⁴The September Programme did not mention specific aims in the East, as this was to be considered later. After Bethmann had concluded a series of discussions with Wilhelm II and the military high command in November of 1916, he drew up what became known as the German Programme. The highlights of this memorandum were the proposed annexations in Courland and Lithuania and the recognition of Poland as a sovereign state (though with economic ties to Germany). Fischer interpreted this as a

Fischer's documentation of these war aims in itself had rankled the West German historical community. But he did not stop here. Fischer argued that the September Programme expressed the desires of Bethmann and the German ruling classes. This "unanimous will to power" undermined a belief widely held among West German historians, namely, that a clear distinction existed between civilian and military war aims.¹⁵ These aims, moreover, had taken shape before the outbreak of the war. The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand on 28 June 1914 provided Germany with an excuse to pursue them aggressively.¹⁶

Fischer's research indicated that Germany had encouraged Austria-Hungary to humble Serbia during the tense days of July, 1914.¹⁷ He posited that the "blank cheque" that Wilhelm II and Bethmann presented to their ally was a carefully thought-out maneuver and not a "leap in the dark" (a radical reversal of policy).¹⁸ Fischer believed that

complement to the September Programme and evidence to support his position that Germany consistently pursued an imperialistic course throughout the war. Fischer, Germany's Aims, 313-16.

¹⁵Fischer, World Power or Decline, 70-81.

¹⁶Fischer, Germany's Aims, 87-92; Fischer, World Power or Decline, 22.

¹⁷Fischer, Germany's Aims, 91.

¹⁸The blank cheque of 6 July assured Austria-Hungary of Germany's support in whatever action it might take against Serbia regarding the assassination.

proof of this could be found in the diaries of Kurt Riezler, private secretary and confidant of Bethmann. They showed that Bethmann eagerly had pledged German support to Austria-Hungary. The diaries also disclosed that he had been "ready for war" long before this time.¹⁹ On 23 July Austria-Hungary delivered an ultimatum to Serbia. The tone of the document was undeniably stern, yet according to Fischer, Germany supported this action knowing that Russia would never allow Serbia's existence to be threatened.²⁰

The salient point for Fischer here was that Germany's actions during the July Crisis did not constitute a change in policy. Germany deliberately risked a continental war as a means for achieving hegemony.²¹ The July Crisis was a link in a chain, stretching from the policy of Weltpolitik in the 1890s through the September Programme and beyond.²²

In a second major work, Fischer attempted to strength-

¹⁹Fischer, Germany's Aims, 91. At the time Fischer wrote this, K.D. Erdmann was preparing the diaries for publication. Fischer had not seen the diaries himself. He was basing his assertions on extracts that Erdmann had cited in a lecture which Fischer had attended.

²⁰Fischer, Germany's Aims, 51-57.

²¹Fischer, World Power or Decline, 20-21. Germany's pursuit of world power had not been the sole cause of World War I for Fischer, but this desire had made it inevitable. Fischer, From Kaiserreich to Third Reich, 4. For a similar viewpoint on this, see David E. Kaiser, "Germany and the Origins of the First World War," Journal of Modern History 55(September 1983): 445.

²²Fischer, World Power or Decline, 20.

en his position by demonstrating that Germany intended to fulfill the Programme's aims as early as 1912.²³ War had erupted between Turkey and the Balkan League (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro) in October of 1912. Since Turkey was already involved in a conflict with Italy, the League wanted to capitalize on the opportunity to expand at the expense of Turkey. Austria and Russia had different ideas, and their intervention prompted an international conference at London to solve the problem. The tense Balkan situation was the topic of a speech Bethmann delivered to the Reichstag on 2 December 1912, in which he assured Austria-Hungary of Germany's support. Upon hearing about the speech, Great Britain issued a statement that it would not stand by idly in the event of a conflict. Wilhelm II became enraged by the attitude of the British and consequently called for a meeting with Germany's military leaders.²⁴

According to Fischer, the War Council of 8 December 1912 epitomized the bellicose spirit which had swept over the nation by this time. Among those present at the meet-

²³Fritz Fischer, Krieg der Illusionen: Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914 (Duesseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1969); Fritz Fischer, War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914, trans. Marian Jackson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975). The English edition is based on the second German edition of 1970.

²⁴Fischer, War of Illusions, 157-59.

ing were the Kaiser, Helmuth von Moltke (Chief of the General Staff of the Army), Alfred von Tirpitz (Minister of the Navy), and Georg von Mueller (Chief of the Kaiser's Naval Cabinet).²⁵ Although everyone agreed that war with Russia (and France) was inevitable, the question remained when would be the best time to engage the enemies. Moltke favored war as soon as possible (before Russia had a chance to become stronger). Tirpitz, on the other hand, recommended waiting several years until the navy's strength would be comparable to that of the British fleet. Evidently sharing Moltke's enthusiasm, the Kaiser called for an increase in armament production and a press campaign designed to prepare the nation for war. Bethmann, who was not present, subsequently was informed of Wilhelm II's decisions.²⁶

For Germany's success in a continental war, it was necessary for Great Britain to remain uninvolved. Fischer maintained that the goal of securing British neutrality had been the basis of Bethmann's foreign policy as early as

²⁵Ibid., 164.

²⁶Ibid., 162-69. Fischer had little to say about the fact that Bethmann (the leading statesman of Imperial Germany) was not at the meeting. He parenthetically noted that Bethmann apparently accepted the decisions of the meeting without question.

1909.²⁷ He further asserted that the chancellor never wavered in his belief that this goal was attainable. The key was to depict Russia as the aggressor. Great Britain would not feel obligated to intervene if Germany was compelled to act in self-defense.²⁸ Fischer interpreted Bethmann's goal of British cooperation as an illusion of German foreign policy which led to the war. Bethmann had erred in believing that Great Britain would allow Germany to become even more powerful on the continent.²⁹

Fischer's study clearly indicated that the policies of Imperial Germany had exacerbated an already explosive situation in the Balkans. Aided by the support of the ruling classes, the government had methodically worked to unleash the First World War. Fischer, of course, was aware that his thesis evoked widespread condemnation among his colleagues, particularly Gerhard Ritter.

In contrast to Fischer, Ritter had matured during the Imperial Era. His political and academic views had been molded before 1914, and Ritter therefore was emotionally

²⁷Fischer, Germany's Aims, 59-67; Fischer, War of Illusions, 85-90, 182.

²⁸Ibid., 209-13.

²⁹Ibid. See also Fritz Fischer, "The Miscalculations of English Neutrality: An Aspect of German Foreign Policy on the Eve of World War I," in The Mirror of History: Essays in Honor of Fritz Fellner, ed. Solomon Wank et. al. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 1988): 373-82.

unwilling to accept any idea of German guilt in the outbreak of the war. He was equally unable to shun the Neo-Rankean methodology which dominated the historical profession. In this view, the state was the object of history and above moral reproach. The duty of the historian was to be the "chief formulator of the political will of the community."³⁰

Utilizing primarily the same sources as Fischer,³¹ Ritter formulated a completely opposite argument. In the third volume of The Sword and the Scepter, he examined Germany's role in the war with particular emphasis on Bethmann. In contrast to Fischer, Ritter perceived Bethmann as a helpless pawn, a tragic figure unable (but not unwilling) to hold the military in check.³² In his defense, Ritter pointed out that Bethmann had opposed Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality as a breach of international law.³³ Bethmann, moreover, had supported the annexationist cause only after Germany's early, exhilarating victories. He had

³⁰Moses, The Politics of Illusion, 24ff.

³¹Whereas Fischer had been granted access to the archives in East Germany by the government there, Ritter was denied this opportunity. Fischer's condemnation of German imperialism unquestionably worked to his favor in this matter.

³²Ritter, The Tragedy of Statesmanship, 19, 486-87.

³³Ibid., 17.

done so to appease the military and not appear weak.³⁴ Ritter argued that Bethmann vehemently objected to a renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 but was overridden by the military.³⁵

Although Ritter did not deny the war was offensive in its later stages, he clung to the idea that Germany had entered it for defensive reasons. Germany's lack of natural borders made encirclement a very real concern to its leaders. They feared that the Triple Entente would develop into a military alliance. At the same time, Germany was troubled by Austria-Hungary's declining position on the continent.³⁶ Ritter brushed aside Fischer's contention that Germany only wanted to prevent Russian intervention in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary received German support because not to have done so "... would have meant violating a solemn commitment... and [would have been] traitorous to the German cause."³⁷

In his study, Ritter tried to relativize the war aims of Imperial Germany. He asserted that the objectives of the September Programme were defensive in that they had taken

³⁴Ibid., 38-40.

³⁵Ibid., 264-74, 326-28.

³⁶Ibid., 24.

³⁷Ibid., 9. The solemn commitment to which Ritter referred was the Dual Alliance of 1879 between Germany and Austria-Hungary.

final shape only under pressure of threats to Germany's security by the Triple Entente. Ritter also noted the unequivocal fact that jingoism had prevailed in London and Paris too.³⁸ Fischer's premise that Germany had unleashed the war was unacceptable to Ritter. All of the major powers were to blame.

Ritter blasted Fischer's first book in a review which he wrote for the Historische Zeitschrift in 1962.³⁹ He accused Fischer of having combined all of the documents under the heading of "war aims," although some clearly had been preliminary studies or considerations. Ritter questioned Fischer's reliance upon Wilhelm II's "marginalia" as evidence, since the Kaiser had been prone to frequent mood shifts and emotional outbursts. Fischer, moreover, had misread the documents to substantiate his position. In the process, he had entirely misunderstood and misrepresented Bethmann's intentions. Perhaps Ritter's most destructive

³⁸Ritter, The Tragedy of Statesmanship, 15-20. Although Ritter's claim was indeed valid (that warlike tendencies and imperialistic ambitions characterized all of the European powers), he apparently lost sight of Fischer's intent in writing Germany's Aims (to examine the nature and extent of German war aims). See James Joll, "The 1914 Debate Continues: Fritz Fischer and his Critics," Past and Present 34(July 1966): 107; Klaus Epstein, "Gerhard Ritter and the First World War," Journal of Contemporary History 1(July 1966): 176.

³⁹Gerhard Ritter, "Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese: Zu Fritz Fischers Buch Griff nach der Weltmacht," Historische Zeitschrift 194(Juni 1962): 646-68.

allegation was that Fischer had resorted to a deductive approach in his study (i.e., knowing what he had to prove and manipulating the sources accordingly). Ritter's inference here was plain: Fischer's book had no lasting merit.⁴⁰

Fischer retaliated, branding Ritter as an "arch-patriot" who could not accept the truth about German war aims.⁴¹ He further asserted that Ritter made no attempt to be "objective," contending that Ritter was unable to control his "constant, personal involvement" and desire "to forgive every action of the Germans."⁴²

The diametrically-opposed positions of Fischer and Ritter illustrated the acrimony of the war aims debate, which by the mid-1960s had escalated into a crisis of German historical consciousness.⁴³ The controversy shaped the research of the subsequent decade, as West German historians examined this painful topic.

⁴⁰Ibid., 657-58.

⁴¹Fischer, "Twenty-Five Years Later," 209-10.

⁴²Fischer, World Power or Decline, 113-14.

⁴³Wolfgang J. Mommsen, review of Juli 1914: Wir sind nicht hineingeschlittert. Das Staatsgeheimnis um die Riezler Tagebuecher. Eine Streitschrift, by Fritz Fischer, "Die Tagebuecher Kurt Riezlers. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Echtheit und Edition," by Berndt Soesemann, and "Zur Echtheit der Tagebuecher Kurt Riezlers. Eine Antikritik," by K.D. Erdmann, in Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, London 14(Autumn 1983): 29.

