

- 77 GPS, pp 127, 135, 156-7.
- 78 GPS, p 128.
- 79 GPS, p 112.
- 80 GPS, pp 117, 131, 156.
- 81 GPS, p 157.
- 82 GPS, p 124.
- 83 GPS, p 164.
- 84 GPS, pp 122-3.
- 85 GPS, pp 169-70.
- 86 GPS, pp 125-6.
- 87 GPS, pp 167-9, 121-2, 173-8.
- 88 GPS, pp 171-2.
- 89 *Lebensbild*, p 406.
- 90 GPS, 1st edn, pp 483-5.
- 91 Engisch, Pfister, Winckelmann, eds, op cit, pp 97-8.
- 92 GPS, pp 23-4.
- 93 *ibid.*
- 94 For what follows see the sections on 'Machtprestige und "Grossmächte"', 'Die wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen des "imperialismus"', WG, pp 520-7; ES, pp 910-20.
- 95 WG, pp 526-7; ES, pp 919-20. He calls this a 'natural product of the immediate class situation'.
- 96 It is repeated in his later writings also, e.g. GPS, p 239: 'Despite all their social opposition there is one decisive respect—that of economic rationalisation—in which the interests of the workers are identical with those of the great entrepreneurs; both are in turn identical with the political interest in maintaining the world position of the nation; in both respects they stand opposed to the interests of all those who enjoy "security of tenure for life" and their associates in economic stagnation.'
- 97 *Verhandlungen des 5. Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses* (1894), pp 81-2. 'No one has a greater interest in the power of the nation state than the proletariat, if it looks beyond tomorrow.'
- 98 *ibid.*
- 99 GPS, p 23.
- 100 GASS, p 485.
- 101 GASS, pp 452-3.
- 102 'Rundschreiben', p 2.
- 103 GPS, p 293.
- 104 GPS, p 306.
- 105 See page 190.

Chapter 6

151

Society, Class and State:
Germany

Previous chapters have concentrated on the more exclusively political aspects of Weber's theory. His theories of bureaucracy, of Parliamentary government, of the nation and nationalism, have been considered largely in abstraction from his theory of society. Although this has the advantage that each can be isolated for purposes of analysis and discussion, it is not intended to imply that Weber regarded the political as independent from society. The political values that Weber sought to realise, whether liberal or national, and the system of Parliamentary government itself, were not simply a matter of designing appropriate institutions and policies, but also of identifying the constellation of social forces, in particular class forces, which supported the existing structure, and of assessing the chances for change in this social basis of support. Most of Weber's writing on contemporary politics was concerned with the interaction between the social and the political, and with the political significance of class structure and attitudes, rather than with constitutional questions pure and simple. The next two chapters will look at Weber's accounts of the relationship between society and state in Germany and Russia respectively, and clarify what kind of theory is implicit in them.

It should be said that Weber's immediate purpose in much of the writing discussed here, at least on Germany, was not to conduct an exercise in political sociology, but to comment on some specific issue of policy—tariff reform, industrial relations, the system of land ownership. Invariably, however, such issues could only be made intelligible in terms of a wider analysis of the social and political forces involved. It is possible to build up a remarkably consistent picture of these from the different periods of Weber's writing. Historians of Germany and Russia may find nothing particularly novel in his account, yet for all that it shows a charac-

teristic perceptiveness of insight. At the same time it has a significance beyond the particular situation Weber was confronting. His analysis of the authoritarian state in Russia and Germany, and of the failure of both societies to achieve a liberal Parliamentary system, contains an implicit theory of the historical preconditions of liberal institutions. It also embodies a general theory of the relationship between society and state in the modern world. As pointed out in Chapter 1, nowhere in his academic writing does Weber attempt to set out an account of the interrelationship of those forces in modern society which are particularly significant for the political structure. What follows is therefore of some importance to our understanding of Weber as a political theorist, while also showing once again his characteristic values at work.

THE SOCIAL BASIS OF THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE

Weber's account of the German political system has been outlined in previous chapters. It was a type of 'Obrigkeitsstaat' or authoritarian state, its political direction in theory in the hands of the monarchy but in practice determined by the bureaucracy, with a façade of Parliamentary institutions, or 'token Parliamentarism'. Such a system could only persist because it enjoyed the support of the dominant groups, and because the class most hostile to the system, the proletariat, had come to adopt political attitudes which in practice helped to sustain it. It was not simply a question of class, but of the political physiognomy of class. In what follows Weber's account of the different classes and their relation to the state will be taken in turn, beginning with the Junkers.