In various articles and books, Wolfgang J. Mommsen has attempted to define the nature and extent of Imperial German war aims. A common thread running through all of these works is his criticism of the Wilhelminian political system. The traditional, dynastic style of government in Germany (as well as Austria-Hungary and Russia) had become inadequate in light of rapid social change and the emergence of mass politics.⁴⁴ An assessment of Mommsen's position, and his criticism of Fischer and Ritter's theses, will cover the following topics which figure prominently in the debate: the War Council of 8 December 1912; Germany's goal of British neutrality in the event of a continental war; the key events of the July Crisis, which culminated in war; and the September Programme, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's "blueprint" for German hegemony.

In his critique of the Wilhelminian political system, Mommsen noted that the old concept of sovereignty was rapidly disintegrating in Germany. Governments traditionally had been responsible for their internal affairs, and intervention in the business of another nation was frowned upon.

⁴⁴Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy before 1914," Central European History 6(March 1973): 43; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "The Topos of Inevitable War in Germany in the Decade before 1914," in Germany and the Age of Total War, ed. Volker R. Berghahn and Martin Kitchen (London: Cross Helm, 1981), 23; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920, rev. ed., trans. Michael S. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 143.

But by the onset of the twentieth century, the European powers exhibited an increasing tendency to meddle in each other's affairs. A classic example of this was the Anglo-German naval race. In 1912 Germany refused Great Britain's request for limited naval armament production. This would have been, for Germany, a clear infringement upon its sovereignty.

Mommsen also observed that traditional diplomacy in Imperial Germany had begun to erode.⁴⁵ After the wars of unification, an era of relatively uninterrupted peace settled over the European continent. Faith in the government to solve international disputes by diplomatic means remained strong among the German people. But the intense nationalistic fervor generated by imperialism, coupled with Bismarck's dismissal in 1890, undermined this faith.

After 1890, power in Germany tended to become more decentralized. The fall of Bismarck enabled the military to vie for an independent voice in foreign policy and become more autonomous on the domestic front. Mommsen asserted that the outcome of the Zabern Affair clearly illustrated the ascendancy of the military (and the inefficacy of representative government) by the eve of the war.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Mommsen, "The Topos of Inevitable War," 24.

⁴⁶Zabern, a small village in Alsace, was plagued by tensions between its French and German inhabitants. In 1913, a dispute erupted involving a German military regi-

Two other developments further exacerbated this confused state of affairs. Middle-class pressure groups, such as the Pan-German and Navy Leagues, vied for a say in the shaping of German foreign policy. The emergence of these bodies demonstrated that public opinion could no longer be ignored by the government.⁴⁷ By 1912, furthermore, the Reichstag was locked in a stalemate. The Social Democratic Party had become the largest political group, and no coalition was possible without its cooperation. But the Social Democrats were viewed with distrust by the moderates and with utter contempt by the conservatives. The Social Democrats seemingly preferred isolation than to ally with any of the "bourgeois parties."⁴⁸

ment and some civilians. Acting upon its own authority, the regiment by-passed the local police and arrested a number of suspects. The military's assumption of police powers over civilians caused a furor in the Reichstag, whose members expressed their disapproval through a vote. The affair subsequently became a test to see who really controlled Germany. The commanding officer of the regiment, Colonel von Reuter, was tried and found innocent by a military tribunal on the grounds that the Zabern police had failed to maintain peace (thereby justifying military intervention). Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), 203ff.

⁴⁷Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Die Regierung Bethmann Hollweg und die oeffentliche Meinung, 1914-1917," Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte 17(April 1969): 117-59. The Pan-German and Navy Leagues are dealt with in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁴⁸Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 26-28.

Since Bethmann could not rely upon a majority in the Reichstag for support, he was forced to pursue a conciliatory course. He hoped to find a "diagonal line" above the parties, as a means of overcoming the chaos in the government.⁴⁹ By 1914, Bethmann faced the overwhelming task of placating the conservatives (who increasingly viewed him as a weak chancellor), military leaders (who wanted war), and the parties left of center, such as the Social Democrats (who would cooperate only if German intentions were defensive). According to Mommsen, Bethmann ironically pleased no one in his attempt to be "all things to all men." A unified and rational leadership remained elusive.⁵⁰

In criticism of Fischer's position, Mommsen suggested that Fischer had attached too much significance to the War Council of 8 December 1912. Decisions made by Wilhelm II proved to be inconsequential. Mommsen argued, for example, that there is no evidence that Bethmann implemented the Kaiser's order to prepare the nation for

⁴⁹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Die latente Krise des wilhelminischen Reiches: Staat und Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1890-1914," Militaergeschichtliche Mitteilungen 15(Januar 1974): 7-28. For a similar viewpoint regarding governmental chaos, see Fritz Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg and the War: The Limits of Responsibility," in The Responsibility of Power: Historical Essays in Honor of Hajo Holborn, ed. Leonard Krieger and Fritz Stern (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 255-56.

⁵⁰Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus, 204.

war via a press campaign.⁵¹ Similarly, Wilhelm II soon changed his mind about going to war before Russia became too strong.⁵² Contrary to Fischer's claims, no evidence existed that a warlike spirit gripped the entire nation, controlling its destiny after 1912. Mommsen did not dispute that "clear, warlike inclinations emerged for the first time at the highest level," but this was not tantamount to Fischer's "will to war."⁵³

According to Mommsen, two points did emerge from the War Council. First, those in attendance discussed the notion of a preventive war very seriously for the first time. Second, in light of Germany's deteriorating military position, Moltke was most eager to strike.⁵⁴ But these two points did not sustain Fischer's assertion that the German nation was bent upon war. Fischer was too quick to draw conclusions from what people said rather than what actually

⁵¹Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 13.

⁵²Ibid. For a corroborating opinion, see A.J.P. Taylor, "Fritz Fischer and his School," Journal of Modern History 47(March 1975): 122.

⁵³Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 14.

⁵⁴Ibid., 12.

occurred.⁵⁵

Mommsen disputed Fischer's claim that Bethmann never wavered in his belief that Germany could secure British neutrality in the event of a continental war. The sources, in fact, revealed the opposite-- Bethmann thought Great Britain would honor its commitment to the Entente.⁵⁶ In a secret debate held in the Reichstag Budget Committee on 24 April 1913, Bethmann stated that Germany could not rely upon British neutrality in the event of a conflict.⁵⁷ Similarly, on 5 June 1914 Bethmann remarked in a letter that if war were to erupt "... England would march against Germany to the last man."⁵⁸ When Bethmann's policy of "Weltpolitik without war" no longer seemed possible (after the Anglo-Russian naval discussions of 1914), he could only

⁵⁵Ibid., 13-15. Another reservation Mommsen had concerning the importance of the meeting stemmed from the facts that Bethmann had not been involved in it and "... the chancellor was informed of the conference... only eight days later, and then only through semi-official channels. If... the decision that Germany should go to war within eighteen months, and that adequate support for this policy should be secured in the country by a systematic press campaign had been arrived at, it would have been very strange indeed to leave the responsible statesmen... completely in the dark about it for more than a week"!

⁵⁶Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 33.

⁵⁷Ibid., 38, n. 67.

⁵⁸Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 60, n. 16, 66; Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 38, n. 67.

hope that Great Britain would delay entering the war long enough for him to engineer some sort of compromise.⁵⁹

The events of July 1914 (the July Crisis) are best understood with this hope in mind. Mommsen believed that Bethmann agonized over the decision to give Austria-Hungary a "blank cheque" because it constituted a radical change in policy.⁶⁰ It was, moreover, a decision made in the hope that if a conflict did occur it would remain a localized one.⁶¹ Contrary to Fischer's assertion, Mommsen argued that the pledge of German support was indeed a "calculated risk." Russian intervention did not appear certain until after 23 July, when Serbia received the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. The fact that Germany did not back down at this point reflected its support of a traditional ally. It did not, as Fischer would have it, denote an unrestrained German

⁵⁹Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus, 277; Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 66; Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 38; Mommsen, "The Topos of Inevitable War," 39.

⁶⁰Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 39. Mommsen contended that Bethmann's policy had been characterized by moderation and restraint. For a similar viewpoint, see Konrad H. Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War: Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's Calculated Risk, July 1914," Central European History 2(March 1969): 55-56.

⁶¹Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 40.

desire for war.⁶²

In Mommsen's estimation, Bethmann was neither "ready" nor "willing" for war by this time.⁶³ Three days after the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum, Bethmann advised the Kaiser that Germany had to remain peaceful and work towards localization if Russia did not act in a hostile manner. Bethmann's attitude here certainly did not reflect the warlike intentions that Fischer ascribed to him.⁶⁴

⁶²Ibid. Bethmann evidently did not approve of the wording of the ultimatum. In 1915, he stated in a conversation with Theodor Wolff (a prominent Jewish journalist) that he had nothing to do with it, but he thought Germany should not leave its ally in the lurch. See Konrad H. Jarausch, "Revisiting German History: Bethmann Hollweg Revisited," Central European History 21 (September 1988): 231-32.

⁶³As noted above (52, n. 19), Fischer made these statements concerning Bethmann before he had the chance to examine the diaries of Kurt Riezler personally. When they were finally published, it was apparent that they failed to substantiate Fischer's claim that Bethmann and Germany had been pushing for war well before August 1914. Unable to accept this, Fischer held that they had been edited (perhaps by Erdmann himself) and then questioned their value as a source. This ignited a "last gasp" of the war aims debate, involving mainly Fischer, Erdmann and Berndt Soesemann. In a review article, Mommsen analyzed their positions and concluded that, given the available evidence, Riezler himself most likely had edited the diaries (and not during the 1950s or 1960s as Fischer would have it). Mommsen noted that the extent and nature of editing could not be determined, but the value of the diaries (that they reflected much of Bethmann's thoughts during the Crisis) had not been affected. As is the case with any diary, Mommsen stressed that the Riezler Diaries had to be used with circumspection. See Mommsen, review of Juli 1914, 28-33.

⁶⁴Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 40; Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War," 64.

Mommsen believed that German motivation in 1914 arose from fear of the country's deteriorating position in Europe rather than desire for world power.⁶⁵ There were apprehensions regarding imperialist rivalry, encirclement by the Triple Entente, and the threat of economic isolation.⁶⁶ In light of these fears, Bethmann risked war when he pledged to support Austria-Hungary. But his motivation was to safeguard German interests, not a desire for continental hegemony.⁶⁷

Just as Fischer's image of Bethmann "lusting" for war needed revision, Mommsen also believed Ritter had treated the chancellor too generously. Ritter's assertion that the intervention of the military after 26 July exonerated Bethmann from any significant responsibility for the outbreak of the war could not be sustained. Although Bethmann might not have done anything actively to encourage war during the crisis, Bethmann also did not work to prevent it.⁶⁸

Regarding German war aims, Mommsen disagreed with

⁶⁵Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 190; Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus, 282.

⁶⁶Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 66; Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War," 48.

⁶⁷Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 190; Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg and the War," 257; Epstein, "Gerhard Ritter and the First World War," 168.

⁶⁸Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus, 269; Mommsen, "The Topos of Inevitable War," 40; Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 37.

Ritter's contention that Bethmann had only tried to placate "... the yearnings and patriotic dreams of a struggling nation."⁶⁹ Equally misleading was his belief that Bethmann had written the September Programme to satisfy the military high command.⁷⁰ Certain elements of Bethmann's policy of "moderate expansion without war" (e.g. the acquisition of an African colonial empire and increased economic involvement in Europe) enumerated in the Programme cannot be attributed to military pressures.⁷¹

Mommsen questioned Fischer's arguments that the war aims had existed long before August 1914 and that they mirrored the desires of the ruling classes. Mommsen did not deny that there had been antecedents to the Programme. But whereas Fischer contended that the war aims provided a rationale for the war, Mommsen thought they assumed a clear, definite shape only after it had begun.⁷² Fischer

⁶⁹Quoted in Moses, The War Aims of Imperial Germany, 28-29.

⁷⁰Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 52.

⁷¹Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 22; Jarausch, "Revisiting German History," 233; Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War," 53. Bethmann's policy in general reflected the desires of moderates such as Max Weber. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 202.

⁷²Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 48, 55-56, 63. Both A.J.P. Taylor and Klaus Epstein supported his conclusion. They all agreed that Fischer was less convincing in his contention that Germany deliberately unleashed the war to fulfill these aims than his argument that these aims were consistently pursued throughout the course of the

also failed to demonstrate conclusively that all of the influential groups in German society consistently entertained these aims. And furthermore, Fischer was not even certain as to who advocated war from 1912 on:

Was it the government, the emperor, the military establishment, the Conservatives, the industrialists, or the nation at large, any one of them, or all of them? Actually Fischer's arguments constantly shift, charging at times one group, at times another with warlike tendencies; but they are never consistent in this respect.⁷³

According to Mommsen, both Fischer and Ritter tended to gloss over an important point. Both offensive and defensive elements of the war aims simultaneously influenced most German leaders. It is equally difficult to discredit entirely the "power" or "fear" motives which figured so prominently in their respective theses. The establishment of a European economic union under German leadership, for example, implied German dominance (an offensive aim). But this also would have guaranteed Germany's protection against the anticipated economic discrimination by the Triple Entente after the war (a defensive aim).⁷⁴

conflict. Taylor, "Fritz Fischer and his School," 121; Klaus Epstein, "German War Aims in the First World War," World Politics 15(October 1962): 178.

⁷³Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 12. See also Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Die deutsche 'Weltpolitik' und der erste Weltkrieg," Neue Politische Literatur 16(November 1971): 482-90; Epstein, "German War Aims," 179.

⁷⁴Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 68-70.

Fischer perhaps was most vulnerable to criticism in his beliefs that Bethmann had wanted war to fulfill the Programme and that he consistently pursued these aims until his dismissal in 1917. Mommsen pointed out that Bethmann became increasingly disenchanted with annexationism as the war went on. Bethmann's peace offer of 12 December 1916 demonstrated his attitude of peace without annexations.⁷⁵ The chancellor's opposition to the renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 also indicated that he was no longer interested in a victory with annexations. Despite Fischer's portrayal of Bethmann, Mommsen thought this more moderate image closely approximated the chancellor's outlook.⁷⁶

Mommsen's position on Imperial German war aims has

⁷⁵Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 49-50; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 211-34.

⁷⁶Ibid. Mommsen has credited Fischer with considerably revising his position regarding Bethmann by the 1980s. Mommsen, in his review of Juli 1914, observed that "... it is interesting to note that Fischer's assessment of Bethmann Hollweg's role in 1914 and during his Chancellorship is far more modest and balanced than will be found in some, if not all of his previous publications. He concedes that Bethmann Hollweg was not an arch imperialist; but neither was he merely a weakling, as the Conservatives argued at the time.... Bethmann Hollweg was walking a tightrope all the time, for on the one hand he must not disprove the assumption of the anti-annexationist camp that the war was essentially a defensive one, while at the same time he had to signal to the ruling elites that his policies were aimed at enhancing the power position of Imperial Germany, largely, if not fully, in accordance with their views." Mommsen, review of Juli 1914, 30.

been well-received by historians. Konrad Jarausch praised Mommsen's attempt "... to combine the internal insights of tradition with the structural criticism of the iconoclasts..." in his various writings.⁷⁷ Jarausch also singled out Mommsen's article on the war aims debate as "... the most judicious summary of the controversy."⁷⁸ L.C.F. Turner applauded Mommsen's article on the relation of domestic factors to foreign policy, noting by way of introduction that Mommsen was "... one of Fischer's ablest critics."⁷⁹ In a review of Germany's Aims, Gerald Feldman commented that Mommsen's article on the war aims was "... the most stimulating and perceptive recent discussion."⁸⁰ Perhaps most significant is the fact that Fischer himself has confronted Mommsen on one point only. Fischer steadfastly maintained that a degree of collaboration always existed between military and civilian leaders, in contrast

⁷⁷Konrad H. Jarausch, "World Power or Tragic Fate? The Kriegsschuldfrage as Historical Neurosis," Central European History 5(March 1972): 86.

⁷⁸Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War," 49, n. 8.

⁷⁹L.C.F. Turner, review of 1914: Delusion or Design? The Testimony of Two German Diplomats, ed. John C.G. Roehl, in Australian Journal of Politics and History 20(April 1974): 122.

⁸⁰Gerald D. Feldman, review of Germany's Aims in the First World War, by Fritz Fischer, in Journal of Modern History 41(June 1969): 260.

to Mommsen's notion of "polycratic chaos."⁸¹

But John A. Moses, one of Fischer's staunchest supporters, sharply criticized Mommsen's treatment of the subject. He labeled Mommsen as one of "... the arch-patriots [who were] politically embarrassed by these [Fischer's] findings."⁸² For Moses, Mommsen (like Ritter) could not accept the image of Imperial Germany which emerged from Fischer's research. Moses was particularly disturbed by Mommsen's allegation that Fischer never clearly defined which groups supported the war aims. What was relevant in all this for Moses was the "universal" belief in Germany's

⁸¹Fischer, From Kaiserreich to Third Reich, 52. He stated that "The Kaiserreich was not a 'polycracy' of forces paralyzing one another, so that political decision-making and activity became impossible. W.J. Mommsen, for one argues from structural-functional premises... that the Reich was 'ungovernable.' In this analysis an aggressive war was precluded by the very 'warps' in the structure of Wilhelmine Germany.... In reality, there did exist at the summit of the Reich a degree of collaboration between political and military leaders." In the English edition of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, Mommsen noted that "... his [Fischer's] point that the political and military representatives in the Reich leadership [were] in agreement, that 'not for a minute... did disharmony arise, is purely his interpretation, and an exaggeration that is in no way supportable." Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 272, n. 306. Fischer and Mommsen could never have agreed on the point of leadership collaboration, since their respective interpretations were pivotal to their theses.

⁸²Moses, The Politics of Illusion, 89.

mission to expand.⁸³

Apparently Moses had examined Mommsen's various writings on a superficial level. As noted above, a recurrent theme of Mommsen is the condemnation of Imperial Germany's politics and antiquated governmental system. The concluding passage of Max Weber und die deutsche Politik, specifically Mommsen's plea for West Germans to abandon the ideal of a powerful nation-state, set him apart from the "arch-patriots." In this regard, Mommsen and Fischer stood in the same camp, a point that obviously eluded Moses.

Mommsen has credited Fischer as having irrevocably altered the course of German historical writing. Fischer's work shattered traditional beliefs⁸⁴ and helped West Germany redefine its political consciousness (i.e., how West Germans viewed themselves, both in terms of history and destiny).⁸⁵ Democracy in Germany has endured, evident in the fact that Fischer did not suffer the fate of dissenters before him (i.e., ostracism by the historical community

⁸³Ibid., 90-92.

⁸⁴Mommsen, review of Juli 1914, 28, where he stated "... a consensus has been reached that the older position..., namely that Germany could not be blamed to any substantial degree for the outbreak of the war, has gone for good.... On the one hand the majority of scholars do not accept the more extreme version of the Fischer thesis..., but on the other hand it does not seem to be any longer in dispute that German policy in 1914 was dictated by considerations of a preventive war...."

⁸⁵Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," 70.

and/or exile).⁸⁶

Fischer's revisionist work paved the way for the younger German historians' critical analysis of the recent past. Led by Mommsen, Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Juergen Kocka, they delved more deeply into the "primacy of domestic policy" to unravel the interaction of society and economics upon politics in the Kaiserreich. Much of Mommsen's subsequent work (e.g. on imperialism and comparative studies dealing with Great Britain and Germany) stemmed from the "Fischer Controversy." The debate about a German Sonderweg (a unique pattern of German historical development), in which Mommsen played a central part, may be seen as an extension of the war aims discussion and another crucial element in the problem of continuity in German history.

⁸⁶Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "German Historiography during the Weimar Republic and the Emigré Historians," in An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 32-66.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE GERMAN SONDERWEG:
 THE BIELEFELDERS, THE BRITISH SOCIAL HISTORIANS
 AND THE POSITION OF MOMMSEN

Every successful imperialistic forcing play abroad normally strengthens, at least for a time, the domestic prestige and with it the power and influence of those classes, parties and estates under whose leadership the success is won.

Max Weber, Grundriss der Sozialpolitik (1922)

The notion of a German Sonderweg (a unique pattern of historical development) remains a hotly contested issue in historiography after nearly twenty years.¹ The concept,

¹The historiographical literature on the Sonderweg debate is extensive. For background purposes in this chapter, I have relied primarily on the following: Robert G. Moeller, "The Kaiserreich Recast? Continuity and Change in Modern German Historiography," Journal of Social History 17(Summer 1984): 655-83; James J. Retallack, "Social History with a Vengeance? Some Reactions to H.-U. Wehler's Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918," German Studies Review 7(October 1984): 423-50; Juergen Kocka, "German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg," Journal of Modern History 23(January 1988): 3-16; Roger Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and its Critics," German Studies Review 7(October 1984): 451-80; and Richard J. Evans, "Introduction: Wilhelm II's Germany and the Historians," in Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany, ed. Richard J. Evans (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), 11-39.

however, did not always arouse such controversy. Prior to 1945, many German historians (e.g., Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter) viewed their nation as having an authoritarian, statist tradition that differed from western countries such as Great Britain, France and the United States. For these historians, Germany's proud heritage of bureaucratic and military development constituted a peculiar and superior source of strength for the state.

During the post-war epoch, however, a "liberal-democratic variant of it [Sonderweg] emerged," literally standing the idea on its head.² In an attempt to discover whether 1933 marked a culmination or an aberration in German history, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Juergen Kocka and other members of the Bielefeld School (so named because the mentor of the group, Wehler, holds a chair in history at the University of Bielefeld) looked back beyond the Weimar Era to the Imperial Era of German history for antecedents of National Socialism.³ Broadly speaking, the

²Kocka, "The Debate about the German Sonderweg," 3-4; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," in Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives, ed. Juergen Habermas, trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1984), 221-28.

³Other leading members of the Bielefeld School are Volker Berghahn, Hans-Juergen Puhle and Heinrich A. Winkler. Since the ideas of Wehler concerning the Sonderweg are the most influential among the group, this chapter will focus on his arguments. Wehler's position will be taken as representative of the Bielefelders unless

Bielefelders concluded that a continuity, though at times circuitous, did exist from Bismarck to Hitler. This had been the unfortunate result of Germany's "uneven modernization" which left "pre-industrial elites" (e.g., military officers, aristocratic landowners, and senior bureaucrats) in control of a rapidly-industrializing society.

This theory was quickly challenged, both from within the West German historical community⁴ and by a group of radical British social historians, headed by David Blackbourn, Geoff Eley and Richard J. Evans. In an effort to refute the concept of a German Sonderweg, the latter scholars assaulted the premise of the Bielefelders that Germany had failed to experience a "true bourgeois revolution" in 1848 with concomitant socio-political changes (e.g., the emergence of an autonomous bourgeoisie and the establishment of a democratic government). Seeking a compromise

otherwise noted. See Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography," 452-59; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy before 1914," Central European History 6(March 1973): 8-9.

⁴West German critics of Wehler and the Bielefelders generally adhere to a creed of neo-historicism. In line with a basic tenet of German historicism, they maintain that historical epochs must be studied in their own right. The inference here is that historical continuity is an impossibility and Hitler must have been an aberration. Thus the neo-historicists stand diametrically-opposed to Wehler and the Bielefelders (and Mommsen, as is discussed below), regarding the issue of continuity in German history. See Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography," 467.

position, Wolfgang J. Mommsen formulated a persuasive argument for the acceptance of a German Sonderweg that integrated valid points from each side of the debate.