The Junkers

The most direct support for the existing political structure came from the Junkers, the landowning aristocracy of East Prussia. The changing economic situation of this class, and the political consequences of this change, formed a central theme of Weber's early studies. The traditional country estates of the east had been not merely economic concerns, but 'Herrschaftszentren', centres of political authority:

They were destined, according to Prussian traditions, to provide the material foundation for the existence of a social stratum into whose hands the state was accustomed to entrust the exercise of its military and political power . . .¹

Two features of this 'material foundation' were of particular

political significance. First, the large estates of the east had provided an appropriate standard of living for their occupants, without absorbing all their energies; as a result the sense of acquisitiveness in the typical Junker was 'relatively underdeveloped', and, although he was no absentee landlord, he had plenty of time to devote himself to political and administrative activities.² The estates provided a source of political consciousness dispersed throughout the countryside.³ A second feature of the rural economy was that it had been organised on a patriarchal basis. The labourer owed total allegiance to his master, but in return he received the use of some land and a share in the harvest. Despite the authoritarian relationship, therefore, there was a substantial community of interest between the owner and his tenants, which had an important political significance. The Junker could not merely claim to be, but in fact was, the 'born representative of his people's interests'.⁴ This not only ensured him their automatic support, but also gave him a political outlook which transcended that of his own immediate self-interest. This community of interest formed the 'basis of the landowner's historical power position in the state'.⁵

The economic changes of the nineteenth century had now eroded this material basis of Junker power. This was partly the unwitting consequence of their own achievements in unifying the nation, which had given a further impetus to the development of capitalism. 'It is the tragic fate of the German east,' wrote Weber, 'that in the course of its powerful achievements for the nation, it has dug the grave for its own social organisation.'⁶ The features of its economic position which had been so politically decisive were now vanishing. The country estates could no longer provide the secure and trouble-free existence they had in the past. International competition forced their owners into a ceaseless struggle to maintain their standard of living. The centre of economic importance had moved decisively to the towns. Weber was convinced that *in the long term* these changes could only undermine the political power of the Junkers. 'In the long term, political power cannot be maintained intact on this basis.'⁷ In the short term, however, the Junkers were still able to cling on to power through their hold over the institutions of government. They still exercised political power, but the economic changes gave it a completely different significance from formerly. Where, before, the economic security the Junkers enjoyed had nurtured a political outlook which transcended that of class, and provided the basis for a policy of national greatness, now their economic insecurity compelled them to use

their political power to prop up their declining economic position. 'Political power, instead of being based upon a secure material foundation, has now, on the contrary, to be put to the service of economic interests.'⁸ Their demand for protection, Weber went on, was already assuming the tone of a 'dissatisfied receiver of charity'.

It was not only that the economic position of the Junkers was now weaker; it had also completely changed its character. They had been compelled to change from patriarchal lords into capitalist businessmen.⁹ As with the typical capitalist, economic interest had to become the dominant consideration, or they faced seeing their estates decline into smallholdings. The striving for profit, which had always been a secondary factor with them, now became all-important. The chief goal of their policy was cheap labour and a good price for their products. At the same time capitalism destroyed the ties of common interest which had bound the serf to his master. He became a free labourer, with no share in the product, his interests opposed to those of the landowner. Class conflict emerged. The Junker could thus no longer support the claim to represent the common interest of society as a whole; he represented only himself. His politics became class, not national politics. The situation on the eastern frontier was a paradigm of this change. The landowner's economic interest in cheap labour from any source put him on the side of the Polish immigrant against the indigenous German; it set him in opposition to the national interest, which required a secure defence for the eastern frontier and the maintenance of German culture in the east.¹⁰ The Junkers were no longer capable of pursuing national goals, only class ones. Though they continued to claim a national significance for their policies, this was no more than a hollow pretence.

If the significance of the Junkers' political power had changed, however, their power itself had not. Despite their economic decline, they maintained their traditional dominance through their hold over the institutions of state. 'The power of the eastern aristocracy in the army and administration remains as great as ever,' Weber complained, 'and it has many sources of access to the ear of the monarch which are not available to other citizens.'¹¹ A major source of this power, within both the Prussian state and the Reich as a whole, lay in its monopoly over recruitment to the army and civil service. This monopoly was reinforced by the system of *fideicommissum* or entailed land, which guaranteed an aristocratic title to the owners of particular estates, and a place in the administration to their sons.¹² Even where other classes were

admitted to the civil service, they were quickly socialised into the values of the agrarian aristocracy, which prescribed the norms of official social behaviour. 'Countless characteristics of the social behaviour of officialdom,' Weber wrote, 'continue to be determined by their conventions.'¹³ This capacity of the Junkers to influence the attitudes of other classes through their monopoly of social conventions was a major feature of their power in Weber's account.

In practice, then, the bureaucracy was not independent, as the 'conservative' view maintained. It did not stand above class but was subordinate to it, and the trend of government policy reflected the interests and values of those groups from which it was recruited. This was a frequent refrain of Weber's writing, in the later, as well as the earlier, period. In an article on the system of *fideicommissum* in 1905 he complained that Germany had 'an administration, which has no knowledge or understanding of the broad strata of the modern bourgeoisie and working classes, and confronts them with a vague feeling of antipathy, coloured by agrarian prejudice.'¹⁴ In a lecture on rural society, given the previous year in the USA, he spoke of 'the imprint of the Junker character' on Prussian officials and on German diplomacy, and how this determined 'many of most important presuppositions of German foreign policy'.¹⁵ In his articles on 'Parliament and Government' in 1917 he explicitly rejected the view that the system of bureaucratic rule could be independent of party or class:

Our state of affairs can teach everyone, that because a bureaucracy is all-powerful does not mean that there is no *party* rule. Anything except conservative governments in Prussia are impossible, and German token Parliamentarism rests in all its consequences on the axiom: every government and its representatives must of necessity be 'conservative', apart from a few patronage concessions to the Prussian bourgeoisie and the centre party. This and nothing else is what is meant by the 'above party' character of bureaucratic rule. . . . The party interests of the conservative officialdom in power, and of the interest groups associated with them, control the direction of affairs alone.¹⁶

Any social or political reforms could only be achieved at the expense of substantial concessions to this agrarian interest. The reform frequently cited as an argument against the 'plutocratic' character of the Prussian state—the income tax introduced by Von Miquel in the 1890s—proved just the opposite in Weber's

view. It showed rather the power of the landowner within this plutocracy, since the price of its introduction had been the abolition of a separate tax on landed property. There could in any case be little harm to agrarian interests from a tax system in which the calculation of their income lay in the hands of officials who were 'politically and socially entirely dependent upon them'. It was only a further indication that all reforms would come to nothing which did not make major concessions to these interests.¹⁷

Other sources of continued Junker power, besides their monopoly of administrative (and also military) recruitment, lay in the constitutional arrangements of the Prussian state. The three-class voting law ensured a permanent conservative majority in the Prussian Landtag.¹⁸ The special position of Prussia within the Reich, as 'Hegemoniestaat', gave them power over the Reich as a whole. Although the influence of the Reich and Prussian governments on affairs of common concern was in theory reciprocal, in practice 'the inner structure of the Reich and its individual states ensures that it is generally the latter influence, that is, the great Prussian character of the Reich government, that prevails'.¹⁹ This dominance of the landowners within Prussia and the Reich (and the capitalist interests allied with them) was naturally cloaked with fine sentiments—monarchist, nationalist, and so on; in reality, however, it was a system of class rule. The main purpose for which political power was exercised was to bolster up the declining economic and political privileges of a class, who no longer had any genuine concern for the nation as a whole:

For fifty years now the Prussian conservatives have never shown a spark of political character in the service of great political or ideal goals. Anyone can see for themselves that it was when either their financial interests, or their monopoly of office or patronage, or their voting privileges . . . were at stake, that their state electoral machine got ruthlessly to work, if necessary against the king himself. The whole sorry apparatus of 'Christian', 'monarchist' and 'national' slogans then sprang into action, and continues to do so.²⁰

The Junker class, then, provided the most direct support for the authoritarian state. It was their system, and its authoritarian character reflected the patriarchal relationships of the traditional estates of East Prussia. Yet, as Weber insisted, the class was in a process of economic decline. On this basis alone the system of bureaucratic rule could not persist for long, if it did not also enjoy the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the economically

powerful class of the bourgeoisie. It was the political character of the bourgeoisie that was central to understanding the persistence of the authoritarian state.

The bourgeoisie

'The broad strata of the bourgeoisie,' Weber wrote, 'are still excluded by feudalism from a share in the exercise of political authority.'²¹ Their exclusion from formal power, however, was distinguished by a marked acquiescence in the system which excluded them. Weber gave a variety of reasons for this. The most obvious one lay in their political character: their cowardice ('Feigheit'), their 'will to powerlessness', their desire for peace and quiet.²² Bismarck had achieved German unity—without them. What was there left to accomplish?

So once the unity of the nation was achieved, and its sense of accomplishment satiated, the German bourgeoisie, growing up drunk with success and thirsty for peace, was seized by a peculiarly 'unhistorical' and apolitical spirit. German history seemed to be at an end. The present was the final culmination of the previous thousand years—who bothered to ask if the future might judge differently?²³

Bismarck's success had led them to expect that others would achieve their political goals for them; it had deprived them of all political independence. Part of the bourgeoisie looked for the appearance of a new Caesar; part had long since sunk into the political apathy typical of a petty-bourgeois mentality.²⁴

This lack of political spirit on the part of the German bourgeoisie was nothing new. Yet it was not on its own a sufficient explanation of why a class which was increasingly powerful economically acquiesced in a system which excluded it from a share in government. Weber's analysis was in fact more complex than this, and included other factors which accounted for their support. One of these was the ability of industrialists, particularly the large syndicates, to exert an influence on government policy through the activity of employers' associations, and to pursue their economic interests by means of direct liaison with the bureaucracy. Weber complained of 'the liaison behind closed doors', and 'the disastrous political influence of the leaders of heavy industry' on the regime.²⁵ As in his Russian articles, he observed that the interests of capitalist industry and the system of bureaucratic rule had become closely intertwined,²⁶ and that 'the great capitalist powers . . . stand as a man on the side of the bureaucra-

tic "Obrigkeitsstaat" and against democracy and Parliamentary government'.²⁷ Since they could successfully satisfy their interests by direct influence on the bureaucracy, Parliament became an unnecessary complication.