During the 1960s and the 1970s, the idea of a German Sonderweg developed radically in West Germany essentially for two reasons. Prior to this, the statist, Neo-Rankean methodology had reigned supreme over the historical community. The Neo-Rankeans were inspired by Ranke's belief "... that the task of history is not 'to judge the past' but the more humble one, 'merely to show what really happened (wie es eigentlich gewesen).'"⁵ Eschewing any subjective interpretations and the application of theoretical models,⁶ the Neo-Rankeans adopted Ranke's idea that the

⁵Georg G. Iggers, The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present, rev. ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 67.

⁶Ranke has been misunderstood and taken out of context, both in Germany and abroad (e.g., the United States). As noted above (4, n. 9), Mommsen believed that the Neo-Rankeans downplayed the importance of culture in Ranke's thought to justify their position regarding the supremacy of the state. As Georg Iggers has observed, the Neo-Rankean separation of history from philosophy and theory in an attempt to write history "objectively" virtually ignored the philosophical and metaphysical context of Ranke's methodology. Georg G. Iggers, "The Crisis of the Neo-Rankean Paradigm in the Nineteenth Century," in Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 173. The American misconception of Ranke stemmed from a group of nineteenth-century American historians (e.g., Herbert B. Adams, George B. Adams and Andrew D. White) who, using Ranke as a model, believed that "... scientific history consisted of a search for facts

subject matter most relevant to historical investigation was the machinations of the state (e.g., foreign policy). Since Ranke had suggested that historical epochs must be understood on their own terms, historical continuity occupied no place in the Neo-Rankean system. This methodology withstood the cataclysmic events of 1933-45, and it was only in the wake of the Fischer Controversy⁷ that West German historians began to challenge traditional, statist history and traverse different paths of inquiry. Fischer's provocative thesis, which proposed a continuity in German foreign policy during both World Wars, opened a forbidden door in German historical writing for younger West German historians such as Wehler. Perhaps continuities existed in other areas of German history (e.g. domestic policies). The time seemed ripe for a thorough and critical evaluation

alone, with no laws or generalizations and with a renunciation of all philosophy." Quoted in Dorothy Ross, "On the Misunderstanding of Ranke and the Origins of the Historical Profession in America," in Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline, ed. Iggers and Powell, 155. For a similar appraisal of the American understanding of Ranke as the father of scientific, objective history, see Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially Chapter One.

⁷See above, chapter 3, for details of the debate.

of the recent German past.⁸

In addition to the attack on the traditional German history paradigm, German universities during the 1960s and 1970s underwent momentous changes and expansion.⁹ The era was one of impressive economic growth in West Germany. One direct result of this was the creation of new and/or expanded institutions of higher learning and numerous new professorial positions.¹⁰ Many of them were filled by young scholars, who would not have advanced so quickly without this growth. Wehler and Kocka were awarded chairs in history at Bielefeld at relatively young ages (both were in their late thirties at the time of appointment); similarly, Mommsen became a Professor of Modern History at Duesseldorf at the age of thirty-seven. Coupled with academic growth

⁸Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," 232; Evans, "Wilhelm II's Germany and the Historians," 13; Iggers, The German Conception of History, 269-71. The critical examination of the past and subsequent methodological diversification (see below) constituted the real revolution in West German historiography.

⁹The liberalization of the German academic community may have been the critical step in the process of historiographical change. For an interesting analysis of the necessary preconditions at universities for the downfall of Historicism, see Wolfgang Weber, "The Long Reign and the Final Fall of the German Conception of History: A Historical-Sociological View," Central European History 21(December 1988): 379-95.

¹⁰To cite some examples, The University of Duesseldorf was founded in 1965, The University of Bielefeld in 1969 and The University of Bremen in 1971.

was a widespread student revolt against traditional authoritarianism in the university system, a movement which found the sympathy of many younger German historians.¹¹

Thus, these two developments--the erosion of the traditional German history paradigm and changes wrought within the university system--paved the way for Wehler and the Bielefelders' liberal variant of the German Sonderweg. This chapter will analyze their position and the opposing argument put forth by the British social historians, specifically Blackbourn and Eley. This chapter also will assess Mommsen's position in relation to both sides by focusing on several components of the Sonderweg. These include the "failed" revolution of 1848 and its impact on subsequent German historical development; the "norm" provided especially by Great Britain in relation to Germany (e.g., the divergent roles of liberalism and the middle classes in the two countries); and the cooperation of conservative groups in order to maintain their influence in society (the policy of Sammlungspolitik and its manifestations, such as "social imperialism").

Seeking to break away from the Neo-Rankean paradigm, Wehler and the Bielefelders adopted a new methodology founded upon theories and models derived from the social

¹¹Evans, "Wilhelm II's Germany and the Historians,"
14.

sciences.¹² In addition to the use of theory, Wehler and the Bielefelders also stood apart from the Neo-Rankeans in their insistence that history could neither be objective nor value-free.¹³ The new "historical social science" aspired towards a history not restricted solely to a "criticism of the sources"; its adherents sought also to scrutinize "present social, political, and ideological relations."¹⁴

Besides a new methodology, the work of Eckart Kehr (1902-33), a radical historian of the Weimar Era, provided another common denominator evident in the Bielefelders' thought.¹⁵ In contrast to other German historians of the

¹²According to Kocka, theory "... refers to an explicit and consistent set of related concepts, which can be used to structure and explain historical data but which cannot be developed from the study of the source materials alone." Juergen Kocka, "Theory and Social History: Recent Developments in West Germany," Social Research 47(Autumn 1980): 426. See also Juergen Kocka, "Theoretical Approaches to the Social and Economic History of Modern Germany: Some Recent Trends, Concepts, and Problems in West and East Germany," Journal of Modern History 47(March 1975): 101-19.

¹³Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography," 459.

¹⁴Kocka, "Theory and Social History," 430-31.

¹⁵Mommsen coined the term "Kehrites" which he defined as those historians who approached the history of the Kaiserreich by explaining "... developments in the political sphere as the outcome of defensive strategies of democratization...." Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 8. The notion quickly became indicative of any advocates of the Sonderweg argument, no matter how diverse they might have been. Kehr's thesis of the primacy

1920s, Kehr scrutinized his country's recent past to unearth the seeds of post-war discontent. Not surprisingly, Kehr's approach found little support among peers who attributed Germany's woes to the deeds of other nations. His arguments alienated him from the historical community, and Kehr remained in relative obscurity until Wehler resurrected his ideas in the 1960s.¹⁶ Kehr argued that the turbulent Weimar Era was a direct consequence of structural flaws in the Kaiserreich rather than the result of pernicious foreign influence. His penetrating analysis of domestic factors and their impact upon the course of German foreign policy provided Wehler and the Bielefelders with a starting point for their research.

The most precise articulation of the views and methodology of the Bielefelders may be found in Wehler's re-

of domestic politics unequivocally has influenced the standpoint and research of Wehler and the Bielefelders. But to assign a label such as "Kehrites" to them is of dubious value, because "... there is nothing very meaningful in a category that embraces--among others--Thorstein Veblen, Max Weber, Hans Rosenberg, David Landes,... Fritz Fischer, all the real and alleged members of the Bielefeld School, and most practitioners of the traditional school of historiography from Ranke and Treitschke through Gerhard Ritter." See Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography," 455-56.

¹⁶Eckart Kehr, Der Primat der Innenpolitik. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preussisch-deutsche Sozialgeschichte in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Berlin: Ullstein, 1965).

visionist monograph, Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918.¹⁷

In it, Wehler contended that German historical development differed from the West because Germany had been saddled with "uneven modernization." On the one hand, it was a highly industrialized country by the late nineteenth century. Socially and politically, however, Germany remained backwards. The persistence of pre-industrial elites fettered Germany's evolution towards a liberal democracy in line with Great Britain, France and the United States. Wehler suggested that these elitist elements retained power and status even after the fall of the German monarchy in 1918 and the advent of Weimar democracy. He further posited that these elites propelled Hitler and the National Socialists to power in 1933. The nagging question in all this is evident: why were these elitist groups able to retain their influence despite the process of industrialization?

To formulate an answer to this question, Wehler looked initially at the revolution of 1848 and its consequences. He believed that the prolonged discussions in the Frankfurt Assembly regarding the political structure and boundaries of a united Germany gave Frederick William IV,

¹⁷Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918 (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, The German Empire, 1871-1918, 2d ed., trans. Kim Traynor (New York: Berg Publishers, 1991).

King of Prussia, time to recoup and secure his position. Frederick's rejection of a crown from the Frankfurt Liberals (in his view as a divine right ruler, it was a "crown from the gutter") denied them their ultimate goals (e.g., a constitution and a unified Germany). Wehler contended that the failure of the Liberals in 1848-49 facilitated the rise of Bismarck and subsequent unification from above. As will be discussed below, Wehler concluded that Bismarck's victory over the Prussian Liberals (the constitutional crisis of 1862) signified the effective downfall of German liberalism.¹⁸

According to Wehler, the crisis of 1862 began as a quarrel over Prussian army reforms but soon mushroomed into a dispute concerning constitutional prerogatives.¹⁹ In 1861 William I, the new king of Prussia, wanted to initiate sweeping military reforms. But according to the Constitution of 1850, he could do so only with the approval of the lower house of the Prussian parliament. The reforms generated much dissent in the lower house, particularly among the Liberals who subsequently split into two groups. The left branch became the Progressive Party (Fortschritts-partei). Clearly opposed to William I's reform plans, this

¹⁸Wehler, The German Empire, 1871-1918, 20-24.

¹⁹Ibid., 21.

group scored a decisive victory in the next election.²⁰ By the following year, a stalemate between William and the lower house had been reached.

In desperation, William appointed Bismarck minister-president and foreign minister of Prussia because he believed only Bismarck could force the lower house into submission. Bismarck's solution to the conflict was simply to rule by executive decree. To quell any parliamentary resistance and to generate popular support, Bismarck engineered crises with Denmark (1864) and Austria (1866) which were resolved on battlefields in Prussia's favor. The Prussian parliament, awe-stricken by Bismarck's success, knuckled under to him by passing an Indemnity Bill. This in effect sanctioned all of Bismarck's actions during the previous four years. As had been the case with the military reforms, the Liberals were divided on the Indemnity Bill. The Progressives refused to vote on the measure. The remainder of the group became known as the National Liberals. Tempted by the prospect of German unification that Bismarck dangled before them, they abandoned their

²⁰The Fortschrittspartei was founded in June, 1861. A new election in December of the same year increased the number of its representatives in the Prussian lower house to 109. The party's seats rose to 135 after the election of May, 1862. In less than a year's time, the Progressives had become a dominant political force.

liberal ideals and supported him.

Wehler has referred to the era of the constitutional crisis as a duel between "bourgeois parliamentarism" and the "absolutist military state." Having come up empty-handed in 1848-49, the bourgeoisie once again was denied political power. For Wehler, the crisis marked another turning point in Prussian domestic politics.²¹

Wehler and the Bielefelders argued that Imperial Germany had been plagued by the problem of "... the defense of inherited ruling positions by pre-industrial elites against the onslaught of new forces...."²² By the late nineteenth century, forces unleashed by industrialization had frightened the elites into a corner occupied by other social and political groups of the right. The so-called Rye and Steel Alliance of 1879 (a pact between the Junkers and the barons of heavy industry)²³ constituted the crucial

²¹Wehler, The German Empire, 1871-1918, 21. At least it was not a complete return to absolutism. The constitution and the parliament endured, much to the chagrin of the military leaders. For the viewpoint of the army concerning the crisis, see Gordon S. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 136ff.

²²Wehler, The German Empire, 1871-1918, 12.

²³Ibid., 74-75. Wehler has argued that the effects of the Great Depression, which began in 1873, provided the impetus for the Alliance and Bismarck's endorsement of protectionist measures (e.g., tariffs) which the Junkers and the leaders of industry desired. Although Bismarck rarely concerned himself with economic matters, he realized that the revenue from tariffs could make the government

first step in the policy of Sammlungspolitik (the rallying together of conservative elements in German society).²⁴ It was an uneasy alliance but one that, according to the proponents of the Sonderweg, proved to be resilient.