Thus, though the conservatives enjoyed a monopoly of formal office, from which the bourgeoisie were largely excluded, this was only maintained by an uneasy compromise with the interests of large-scale capitalism. While industry had to make concessions to the agrarian interests,²⁸ it in turn received the support of the state for its economic goals. A reactionary social policy, and a highly authoritarian system of industrial relations, were among the most pernicious consequences of this coalition, in Weber's view.²⁹ The laws which gave workers the right of association were empty, because at the same time they allowed employers to dismiss them with impunity, while also giving full protection to the strike-breaker. In addition, the courts invariably sided with the employer. In the Saarland 'anyone who is a state official dances to the tune of these people'.³⁰ The whole character of industrial relations took its tone from the authoritarian nature of the state, of which the factory was a microcosm. Indeed, an insistence on showing who was boss within the factory became the employer's substitute for his lack of formal authority within the state:

The less political say the German citizen has officially in the German Reich, the more the government is carried on over his head, the more he is treated as merely an object of statecraft, so much the more is he determined that where he is actually paterfamilias—and that includes the large firms particularly—he will show those under him that he now has something to say, and the others must fall into line.³¹

Weber's account of industrial relations illustrates a central feature of his analysis of the German bourgeoisie; they acquiesced in the 'Obrigkeitsstaat', not only because they were able to pursue their economic interests successfully within it, but because they had themselves imbibed the patriarchal attitudes of its dominant landowning class. The clearest example of this was the increasingly widespread practice among the bourgeoisie of buying up country estates in order to purchase the accompanying aristocratic titles, which ensured a social position for themselves and political privileges for their offspring. The amount of agricultural land subject to *fideicommissum* was extending rapidly under their pressure. If there was one thing more than any other which characterised for Weber the condition of the German bourgeoisie, it was this

striving of the *nouveaux riches* for social status. Economically and politically debilitating, it ensured that they remained captive to the existing system. Economically, it meant that industrial capital became tied up in land, and that the attention of the bourgeoisie was diverted from entrepreneurial activity, from 'the path of economic conquest in the world', to a concern with securing the placid existence of a rentier.³² Ownership of land was the method chosen by satiated capitalists to 'rescue their earnings from the stormy sea of the economic struggle into the safe harbour of "peace with honour"'.³³ This 'feudalisation' of bourgeois capital distorted the rural economy, since ever more land was needed in order to secure an adequate rent. But Weber's main fear was that Germany would become, like France, a 'Rentnerstaat', a stagnant society, choosing to live off rent rather than engage in vigorous entrepreneurial activity. Thus, when in the middle of the war proposals were made by the Prussian government to extend still further the system of land entailment, to provide a safe home for the profits made in the war, Weber could not contain his disgust:

This proposal breeds not entrepreneurs, but rentiers, and those of the most despicable kind. . . . The ideal of secure rents hovers in front of an increasing portion of the nation, and the stupid clamour set up against capitalism only intensifies it. The decisive problem for our whole future is how to free ourselves from the resulting rentier character. If we do not succeed, then Germany will become an economically stagnant country, far more even than France. . . .³⁴

It is, however, the political significance that Weber attached to the system of *fideicommissum* that most concerns us here. In offering the bourgeoisie, or at least some of their number, the chance to achieve an aristocratic social position and political privileges for their children, it reconciled them to the 'Obrigkeitsstaat' and to the exclusion of their class from formal power. Weber pointed out that the aristocratic ideal they pursued was in fact a thing of the past; the spirit of the traditional Junker could not be re-created in an age when the rural estate was beset by economic worries. All they attained was the 'physiognomy of the *parvenu*'. The dance round the golden calf was as eagerly pursued in the country estates as it was anywhere, only here it was mixed with seigneurial pretensions.³⁵ It was these pretensions, though, that the ruling circles in Prussia knew how to play on, in order to reconcile the bourgeoisie to their own lack of power:

The current political wisdom which is dominant in Prussia is to reconcile bourgeois money-bags to the negligible political influence of the bourgeoisie, by conceding a type of 'second-class aristocracy'; and nothing would be more unpopular in the circles which are receptive to this policy than to put difficulties in the way of the 'ennoblement' of capital won in the course of trade, industry or the stock exchange, and its transformation into country estates.³⁶