The question arises here as to how the elites were able to defend their positions of pre-eminence in a rapidly changing society. Wehler enumerated several tactics that the elites employed to achieve this end.²⁵ One such maneuver was manipulation, the successful prevention of the formation of effective political coalitions. Their absence insured the proliferation of the "Bonapartist-dictatorial regime" because each political group remained in virtual isolation. The pre-industrial elites also resorted to negative integration in an attempt to shore up their positions. They depicted elements of German society which were left of center (e.g., Socialists and Jews) as subversive and dangerous.

Arguably the pivotal stratagem employed by the pre-industrial elites was social imperialism. Wehler defined

financially less dependent upon the Reichstag. To secure passage of the measures, Bismarck solicited the support of the Catholic Centre and Conservative Parties because the Liberals opposed the bill on principle (tariffs violated the idea of free trade). Bismarck's shift to the right dealt an irreparable blow to German Liberalism.

²⁴Wehler, The German Empire, 1871-1918, 94-99, 168, 176.

²⁵Ibid., especially 52-94.

this "Machiavellian technique of rule" as an attempt by the elites to divert reformist and democratic impulses into desire for colonial expansion and nationalistic fervor.²⁶ In addition to a social basis for imperialism, Wehler noted an economic motivation. He argued the German recession of 1883-86 heavily influenced the idea that imperialism could provide a boost for the sluggish economy.²⁷ Finally, Wehler posited that imperialism possessed a psychological lure in providing a release valve for pent-up frustration and glory-seeking among the population.²⁸ For Wehler, the social, economic and psychological reasons reflected an "ideological consensus" for German imperialism.

Wehler and the Bielefelders had seemingly painted a convincing picture of a German Sonderweg. In contrast to Great Britain, France and the United States, the forces of the old order had triumphed over the pressures of the new. The Bielefelders' arguments appeared so persuasive that

²⁶Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus (Cologne: W. Kohlhammer, 1969), 115, quoted in Geoff Eley, "Defining Social Imperialism: Use and Abuse of an Idea," Social History 1(October 1976): 265.

²⁷Ibid., 267. Imperialistic advocates believed that colonies would be a double-edged sword to the economy, providing a source of valuable raw materials and a market for finished products.

²⁸One detects in this a parallel mentality to America in the 1890s. The psychological need to expand beyond the "closed frontier" contributed to the public's eventual acceptance of American colonial expansion.

a noted historian claimed that a "new orthodoxy" in German historiography had been established.²⁹

In 1980, however, the arrival of a small book in Germany proved to be a serious challenge to the beliefs of Wehler and the Bielefelders.³⁰ In this work, Blackbourn and Eley launched an attack on their West German counterparts by assaulting the "failed" revolution idea largely on theoretical grounds (i.e., how one should define a bourgeois revolution) and by questioning the "peculiarity" of German historical development.

²⁹James J. Sheehan, review of Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung: Zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland, by Gerhard Ritter, ed. and Regierung und Reichstag im Bismarckstaat, 1871-1880: Caesarismus oder Parlamentarismus, by Michael Stuermer, in Journal of Modern History 48(September 1976): 567.

³⁰David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung. Die gescheiterte buergerliche Revolution von 1848 (Berlin: Ullstein, 1980); David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). Blackbourn and Eley are leading members of a group of leading British social historians who have challenged the German Sonderweg thesis in a series of books and scholarly articles. See, for example, David Blackbourn, Class, Religion and Local Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Centre Party in Wuerttemberg before 1914 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Geoff Eley, Reshaping the German Right. Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Geoff Eley, From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Richard J. Evans, Rethinking German History: Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1987); Richard J. Evans, ed., The German Working Class, 1888-1933: The Politics of Everyday Life (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1982).

Blackbourn and Eley began by pointing out that to have an aberration implied the existence of a norm. They argued that one is hard-pressed to demonstrate the occurrence of a "successful" bourgeois revolution anywhere (i.e., one in which a bourgeoisie overcame the primacy of elitist elements and erected a liberal-democratic government).³¹ In order to bestow any meaning upon the term, they contended that the concept of bourgeois revolution had to be redefined. Arguing from a neo-marxist standpoint in the vein of such British historians as E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm,³² they suggested that nineteenth-

³¹Blackbourn and Eley, The Peculiarities of German History, 12-15, 55-60, 135.

³²Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital, 1848-1875 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975); E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964). In Rethinking German History, Richard Evans commented that the younger West German historians did not use the British marxist historians in the "... element of 'New Left' Marxism [which was] added to the conceptual armoury of these younger historians, [largely through] the influence of philosophers and sociologists such as Juergen Habermas.... The explicit role played by Marxist-Leninist theory in East German history books [helped to] provoke them into giving theory a similar role.... But it has also been a deterrent, forcing them... to give Marxist ideas a strictly subordinate role... [they] have equated Marxism purely with East German Marxist-Leninism, and have virtually ignored other variants of it, rather as 'Eurocommunism' on the Italian model.... As a result, West German historians have largely sealed themselves off from the influence of alternative models of Marxist theory and historiography as developed in... Great Britain.... and have tried to mitigate this by turning to the USA, and to the disciplines of political and social science as they have evolved there...." Evans, Rethinking German History, 34-35.

century Germany did witness the emergence of an "authentically bourgeois society" evident in the triumph of the capitalist mode of production. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony (i.e., a bourgeoisie rules less by control of state power than by restructuring the social, institutional and ideological spheres of influence), Blackburn and Eley purported to show that the German bourgeoisie did effect a "silent" bourgeois revolution.³³ Both authors (but in particular Blackburn) went to great lengths to demonstrate the existence of a bourgeois culture in Germany with regards to four main areas of accomplishment: the growth of capitalism; the rise of technology and material optimism; the rule of law; and the emergence of a public consciousness.

Blackburn and Eley did not dispute that the blossoming of German capitalism benefitted from the actions of the state (e.g., the abolition of guilds, the removal of internal tariff barriers and so forth), but they maintained that

³³Blackburn and Eley, The Peculiarities of German History, 87-88, 174, 290. Hegemony may be defined as "... an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society...." Anne Showstack Sassoon, ed., Approaches to Gramsci (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society, 1982), 94. For Eley's thoughts on Gramsci, see Geoff Eley, "Reading Gramsci in English: Observations on the Reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English-Speaking World," European History Quarterly 14(October 1984): 441-78. For a useful summary of Gramsci, see Anne Showstack Sassoon, Gramsci's Politics (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

one must also acknowledge the role of the bourgeoisie in the process.³⁴ The appearance of public limited companies in the 1850s, for example, clearly advanced capitalistic expansion. The mobilization of money, derived from the buying and selling of stock, financed industrial endeavors such as mining and railroads.

The technological explosion of the nineteenth century embodied the bourgeoisie's optimistic belief in material progress. New forms of communication and transportation (e.g., the telegraph and the railroad) spurred industrial expansion and increased mobility. According to Blackbourn and Eley, the triumph of mechanical civilization was synonymous with the new economic order and clearly linked with the rising bourgeoisie.³⁵

The notion of the equality of citizens before the law signalled a move away from the corporate state. A necessary precondition for a bourgeois society, the legally-based state further exemplified the growing presence of bourgeois interests in society. The Constitution of 1871, the legal accountability of such groups as the bureaucracy, and the individual's right to buy and sell property without

³⁴Blackbourn and Eley, The Peculiarities of German History, 176-84. Both authors make the point that the state's influence on the capitalistic process was certainly not peculiar to Germany.

³⁵Ibid., 185.

restriction signified that law had become a public concept.³⁶

Blackbourn and Eley also equated the growth of the public sphere with the actions of the bourgeoisie. Associations of all sorts (e.g., sporting, cultural, religious and political) sprang up, in which membership was voluntary and open to wide sections of the population. They provided vehicles for bourgeois social participation and leadership. Cultural pursuits, such as museums and art galleries, became open to the public.³⁷

The above-mentioned examples illustrate the impression that the bourgeoisie made on nineteenth-century German society. For Blackbourn and Eley, this "silent" bourgeois revolution was tantamount to bourgeois hegemony in Gramsci's sense. Regarding the social and economic spheres, the two authors certainly presented a viable case. But how effective had the bourgeoisie been in the realm of politics?

Blackbourn and Eley answered this question with two broad assertions. On the one hand, they maintained that cultural and economic successes of the bourgeoisie rendered the acquisition of political power somewhat superfluous.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., 192-94.

³⁷Ibid., 195ff.

³⁸Ibid., 241.

The existing governmental structure of the Kaiserreich (in spite of its authoritarian character) had not impeded the fashioning of a bourgeois society.³⁹

Blackbourn and Eley also argued that there were major divisions (e.g., economic, regional and religious) within the bourgeoisie that became especially prevalent at the national level of politics.⁴⁰ These divisions inhibited overall unity within the bourgeoisie. Participation in politics therefore remained at regional and local levels (e.g., as town councilors and mayors), where these differences were less noticeable. The position of Blackbourn and Eley regarding the bourgeoisie and politics was, in the final analysis, diametrically opposed to Wehler's stance. Whereas Wehler held that the bourgeoisie had been politically frustrated by the manipulative tendencies of the pre-industrial elites, the two British authors asserted that the fragmentation of the bourgeoisie limited its political activity.⁴¹

In addition to their attack on the "failed" revolution, a second major criticism that Blackbourn and Eley levelled against Wehler and the Bielefelders arose from the former's idea of Germany's uneven modernization.

³⁹Ibid., 127.

⁴⁰Ibid., 261.

⁴¹Ibid., 266-76.

Blackbourn and Eley maintained that this German "peculiarity" presumed the existence of a "normal" pattern of development allegedly evident in Great Britain, where political changes (the emergence of a liberal democracy) reflected socio-economic shifts (the bourgeoisie's displacement of the aristocracy, concurrent with industrialization).⁴²

They objected to this assertion on two counts. First, this model of British development was, in their estimation, not grounded in historical reality. Most liberal reforms of the early twentieth century, for example, were not the result of "healthy" growth. Rather, they were in response to a declining Liberal Party desperate to bolster its public image.⁴³ Second, the inherent danger in using a norm to evaluate a country's historical development was evident to Blackbourn and Eley--namely, the problem of unfair value judgments. An idealized version of historical evolution (in this instance, Great Britain's) was the inevitable outcome.⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., 62-63.

⁴³Ibid., 100-04.

⁴⁴Ibid., 10, 69. Blackbourn and Eley specifically objected to the implicit reliance of the West Germans on this idealized model of British historical development because "... it is seldom based on much critical or independent analysis or on any direct acquaintance with the British past.... an intensive engagement with the specifics of British social and political development has not been high on the agenda of German historical inquiry." They do note some exceptions to this, however, a major one being

For Blackbourn and Eley, social conditions in Germany reflected what occurred in any country making the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. The Kaiserreich was much more modern and progressive than Wehler and the Bielefelders thought, in spite of its admittedly anti-democratic character.⁴⁵ Where they erred, according to Blackbourn and Eley, was in their assumption of a causal relationship between liberalism and democracy (i.e., a democratic government could only be erected in a liberal society).⁴⁶

In general, Blackbourn and Eley have attacked Wehler and the Bielefelders for failing to write a "history from below" of the Kaiserreich, one which would encompass social, psychological, economic and political elements. Critics of the Bielefelders such as Richard J. Evans have suggested that their approach to social history was too narrow and overly dependent upon American sociology and social

work that was conducted at the German Historical Institute at London while Mommsen was its Director (1977-85).

⁴⁵Blackbourn and Eley, The Peculiarities of German History, 75-76.