This inculcation of the bourgeoisie with the social attitudes of the Prussian ruling class extended to all areas of life. Even the newly founded trade and business schools, which were springing up everywhere, instilled their entrants not only with commercial skills but also with the social qualifications for reserve officer status. Anyone who aspired to be a full member of the commercial class had to acquire this characteristic qualification of the feudal social order.³⁷ What this striving after the prestige symbols of a previous age could contribute to commercial success Weber found hard to imagine; indeed it was quite inappropriate to the hard task of economic competition.³⁸

Although Weber's account of the German bourgeoisie contains an element of caricature, it is clear that, in his view, they did not fully measure up, either economically or politically, to the type image of a true bourgeois class. Economically, they did not show that degree of devotion to the work ethic which was the central feature of the capitalist spirit, but were easily diverted to a rentier existence. Politically, the achievement of quasi-feudal aspirations reconciled them to their exclusion from formal political power. Marx or Engels would have called this 'false consciousness'. Weber eschewed such loaded concepts, but the exact terms matter little. The attitudes of the German bourgeoisie, or a section of it, were in Weber's view inappropriate to their economic situation, and belonged to a different age. That they held such attitudes was due, in part at least, to the conscious efforts of a ruling class to hold on to its political power after the point of its economic decline. He could only express the hope that the bourgeoisie would 'free itself from its *unnatural* association' with the Junkers, and 'return to the self-conscious cultivation of its own ideals'.³⁹

The acquiescence of the bourgeoisie in a system of government from which they were excluded was sealed, finally, by the threat of an organised and self-conscious working class. The industrialists had no confidence in their ability to withstand the working class on their own in a fully democratic system.⁴⁰ Universal

suffrage had come before they had had a chance to find their feet in the practice of Parliamentary government. In this article, 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie,' Weber questioned whether it would not have been better from a political point of view if in the early stages of the Reich there had been a more restricted suffrage, like the British, so that the more prominent classes could have accustomed themselves to responsible Parliamentary co-operation with the government. As it was, fears of further democratisation among the bourgeoisie could always be played on to ensure their support for the existing system:

The division of the characteristic strata of modern society into two interlocking and hostile classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat, made it possible . . . to exploit the cowardice of the bourgeoisie in the face of democracy for the preservation of bureaucratic rule. The effects of this cowardice are felt to this day.⁴¹

The political situation and character, then, of the bourgeoisie was crucial to the persistence of the 'Obrigkeitsstaat'. Although formally excluded from political power, the large industrialists were able to pursue their interests through the influence of employers' associations, and formed an uneasy 'coalition' with agrarian capitalism. This coalition was strengthened by the assimilation of a section of the bourgeoisie into a pseudo-aristocratic stratum. Their support for the system was confirmed by the fear of their inability to resist working-class strength under more democratic political arrangements. The next section will consider briefly the political character of the working class which reinforced such fears.

The proletariat and social democracy

While it could not be said that the working class supported the existing system of government, yet the character of their political activity and organisation contributed, in Weber's view, to its persistence, in that it pushed the bourgeoisie into the arms of the conservatives. This view was expressed somewhat crudely in a speech in 1896. 'Because Social Democracy has set itself against the bourgeoisie,' Weber said, 'it has smoothed the path for reaction.'⁴² Later this was developed with rather more subtlety into a critique of the character of the Social Democratic Party itself. Its combination of a revolutionary ideology on the one hand, with a network of full-time activists who had a direct material interest in

the persistence of the party structure on the other, was a combination which could only serve to reinforce the existing political system. The revolutionary ideology frightened the bourgeoisie. The material interests of the party officials and others directed that the party should prosper within the system rather than that the system itself should be changed.

Weber recognized at least as early as Robert Michels that behind the façade of revolutionary zeal in the SPD was a party of a very different character. One of the earliest attempts at a social analysis of the party's electorate was published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1905, and Weber added some comments of his own at the end.⁴³ He argued that the character of the party was affected not only by the social composition of its electorate, but also by the interests of those immediate supporters who made a living from it. For them the party was an end in itself ('Selbstzweck'), and their interest lay in maintaining the party as it stood, because their livelihood depended on it. The influence of these 'conservative' interests had made itself felt in the crisis over revisionism. The demand for a formal surrender of the ancient faith, which everyone had been able to interpret as he found convenient, and the attempt to substitute a new one, had presented a serious threat to the party and had had to be resisted. In all major questions of strategy their concern was that under no circumstances should there be any risk to the existing state of the party. In respect of this constellation of material interests ultimately involved in its fortunes, the SPD was increasingly coming to resemble the American political parties, albeit under very different political circumstances.⁴⁴ In a speech to the Verein two years later Weber spelt out more fully what these interests were.⁴⁵ The party, he said, was in the process of becoming a powerful bureaucratic machine, creating a huge army of officials, a 'state within the state'. Just like the state itself, it had its own hierarchy of offices, its own universities with professors, its own 'enemies of state', its regular assemblies. Above all it had an increasing army of people who had an interest in 'advancement', including not only party employees, but the innkeepers whose premises were patronised, the editors of socialist journals, and so on. If ever the socialists achieved power, and it came to a conflict between the revolutionary ideologists and the material interests of those whose livelihood depended on the party, the power of the latter would become apparent.⁴⁶

In the meantime, however, it was in the interests of these groups to maintain a revolutionary ideology and a total opposition

to the existing order so as to preserve their electoral support. Weber discerned a kind of unholy alliance at work between the ruling classes and these interests within the SPD. It was in the interests of the Junkers and the large capitalists that the electoral strength of revolutionary socialism should be kept up, since this would lessen the chance of social reform and would keep the bourgeoisie as a whole in line. At the same time it was in the interest of those who made a living from the SPD that as reactionary a social policy as possible should be pursued by those in power, so as to maintain their electoral support and their own positions secure. This symbiosis of opposites was well expressed in another of Weber's speeches to the Verein:

Have the representatives of large industry and their allies in the field of social policy, the agrarian parties, any real interest in the restriction of Social Democracy? Anyone at all intelligent politically must answer, no! Every additional socialist non-entity in the Reichstag, elected at the expense of parties of social reform, is pure gain for them. Every upsurge of radicalism within Social Democracy, every increase of Social Democracy at the expense of liberalism, especially of the Left, means pure gain for them, just as on the other side it means pure gain for the dependants of Social Democracy, when we pursue a reactionary policy. And on the other side, have any of the numerous people who are economically dependent on the increase in numbers of the SPD, on the increase in the readership of social democratic newspapers, and so on, any interest in the state's pursuing a reforming social policy? The closer the state allies itself with property and maintains a common interest with the syndicates, and the more reactionary its policies, so much the better for the material interests of these people—since even Social Democracy itself will have to allow its representatives to be put under the microscope of their own so-called materialist principle of explanation. Reactionary policies mean pure gain for these party dependants. Despite all their mutual opposition in economic affairs, therefore, there exists no closer community of interest politically than between the representatives of agrarian capitalism and the industrial syndicates on the one hand, and the representatives of Social Democracy on the other.⁴⁷

Although opposed to the existing social and political order, those who made their living from Social Democracy thus had an interest in its perpetuation, so that they could continue to benefit from opposing it. While their revolutionary ideology no longer corre-

sponded to the actual condition of the party, it nevertheless played a part in sustaining the existing system of government.

This completes our account of Weber's analysis of the social basis supporting the authoritarian state. The latter persisted because the Junkers managed to hold on to their traditional monopoly of office; because the bourgeoisie acquiesced in it and had, to an extent, assimilated its values; because, finally, the political organisation of the working class reinforced the alliance between Junkers and bourgeoisie. This analysis determined the character of Weber's strategy for reform, which will be discussed in the next section.

A STRATEGY FOR BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY

Weber's strategy for change was intimately linked with the sociopolitical analysis outlined in the first part of the chapter. At least until late on in the World War, this strategy was less concerned with constitutional reform itself, than with bringing about a new alignment of social and political forces which would undermine support for the existing system of government. One part of this strategy lay in detaching the bourgeoisie from their subservience to the authoritarian state—by seeking to drive a wedge between the interests of industrial and agrarian capitalism, by attacking the social status system which reconciled the bourgeoisie to the existing order, and by exposing their fears of Social Democracy as empty. The other part of the strategy involved seeking to draw the working class away from a negative, oppositional attitude to capitalist society by means of a social policy which encouraged co-operation rather than outright opposition. In this way a social coalition could emerge capable of supporting bourgeois democracy.

To speak of Weber having a 'strategy' can perhaps be misleading. It is not meant to imply that he was himself engaged in any sustained campaign to construct the kind of coalition he saw as necessary. He was not a professional politician of this kind. Yet it is possible to talk of him having a strategy in the sense that his various interventions as a propagandist in policy issues formed a coherent and consistent whole, which made sense in terms of the social analysis just considered. What is important here is not so much the actual political effectiveness of Weber's interventions, but rather the coherence of his perception of his own society. The different aspects of this 'strategy' will be considered in turn.