⁴⁶Ibid., 87-90. Such a link is tenuous at best for Blackbourn and Eley and probably could not be substantiated anywhere, at least not before 1945 (or 1933 in the United States).

science.⁴⁷ Wehler and the Bielefelders were guilty of a transgression similar to one that earlier German historians had committed. Instead of history unfolding from the actions of the state, Wehler's history merely percolated downwards from the manipulation of elitist elements. For the British social historians, this certainly was no improvement and amounted to nothing more than a "social history of politics."⁴⁸

They also posited that the Kaiserreich was an historical era in its own right, not merely a prologue to

⁴⁷Evans, Rethinking German History, 193-94. The Bielefelders generally have conceded that their approach to history is indeed too narrow. Kocka has admitted that "... in a way, it remains political history, but in socio-economic terms. Economic and social factors are not studied in their own right. And, more important, a broad spectrum of human situations and experiences is left out of consideration." Kocka, "Theory and Social Research," 437. Wehler has noted that Gesellschaftsgeschichte (social history) in his sense is too limited. See Retallack, "Social History with a Vengeance?" 445. Mommsen recently has observed, in line with Evans and the British social historians, that "... the Bielefeld school (despite its repeated programmatic declarations) did not develop forms of social history similar to the Anglo-Saxon pattern, that is to say, to write a history of social change without direct reference to politics." Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism: Recent Trends in West German Historiography," Storia della Storiografia 11(November 1987): 111.

⁴⁸Georg G. Iggers, The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historiography since 1945 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Iggers, The German Conception of History, 269-90; Georg G. Iggers, New Directions in European Historiography, rev. ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 80-122.

National Socialism. Conservative West German historians (neo-historicists, such as Thomas Nipperdey) lauded the arrival of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung, for they viewed it as a return to Historismus.⁴⁹ Both groups (the British social historians and the neo-historicists) accused Wehler of viewing the Kaiserreich backwards from 1933, to establish continuity in German history.⁵⁰ Without this concept, the idea of Hitler having been a culmination of deeply-ingrained elements in German history cannot be sustained.

For an analysis of Mommsen's position regarding the Sonderweg debate, one must keep in mind that his standpoint and methodology closely approximates that of the Bielefelders. Mommsen recognized the inherent value of the social sciences as tools for a "critical" evaluation

⁴⁹Evans, Rethinking German History, 107.

⁵⁰In this regard, the Bielefelders have had to fight a "war on two fronts." Although they have conceded some ground to the neo-historicists, the Bielefelders have attacked the arguments of Blackbourn and Eley rather sharply and, at times, in a condescending manner (and vice-versa). See, for example, Juergen Kocka, "Der 'deutsche Sonderweg' in der Diskussion," German Studies Review 5(October 1982): 365-79; Geoff Eley, "Die 'Kehrites' und das Kaiserreich: Bemerkungen zu einer aktuellen Kontroverse," Geschichte und Gesellschaft 4(Februar 1978): 91-107; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Kritik und kritische Antikritik," Historische Zeitschrift 225(Oktober 1977): 347-84; Heinrich A. Winkler, review of Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck, by Geoff Eley, in Journal of Modern History 54(March 1982): 170-76, in which Winkler accuses Eley of "historical bluff."

the past. His beliefs that historical judgments are grounded in social reality and the historian always must express his perspective clearly stood in opposition to the Neo-Rankean "value-free" history.⁵¹ It is therefore not surprising that Mommsen subscribes to the Sonderweg thesis, for the most part, since his standpoint is so removed from the traditional German history paradigm and parallels that of the Bielefelders.⁵² Yet unlike them, Mommsen is much more sympathetic to the arguments of British social historians (perhaps due to Mommsen's lengthy tenure at the German Historical Institute in London).

Mommsen concurred in Juergen Kocka's assertion that to examine the Sonderweg as a German "divergence" from the West rather than a "peculiarity" (a unique historical pattern) would be more productive.⁵³ Mommsen believed that a

⁵¹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Social Conditioning and Social Relevance of Historical Judgments," History and Theory 17(December 1978): 21.

⁵²Mommsen's association with the Bielefelders was evident in the community that the historians of the "new critical orientation" formed, using newly-found universities as bases. The group subsequently acquired a professional voice with the founding of Geschichte und Gesellschaft (History and Society) in 1975, a scholarly journal under the collective editorship, among others, of Wehler, Kocka and Mommsen. See Iggers, The German Conception of History, 278-79. Mommsen's affiliation with the Bielefelders has prompted some historians to include him among their ranks. See Retallack, "Social History with a Vengeance?" 424.

⁵³Kocka, "The Debate about the German Sonderweg," 7-11.

careful analysis of the political, economic and social characteristics of the Kaiserreich revealed key differences between Germany and the West (especially with regards to Great Britain). These divergences, which are discussed below, definitely lent substance to the idea of a German Sonderweg.⁵⁴

An obvious political difference between Great Britain and Germany was the nationally-unified British government in light of the particularism of the German territories. Prior to the age of Napoleon, Germany had been composed of literally hundreds of states, principalities, duchies and free cities. Territorial and local rulers enjoyed a measure of personal autonomy that probably had no equal in Great Britain, at least after the passing of the feudal order. But neither Napoleon's dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 nor Bismarck's unification of Germany in 1871 entirely eradicated German particularism. It in fact remained a central issue in German history until the rise of Hitler and National Socialism.⁵⁵

Germany also differed from Great Britain and the West

⁵⁴Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Two Centuries of Anglo-German Relations: A Reappraisal (London: German Historical Institute, 1984), 7; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Britain and Germany, 1800 to 1914: Two Developmental Paths (London: German Historical Institute, 1986): 3-4.

⁵⁵Ibid., Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920, rev. ed., trans. Michael S. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 64-65.

in its method and lateness of unification. Kocka in particular has argued that German "nation-building" came essentially from above and simultaneously with two other developments: parliamentarization and industrialization.⁵⁶ No parallel situation existed in Great Britain (or, for that matter, France or the United States). Drawing upon these particular attributes of German unification, Mommsen stressed the impact this had upon the German national psyche. He cited Max Weber as a case in point, for whom the power of the nation-state remained a lifelong fundamental value. Weber lamented the fact that unification had come so late to Germany, for it had prevented the nation from assuming its "rightful" place among the world powers.⁵⁷

Another divergence of Germany from Great Britain and the West was its authoritarian political structure.⁵⁸ Al-

⁵⁶Kocka, "The Debate about the German Sonderweg," 12; James J. Sheehan, "What is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography," Journal of Modern History 53(March 1981): 1-17.

⁵⁷Mommsen quoted Weber as having said, "Time and again we find that the concept 'nation' directs us to political power.... to a specific kind of pathos which is linked to the idea of a powerful political community of people who share a common language, or religion, or customs, or political memories...." Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 52. On this point, see also Wolfgang J. Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy: Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber (Oxford: Basil Blackford, 1974), 26-28.

⁵⁸Mommsen, Two Centuries of Anglo-German Relations, 9-10.

though Germany had become relatively modernized by 1900, Mommsen believed that it remained a political anachronism. He pointed out that ministers were responsible to the Kaiser rather than the Reichstag, and the emperor was accountable to no one. In view of the Reichstag's limited powers, the election of its representatives was of dubious value to the German people.⁵⁹ No parallel of British parliamentary government existed in the Kaiserreich,⁶⁰ and Germany did not witness the formation of a "Gladstonian coalition."⁶¹

In line with Blackbourn and Eley, Mommsen recognized that the German middle classes had been more active at

⁵⁹For example, the Reichstag had no say whatsoever in foreign policy or military activities. The most it could do was vote down a budget request.

⁶⁰Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 189, 392-95; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, review of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung. Die gescheiterte buergerliche Revolution von 1848, by David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, in Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, London 8(Autumn 1981): 22. Although on the one hand Mommsen suggested that liberal figures in the Kaiserreich such as Weber and Friedrich Naumann often misunderstood the reality of the British Government, they nevertheless maintained that the constitutional system of Imperial Germany paled that of Great Britain. Time and again, Weber looked to the "progressive, dynamic example of the British" as a rationale for his criticism of Imperial German politics.

⁶¹William E. Gladstone (1809-98) was instrumental in the formation of the modern English Liberal Party. He succeeded in unifying the Liberals and rallying them to the cause of numerous reforms during his intermittent tenure as Liberal prime minister from 1868 to 1894.

local and (to a lesser extent) regional levels of government than historians previously believed.⁶² But for Mommsen, power politics always rests in the hands of a few individuals. He contended that in Germany the pre-industrial elites clutched the reins of national politics.⁶³

The Pan-German and Navy Leagues provided possible exceptions to the rule of elitist political dominance.⁶⁴ In line with Eley, Mommsen thought that these national associations had emerged as significant, political pressure groups by 1900. Predominantly middle class in makeup, they provided the bourgeoisie with the political voice it lacked

⁶²Mommsen, Two Centuries of Anglo-German Relations, 15.

⁶³Mommsen, review of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung, 23. In agreement with Isabel Hull, Mommsen acknowledged that Wilhelm II was surrounded by a group that "... narrowed down the spectrum of policy options to such a degree that he always followed a line close to their conservative instincts, coming as they did, almost to a man, from the agrarian nobility and the officers corps...." Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," Journal of Contemporary History 25(May-June 1990): 295, 312-13.

⁶⁴Founded in 1893, the Pan-German League was a haven for right-wing nationalists. It espoused the uniqueness of German people and championed the diffusion of German nationalism throughout the world. The Navy League, founded in 1898, had a right of center political orientation and a nationalistic philosophy.

in the Reichstag.⁶⁵

Mommsen certainly did not question Eley's central arguments, namely, that these associations were neither "fringe phenomena" on the political spectrum nor merely the result of manipulations of the elites. The new nationalism embodied in the Pan-German and Navy Leagues was an independent movement which evolved alongside traditional, right elements in German society.⁶⁶ But Mommsen cautioned against Eley's premise that these groups constituted a distinctly middle-class movement. Most of their leadership came from the old elites. These associations, moreover,

⁶⁵Much of Eley's research has centered upon associations such as the Navy League. He contended that they filled the void left after 1890 by the decline of the National Liberals. Geoff Eley, "Sammlungspolitik, Social Imperialism and the Navy Law of 1898," Militaergeschichtliche Mitteilungen 15(January 1974): 29-63; Geoff Eley, "Reshaping the Right. Radical Nationalism and the German Navy League, 1898-1908," Historical Journal 21(June 1978): 327-54; Eley, Reshaping the German Right. For a recent assessment of the Pan-German League, see Roger Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914 (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984.)

⁶⁶Wolfgang J. Mommsen, review of Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck, by Geoff Eley, in Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, London 4(Spring 1980): 16; Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy, 95. Both Mommsen and Eley held that the decision to go to war in 1914 was made, among other reasons, to appease the nationalistic fervor of the middle classes. See Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 37-43; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "The Topos of Inevitable War in Germany before 1914," in Germany and the Age of Total War, ed. Volker R. Berghahn and Martin Kitchen (London: Cross Helm, 1981), 36.

were not necessarily hostile to the government.⁶⁷

Regarding economic considerations, Mommsen agreed with Blackbourn and Eley that the bourgeoisie had been more active in the capitalistic process than previously believed. But the bourgeoisie's contribution was secondary to that of the state. Changes in the economic structure necessary for the expansion of commerce and industry (e.g., the abolition of serfdom, the emergence of free trade, a unified monetary currency and so forth) paved the way for Germany's unprecedented economic growth in the late nineteenth-century.⁶⁸ In line with the Bielefelders, Mommsen asserted that German industrialization "... with its paternalistic varieties of industrial relations and the predominance of... conglomerates..., did not lend itself to liberal values, as had been the case in Britain...."⁶⁹

Mommsen argued that Great Britain, unlike Germany, traversed a relatively smooth path throughout the process of industrialization. The British landed aristocracy gradually yielded to new social forces and measures (e.g., the Reform Bill of 1832) while simultaneously maintaining

⁶⁷Mommsen, review of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung, 23; Mommsen, review of Reshaping the German Right, 17-19.

⁶⁸Mommsen, Britain and Germany, 1800 to 1914, 23.

⁶⁹Mommsen, Two Centuries of Anglo-German Relations, 16.

its social status.⁷⁰ In Germany, however, the Junkers resisted the forces of change. This opposition in turn encouraged internal strife and divisiveness. According to Mommsen, the concomitant social tensions necessitated the existence of a strong, authoritarian government, one which could transcend the petty dealings of political parties and social groups.⁷¹

Although Great Britain and Germany both underwent rapid industrialization, Mommsen thought the process did not significantly enhance the liberalization of German society (as it had in Great Britain).⁷² He believed that Max Weber's comment about industrialization was rather apropos, namely, that the achievements of "high capitalism" left

⁷⁰The Reform Bill of 1832 lowered the property qualification for the franchise, thus increasing the electorate by about 50%. Metropolitan areas, however, continued to be underrepresented for several decades because seats in parliament had been partially, not entirely, redistributed. The urban electorate was strengthened only by the second Reform Act (1867).

⁷¹Mommsen, Britain and Germany, 1800 to 1914, 8; Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 28-29; Mommsen, Two Centuries of Anglo-German Relations, 16.

⁷²Ibid., 22, where Mommsen stated "... German society, unlike its British counterpart, was not yet a genuinely industrial society in 1914, either in real economic terms, or--and this is important in this context--in terms of the dominant political mentality of the nation at large, or at any rate its opinion leaders."

Germany modern but backwards.⁷³ Weber regretted that a once proud and self-reliant German middle class had degenerated into aping the values of the Junkers. Weber vehemently opposed the bourgeoisie's emulation of the nobility (e.g., coveting titles and purchasing large country estates) because he realized that an archaic class occupied no place in the modern world.⁷⁴

But Weber's plea had little impact on the situation. The Junkers had become idealized figures: simple men with close ties to the soil, paternalistic in outlook, virtuous, rustic, and loyal to king and country. Mommsen noted Weber's conviction that these traits had become synonymous with a collective, self-image of the German bourgeoisie.⁷⁵

As noted above, Blackbourn and Eley assailed this alleged German "peculiarity" by arguing that an "embourgeoisement" of society occurred in the later nineteenth

⁷³Mommsen, Britain and Germany, 1800 to 1914, 25; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays (Cambridge: Policy Press, 1989), 10-12.

⁷⁴In a lecture that Weber delivered in 1896, he stated "... The rank and file of the bourgeoisie are still excluded from participation in power by the feudal mentality that dominates the minds of ministers and industrialists alike...." Quoted in Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 96. Juergen Kocka agreed with Mommsen's opinion regarding Weber and the "feudalization of the bourgeoisie." See Kocka, "The Debate about the German Sonderweg," 5.

⁷⁵Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 142, 390.

century. They contended, moreover, that middle-class emulation of aristocratic values and lifestyles was by no means unique to Germany.⁷⁶ Mommsen generally has agreed with Blackbourn and Eley here. The feudalization of the bourgeoisie may not have been unique nor as widespread as historians previously asserted. For Mommsen, this was a strong point of their argument and a weak link in the Sonderweg thesis.⁷⁷

Echoing Wehler and the Bielefelders' position, Mommsen held that industrialization had been rapid enough to jolt the elites without undermining their status significantly. Mommsen also recognized the strategy employed by the elites to defend themselves. A textbook example of manipulation had been the splitting of the Liberals by Bismarck.⁷⁸ Coupled with the political polarization of labor and liberalism, this enabled the elites to retain their influence longer than they should have.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Blackbourn cited Max Weber as a contemporary justification of this point: "In the German East the same thing now takes place which has been going on in England for centuries...." Quoted in Blackbourn and Eley, The Peculiarities of German History, 229, 233-38, and 106ff.

⁷⁷Mommsen, review of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung, 26; Kocka, "The Debate about the German Sonderweg, 12.

⁷⁸Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 87-90.

⁷⁹Ibid., 164, 390-95; Mommsen, Britain and Germany, 1800 to 1914, 21-23. According to Mommsen, the polarization of labor and liberalism had been cemented by the

The tactic of negative integration aided the elites in maintaining the status quo. Certain social groups (e.g., Jews and Social Democrats) were branded as subversive, effectively precluding them from attaining true social equality in the Kaiserreich.⁸⁰ To illustrate this, Mommsen pointed to Roberto Michels, an admitted member of the Social Democrats (and a close friend of Max Weber). Michels had been denied a professorial chair at a German university because of his political affiliation.⁸¹ Weber chided the Imperial Government for condoning a "freedom of scholarship" defined by rigid bounds because it constituted "... disgrace and ignominy for a cultural nation."⁸²

Whereas Blackbourn and Eley highlighted the progressiveness of German society (e.g., Bismarck's social reform legislation, the establishment of universal suffrage and so on), Mommsen contended the opposite. A political stalemate,

alliance of the working classes with the Social Democrats after 1890.

⁸⁰Mommsen, Britain and Germany, 1800 to 1914, 21; Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 111-12.

⁸¹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Max Weber and German Social Democracy," in Socialism and the Intelligentsia, 1880-1914, ed. Carl Levy (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 94-95; Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Juergen Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 122-24. Michels was not allowed to complete the process of habilitation (the writing and defending of a second dissertation), a prerequisite to earning a chair.

⁸²Mommsen and Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries, 124.

which had occurred by the 1890s (see above, Chapter 3, 62), rendered the government increasingly dependent upon the goodwill of the conservative establishment. The impetus for reform clearly had waned, and the elites did retain the upper hand.⁸³

Regarding the tactic of social imperialism, Mommsen has questioned Wehler's "ideological consensus" primarily for two economic reasons. First, the German colonies did not prove to be a significant source of revenue. Mommsen parenthetically referred to Bismarck's contention that colonies would never generate large profits for the mother country.⁸⁴ Second, the most active period of German imperialism (the 1890s) was one of strong economic growth. For Mommsen, this contradicted Wehler's contention that

⁸³Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 35. This is essentially the conclusion that W. Carr stated in his review of Blackbourn and Eley's book. See W. Carr, review of The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany, by David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, in English Historical Review 101(January 1986): 192.

⁸⁴Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Bismarck, the Concert of Europe, and the Future of West Africa, 1883-1885," in Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin-Africa Conference, 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Ronald Robinson, and Stig Forster (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 154-56; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, review of Bismarck und der Imperialismus, by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in Central European History 2(December 1969): 370.

imperialism was a cure-all for a sluggish economy.⁸⁵

Mommsen believed Wehler to be on more secure ground when he attributed imperialism to social-psychological motivations. Mommsen pointed out, for example, that Chancellor Bernhard von Buelow's Weltpolitik represented a means for alleviating social and political tensions on the domestic front by diverting the public's attention overseas.⁸⁶

But to Mommsen, foreign policy considerations furnished the primary impetus for German imperialism, especially regarding Bismarck. Whereas Wehler emphatically denied any link between foreign policy and imperialism, Mommsen argued that Bismarck endeavored to pit Great Britain against France in the colonial arena.⁸⁷ Bismarck saw an opportunity in this to safeguard Germany's continental position by diverting the attention of her rivals to

⁸⁵Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy," 16.

⁸⁶Ibid., 18; Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," 301.

⁸⁷This point regarding foreign policy and imperialism exemplifies a key difference between Mommsen and the Bielefelders. Mommsen does not strictly adhere to Eckart Kehr's "primacy of domestic policy" in analyzing the Kaiserreich. Unlike Wehler and the Bielefelders, Mommsen has never acknowledged a direct debt to Kehr. See Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography," 456; Iggers, The German Conception of History, 276-77.

distant continents.⁸⁸

A final element of the German divergence from Great Britain and the West was the divisiveness of German Liberalism. In contrast to British Liberalism, Mommsen noted that German Liberalism had become a splintered, ambiguous movement after the events of 1862-66 and 1879. German Liberals always struggled with the problem of defining their relationship to the populace, on the one hand, and the state on the other.⁸⁹ Ultimately for Mommsen, the Liberals were inclined to compromise with the state and existing political institutions rather than adhering to democratic principles.⁹⁰

For Mommsen (and the Bielefelders), the failure of German Liberalism was the soft underbelly of Blackbourn and Eley's argument. They failed to provide a suitable answer to a crucial question--namely, why the German Liberals were unable to form a large, united political party comparable

⁸⁸Mommsen, review of Bismarck und der Imperialismus, 371; Mommsen, "Bismarck, the Concert of Europe, and the Future of West Africa," 161-65.

⁸⁹Wolfgang J. Mommsen, review of German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century, by James J. Sheehan, in Journal of Modern History 51(September 1979): 597; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Wandlungen der Liberalen Idee im Zeitalter des Imperialismus," in Liberalismus und imperialistischer Staat. Der Imperialismus als Problem liberalen Parteien in Deutschland, 1890-1914, ed. Karl Holl und Guenther List (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 109-47.

⁹⁰Mommsen, review of German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century, 599.

to the English Liberals or the French Radicals and win support of the German working classes.⁹¹ The position of Blackburn and Eley (that the non-democratic, political system of the Kaiserreich adequately articulated bourgeois class interests, and economic success made bourgeois politics less vital) was not acceptable to Mommsen because:

If this is so, why, one is inclined to ask, only for the Wilhelmine period and not today as well? If the economic system generates spontaneously, as it were, that kind of non-democratic and repressive politics..., why only then and not always? One might in fact think that the latter is, indeed, the line of argumentation that Eley believes in, but this is specifically excluded by the argument that Wilhelmine society must be judged in its own right, and not in present-day terms. But if it is not the capitalist system as such, it must be the political conditions under which it operates that account for these differences.⁹²

Thus, economic and social successes alone could not explain the German bourgeoisie's abandonment of Liberalism. According to Mommsen, political motivations were decisive in the demise of the movement. Fear of the Social Democrats, for example, had compelled the bourgeoisie to ally with and defend the elitist status quo.⁹³ The dominance of the conservative, elitist elements of German society down through 1918 (and beyond), despite the forces of

⁹¹Mommsen, review of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung, 24-25. See also Evans, Rethinking German History, 115, for a similar criticism of Blackburn and Eley.

⁹²Mommsen, review of Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung, 25.

⁹³Ibid., 24-25.

industrialization and modernization, and the related failure of German Liberalism were, for Mommsen, the central reasons for the tragic rise of National Socialism.⁹⁴

In debating the question of a German Sonderweg, the Bielefelders, the British social historians and Mommsen have grappled with a common problem--namely, the relationship among economic, political and social developments in the Kaiserreich. Their interpretations differed according to their respective standpoints and methodological orientations. The question remains, though, as to how the historian can find a way out of the morass created by these endless polemics. Perhaps no consensus is possible, as Konrad Jarausch recently suggested,⁹⁵ and one must accept Thomas Childers' conclusion that the debate has reached a "methodological and theoretical impasse."⁹⁶ Historians nevertheless should find Mommsen's compromise position appealing. He has successfully demonstrated that neither the argument of Blackbourn and Eley (viewing the Kaiserreich as a true bourgeois society, albeit of an authoritar-

⁹⁴Mommsen, review of German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century, 599.

⁹⁵Konrad H. Jarausch, "Illiberalism and Beyond: German History in Search of a Paradigm," Journal of Modern History 55(June 1983): 282.

⁹⁶Thomas Childers, "The Social Language of Politics in Germany: The Sociology of Political Discourse in the Weimar Republic," American Historical Review 95(April 1990): 331.

ian character) nor the thesis of the Bielefelders (the triumph of pre-industrial elites in a rapidly-modernizing nation) can be sustained without reference to one another. By integrating valid points from both, Mommsen's analysis revealed a strong case for the acceptance of a German Sonderweg. The debate about German historical development shaped much of Mommsen's research during the last two decades (especially in terms of comparative studies of Germany and Great Britain). On a broader scale, the Sonderweg discussion epitomized the different directions that West German historiography has traversed since the 1960s and symbolized the final fall of the statist, monolithic paradigm of German historical writing.