A recurrent theme of Weber's political speeches and writings

was the necessity for a complete break between the forces of industrial capitalism and the rural landowning class. A typical example of this theme is a speech he made at the founding meeting of Naumann's National Social Party in December 1896, in which he insisted that there was only one meaningful choice in German politics: either to support the feudal reaction or to promote bourgeois independence.⁴⁸ Although Weber had himself been partly responsible for the change of direction in Naumann's political development, which led to the foundation of the new party, he was critical of the venture because Naumann failed to recognise the necessity of this fundamental choice. Naumann's concern to make the party a supporter of the economically disadvantaged, wherever they might be, threatened to turn it into a kind of 'jumping jack', turning against the agrarian interests one moment, and against large-scale industry the next. A viable party could not be constructed out of this kind of purely ethical motivation, but only on the basis of a clear political recognition that there was only one choice available: 'either to promote bourgeois development or unconsciously to support the feudal reaction'.⁴⁹ A party of the 'fourth estate' could only serve to strengthen one or other of the dominant forces, whether it wanted to or not. The question was: which one? Weber insisted that the new party must become a 'national party of bourgeois freedom', since this was what Germany needed above all.

Two areas of policy that Weber regarded as particularly crucial to driving a wedge between the bourgeoisie and the rural landowners were the tariff issue and the system of entailed land. He was outspoken on both. In the speech he made to the Protestant Social Congress in 1897 on 'Germany as an Industrial State' he treated the tariff issue both as a touchstone for the kind of society Germany was to become, and as crucial to the independent development of the bourgeoisie. The consequence of tariff protection and of the 'internal market' it created was to make the bourgeoisie inward looking, and to confirm the coalition of interests between industrial and agrarian capitalism. While nothing, in Weber's view, could hinder the development of German industry—it was an irreversible process—the ending of tariff protection was a necessary step to the political independence of the bourgeoisie. He said at the end of his speech:

Everyone here is looking for a bourgeois politics; they want the bourgeoisie to free itself from its unnatural coalition and show an independent outlook; they want it to return to the self-

conscious cultivation of its own ideals, in the interests of a prosperous social development and the development of the country's political freedom.⁵⁰

Weber was equally explicit about the need to check the extension of the system of entailed land and close the avenue to the 'feudalisation of bourgeois capital'. In both 1904 and 1916 proposals were made by the Prussian government to extend the amount of land subject to *fideicommissum*, so as both to secure more rent for existing holders and to satisfy the demand for new estates. On each occasion⁵¹ Weber wrote articles attacking this further capitulation to the interests of agrarian capitalism, 'which sacrifices hundreds of thousands of acres of German soil to the contemptible striving for aristocratic titles or a pseudo-aristocratic position'.⁵² In both articles he put up counter-proposals, which would have the effect of restricting the extension to families of at least two generations' standing on the land and to areas of woodland only, and of giving protection to the small independent farmer.⁵³ A central argument was the consideration of social policy: the desirability of maintaining a strong rural population of independent farmers. But Weber linked this, typically, with the wider political consideration, of the necessity to close off this avenue to satisfying the quasi-feudal aspirations of his own class.

The question of tariffs and the system of entailed land were only two of the critical issues on which Weber sought to detach the bourgeoisie from the Junker ruling class. He also set out to expose their fears of the 'red spectre' as illusory. A particularly notable example of this was a speech he made at the Mannheim meeting of the Verein in 1907.⁵⁴ The subject for debate was the constitution and administration of local government, and it developed into an argument on the extension of the suffrage, with many fears being expressed of the consequences of the Social Democrats attaining power as a result in the large towns and cities. Weber sought to ridicule such fears. In the event of the socialists attaining office, he argued, one of the first consequences would be the emergence of a conflict between the bearers of its revolutionary ideology and the host of its supporters with a material interest in their own advancement. The former would be the ones in real danger. In the long run it would not be Social Democracy which conquered city and state, but rather the latter which conquered Social Democracy.⁵⁵ The faint-hearted should take a lesson from the Mannheim party congress, Weber went on. The Russian socialists, who attended as spectators, must have been shaking

their heads at the spectacle of a self-confessed revolutionary assembly behaving like a collection of petty-bourgeois innkeepers. There was no word of revolutionary enthusiasm, only 'a feeble, niggling, pettifogging style of argument and debate, instead of the Catalinarian energy of faith', which the Russians were accustomed to in their own assemblies.⁵⁶ But what would be the actual effect of socialist economic policy carried out in practice? Weber asked. They should take a look at towns where socialists were already in power, such as Catania, the main industrial centre of Sicily. The policy of the socialist council there had been precisely the same as the bourgeois one it replaced, of attracting the maximum amount of industry to the town. Only the motive was different. Bourgeois councils wanted industry so as to ease the tax burden on the citizens, socialists so as to bring favourable employment opportunities for the workers. As to the attempt to municipalise the bakeries in Catania, that had collapsed and led to the discredit of the socialist administration, not, however, without the citizens enjoying some good cheap bread for a while. Any similar attempt, Weber concluded, to carry out futurist socialist policies in Germany on the basis of its existing social and economic order would pay the same penalty. 'The first to leave the party in the lurch would be its own supporters, the working class.'⁵⁷

Robert Michels wrote to Weber after the meeting, expressing some consternation at the savagery of his attack on Social Democracy. Weber replied that his purpose had not been to criticise Social Democracy itself, so much as to make fun of those who were afraid of it.⁵⁸ In a further letter he urged Michels to regard the speech which he found so puzzling as the exhortation 'of a class-conscious bourgeois to the faint-hearts of his own class'.⁵⁹ While fairly representing Weber's views on the SPD, the speech was thus also a typical example of his concern to free his class from the fears which kept them in thrall to the existing order.