CHAPTER 5
WOLFGANG J. MOMMSEN
AND THE WRITING OF GERMAN HISTORY

A historical consciousness which minimizes the caesura constituted by the National Socialist dictatorship would, in my opinion, amount to a false consciousness.

Wolfgang J. Mommsen (1987)

By the mid-1970s, the advocates of historical social science (e.g., Mommsen and Hans-Ulrich Wehler) had become an influential part of the West German historical community. Their success in the recent historiographical debates had been so great that many historians believed they were witnessing a "paradigm shift," away from the statist, Neo-Rankean model of historical writing.¹ But although this

¹Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 77-91. On the status of West German historiography in the 1970s and the paradigm shift, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus (Duesseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1971), 33-38; Konrad H. Jarausch, "Illiberalism and Beyond: German History in Search of a Paradigm," Journal of Modern History 55 (June 1983): 269-74; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," in Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives, ed. Juergen Habermas, trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1984), 231-32; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism: Recent Trends in West German

monolithic historical paradigm which had dominated the profession down to the 1960s had fallen, no single successor emerged.² West German historical writing entered into a period during which historical social science confronted methodological challenges from the Right (the neo-historicists, who adhered to the basic tenets of German historicism) and the Left (proponents of Alltagsgeschichte, the history of everyday life).³ The new paradigm which took shape therefore was a pluralistic one, and the boundaries which separated the different schools of thought were clearly drawn. Mommsen's great achievement was to formulate compromise positions which effectively bridged opposing groups within West Germany, and even abroad (Blackbourn, Eley and the British social historians).

The "Fischer Controversy" constituted an important initial step towards the establishment of a new paradigm

Historiography," Storia della Storiografia 11(November 1987): 108ff.

²Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today, 243-52; Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 114.

³Roger Fletcher, "Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and its Critics," German Studies Review 7(October 1984): 452; Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 105, 117. Mommsen referred to the new brand of West German social history as a "surprising challenge" to historical social science, commenting further that "... its impact upon teaching and research... has been minimal. This may change in the future, but so far it would appear that for the foreseeable future this will remain a fringe phenomenon."

because it raised the question of continuity in German history.⁴ The idea that Hitler and National Socialism might have had antecedents in the German past directly challenged the dominant paradigm, which stipulated that historians must examine an historical era in its own right, free from any subjective interpretation.

The "Fischer Controversy" and the related problem of continuity structured much of Mommsen's research. In addition to original works, Mommsen analyzed the extreme positions of the "war aims debate" (those of Fritz Fischer and Gerhard Ritter). Broadly speaking, Mommsen concluded that Fischer was on solid ground, if one disregarded his obsessions with the "War Council" and the "September Programme" and his equally rigid assertion that the "July Crisis" amounted to a grasp at world power instead of Germany's attempt to enhance its continental position. In the final analysis, Mommsen thought that Fischer had overplayed his hand and succumbed to the lure tempting any revisionist: to carry one's revision too far.

Methodologically speaking, the "Fischer Controversy"

⁴Wehler, "Historiography in West Germany Today," 232-35; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Gegenwaertige Tendenzen in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik," Geschichte und Gesellschaft 7 (April 1981): 160-64. Continuity here may be defined as "... continuing incremental change in human society, of history as a developing process, of linkage rather than periodization, of the existence of the past in the present." Robert Jones Shafer, ed., A Guide to Historical Method, 3d ed. (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1980), 21.

did not challenge the dominant paradigm because it was argued along the traditional lines of political history. Fischer did assert that Germany's aggressive policies had a socio-economic basis, but he did not systematically explore this.⁵ The "primacy of domestic policy" became a central issue of the Sonderweg debate.

The idea of a unique German historical development which facilitated the rise of Hitler formed another chapter in the disturbing topic of continuity. At one extreme, Wehler and Kocka contended that Imperial Germany had been the victim of "uneven modernization" which allowed "pre-industrial elites" to retain control of an industrial society. They survived the Revolution of 1918 and were pivotal in the rise of National Socialism. The neo-historicists were at the other extreme, again denying any link between 1933 and the German past. The debate about the German Sonderweg became an international affair when a group of British social historians, led by David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, also attacked the position of Wehler and Kocka (though for different reasons than the neo-

⁵Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Schlussbetrachtungen: Zur Veraenderung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in der sechziger Jahren," in Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (1945-1965), ed. Ernst von Schulin (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1989), 291.

historicists).⁶

The lasting significance of the Sonderweg controversy is that it stimulated the study of "impersonal social forces" (e.g., imperialism and industrialization) and comparative history in West Germany. Mommsen's research reflected these trends, especially during the years that he was Director of the German Historical Institute at London. His conclusions regarding Germany's historical development provided a masterful balance among the opposing positions. Mommsen recognized the survival of an authoritarian, "pre-industrial" mentality in Germany which aided Hitler in his quest for power. But in line with Blackbourn and Eley, he conceded that such tendencies by no means were unique to Imperial Germany.

According to Mommsen, the general trend of West German historiography since the 1960s has followed the developmental path suggested by Theodor Schieder in the 1950s.⁷

⁶Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 113. Blackbourn and Eley never denied the existence of continuities in German history. The salient issue for them was rather what kind of continuities. By their way of thinking, German capitalism per se, not pre-industrial elites, allowed for the rise of National Socialism. The pre-industrial elites also were not the force behind an aggressive German foreign policy. The lower middle classes, which formed the core of the "New Right," propelled the intense nationalism in Germany after 1890.

⁷Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 107.

Historians explored new levels of analysis: the impact of social and economic forces upon foreign policy; comparative history; and writing history away from national lines. But Mommsen wondered if perhaps these tendencies had gone too far. There was in Wehler's work, for example, a blatant disregard for foreign policy, an exaggerated stress upon social imperialism, and an omission of the human factor in decision-making. The historical social scientists constantly were at odds with the neo-historicists over the relevance of social and economic history, and the need for theories and models in historical research.

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Duesseldorf, Mommsen carefully delineated these tensions. He called for a compromise, a synthesis between the "individualizing" approach of neo-historicism and the "hermeneutic" (i.e., interpretive, explanatory) style of historical social science.⁸ The former limited historical inquiry to politics and diplomacy, emphasizing the roles that leading individuals played in these processes. The latter sought answers mainly in impersonal social forces. Mommsen appreciated the merits in both, realizing that neither

⁸Mommsen, Die Geschichtswissenschaft, 15-30. See also Mommsen, "Gegenwaertige Tendenzen," 155-75; Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 108-14; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Die Geschichtswissenschaft in der modernen Industriegesellschaft," Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte 22(Januar 1974): 1-17.

approach was entirely self-sufficient.

To understand why Germany became involved in the First World War, for example, Mommsen analyzed both the structure of the government (see 60-63 for this) and the roles that leading individuals played on the eve of the war.⁹ The failure of Wilhelm II to fulfill his prime duty (to mediate between the military and political camps) and Bethmann's dilemma (having to be "all things to all men") both indicated the lack of a unified, rational leadership.¹⁰ This deficiency was exploited by such aggressive individuals as Buelow (Chancellor from 1900 to 1909) and von Moltke (Chief of the General Staff) for their own ends.¹¹ According to Mommsen, much of Wilhelm II's "personal rule" had really been Buelow's idea (e.g., German intervention in Morocco in 1905), and von Moltke's desire for war before the Schlieffen Plan became obsolete came to fruition essentially because of Bethmann's inability to prevent the conflict. Ultimately for Mommsen, the human factor

⁹Mommsen, "Between Revisionism and Neo-Historicism," 107-09.

¹⁰Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," Journal of Contemporary History 25(May-June 1990): 310; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), 204ff.

¹¹Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," 303; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," Journal of Contemporary History 1(July 1966): 62.

greatly influenced the course of historical events.

Echoing Theodor Schieder's position, Mommsen argued that "personality" must not be neglected in structural approaches to history.¹² For Mommsen, it possessed an indisputable place in the discipline, a conviction especially evident in his lifelong preoccupation with the study of Max Weber. Rather than isolate Weber from his era (as most sociologists tended to do), Mommsen opted to examine him within the currents of Imperial Germany, demonstrating that Weber's ideas had been totally time-conditioned. Max Weber und die deutsche Politik represented a new style of biography which studied the history of a distinct period while focusing on the activities of a dominant personality.

Mommsen's standpoint is crucial in understanding the challenges which he posed to the statist, conservative paradigm. Arguing from a "consistent, liberal-democratic position,"¹³ Mommsen approached the recent past with an unwavering determination to evaluate it critically. He believed, for example, that it was his moral obligation as an historian to depict Weber truthfully (as a liberal and a nationalist), even if this disturbed the community.

¹²Mommsen, Die Geschichtswissenschaft, 42-44.

¹³Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920, rev. ed., trans. Michael S. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 427. This of course was also the standpoint of Wehler, Kocka et.al.

Rejecting the possibility of objectively reconstructing past reality "as it really happened," Mommsen thought (as Max Weber had) that history is meaningless unless approached with specific assumptions and lines of inquiry.¹⁴ For Mommsen, his judgment of the German past rested on the assumption that the liberal, democratic order of West Germany was both morally right and politically desirable.

According to Mommsen, the perspective of historians necessarily determines how they receive historical research. For example, Mommsen's conclusions regarding Weber, Fischer's war aims thesis, and the liberal-democratic variant of the Sonderweg all stood in sharp contrast to the accepted images of the West German historical community. But if history is molded by a specific social context, is relativism the inevitable outcome? Mommsen contended that present influences (e.g., biases) are kept in check, since historical judgments are open and subject to scholarly evaluation.¹⁵ The community scrutinizes the historian's use of sources, his presuppositions and conceptual framework in evaluating his work.

Fulfillment of these obligations in historical research makes progress in the discipline possible for

¹⁴Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Social Conditioning and Social Relevance of Historical Judgments," History and Theory 17(December 1978): 20.

¹⁵Ibid., 32-33.

Mommsen. As research on an historical problem (e.g., the war aims of Imperial Germany) continues, a constant, increasing clarification and reduction of differences occurs.¹⁶ Over time, a body of widely-accepted knowledge emerges and the original topic ceases to be a point of controversy. But progress is limited, though, in the sense that as a new generation of historians emerges, it will be grounded in a different social reality and therefore will judge the past on the basis of new values and presuppositions. Because historical judgments are always inextricably linked to a certain social reality, and since the historian's perspective originates within his era, all history for Mommsen is "contemporary history."¹⁷

A pluralistic historical paradigm is now entrenched in Germany, indicative of the different paths that the discipline has traversed. Much of Mommsen's research, which has helped shape the paradigm, deals with methodological and historiographical topics. He has written about the influence of Ranke on the historical discipline, the role of history in modern industrial societies, the impact of society upon the historian's judgments, and the debates that have occupied the German historical community since the 1960s. Mommsen's works reflect his openness to different methodo-

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 22.

logical approaches and desire to understand the forces that shape history (e.g., continuity, structures and individuals). The result of Mommsen's efforts is a balanced interpretation of German history that epitomizes the rich diversity of the discipline today.

As 1945 recedes further into the past, the Germans are less concerned with the problems of their past national history and institutions of power. Although Mommsen does not think that Hitler belongs on the back burner of historical inquiry, many German historians appear to have grown tired of the question as to why National Socialism came about. The emphasis in research has shifted to regional and local studies. Topics such as medicine and disease, women, labor, and sexuality in German history command the attention of the (now) younger generation of German historians. The diversity of historical interests and methodological approaches which now characterize the discipline is due primarily to the efforts of historians such as Mommsen. His penetrating analysis of the German past, coupled with an unparalleled intellectual honesty, contributed significantly to undermining, once and for all, the statist paradigm and elevating the discipline to an international level. For this, all students of German history are indebted to him.

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