The animosity Weber showed towards the SPD did not extend to the working class itself. If one part of his strategy involved seeking to detach the bourgeoisie from its support for the system, the other part sought to encourage in the working class a readiness to co-operate with bourgeois democracy, by means of a progressive social policy. This did not mean the kind of paternalist welfare policy traditional in Germany, which was only another expression of the Junker social outlook. It meant rather one which gave the working class increased opportunity to exercise responsibility for themselves. Central in this policy was the position of the trades unions, which Weber regarded with as much favour as he showed

disfavour towards the SPD. They offered the means for developing a spirit of independence and political maturity within the working class. But they could only do so if they were freed from the legal obstructions with which they were encumbered.

The issue of trade union rights formed one of the central areas of controversy within the Verein für Sozialpolitik, and is one of the chief criteria used by Lindenlaub for distinguishing between a 'liberal' and a 'conservative' wing.⁶⁰ The main figure in the controversy was Lujo Brentano, who from the 1860s onwards had been a student and admirer of British industrial practice, and who advocated the development in Germany of trades unions with the effective right to collective bargaining on the British pattern.⁶¹ In theory German workers were accorded the rights to free association and withdrawal of labour under the constitution. But in practice these were rendered ineffectual by clauses which gave full legal protection to blacklegs and forbade the use of any pressure on workers to take part in industrial action.⁶² The 'liberals' in the Verein demanded the removal of these offending clauses, so that the unions would be strong enough to bargain with employers on an equal footing. This was partly an indication of their faith in the power of the market to produce a balance between the two sides of industry. More important, however, was the value they placed on the development of an independent labour movement, capable of standing up for itself, and taking its own decisions on the social and welfare interests of its members. The 'conservative' fear of too much trade union power, and their preference for bureaucratic regulation as the solution to social conflict, was characterised by the liberals in the slogan: 'Everything for the people, nothing by the people'.⁶³

Weber was firmly on the 'liberal' side in this controversy. In the Verein debate on industrial relations in 1905⁶⁴ he made a scathing attack on the patriarchal relationships within German industry, on the 'authoritarian mentality, the need to have everyone regimented, ordered about, constructed, which grips the state and the system of industrial relations in present-day Germany'.⁶⁵ Characteristically, he linked it with the political system as a whole. The attitudes of the typical industrialist reflected the qualities which 'a history of past suppression had stamped on him and which the pressure of the authoritarian system may make permanent'.⁶⁶ These attitudes were in turn responsible for dictating the character of the working class, and were reflected in the laws which governed industrial relations. The law which punished a striker for putting pressure on those who stayed at work was 'a law

for old women, a protection for cowardice'. It was also completely one-sided, since it gave full protection to those who took no part in a strike, while enjoying its advantages, yet at the same time permitted a striker to be dismissed with impunity. What was needed was a system of free and independent trades unions, enjoying the effective protection of the law. Weber went on to contrast the trades unions favourably as agents for the education of the working class with Social Democracy as a whole. They provided the 'only defence of idealism' within the SPD, the only 'guarantee of a political, manly, free independence of outlook'.⁶⁷ It was therefore essential that they be defended.

A rather more systematic exposition of Weber's position on social policy is contained in a memorandum he wrote in 1912.⁶⁸ The context of this was the attempt by a group from the Verein to create a new initiative for social policy by propagating an agreed set of minimum aims, if necessary through creating a special organisation for the purpose. In the end the initiative came to nothing because of disagreement over whether members of the SPD should be invited to join in, but Weber's memorandum provides a useful indication of what he thought these minimum aims were. In the sphere of workers' rights, they rejected all approaches to the problem from the standpoint of the rights of owners, or of patriarchalism, or treating the workers as objects of bureaucratic regulation. Workers should have an equal right to participate in collective agreements on working conditions and their organisations should be strengthened to this end. They regarded the increasingly one-sided power of employers' associations, backed by the support of the police and the courts, as an evil, as also the total supremacy of capital in the areas of heavy industry in liaison with the power of the state, since 'we wish to live in a land of citizens, not of slaves'.⁶⁹

There is no doubt that Weber regarded the increased autonomy of working-class organisations as valuable in itself. At the same time he was alive to its wider political significance. A strong trade union movement, capable of pursuing its interests successfully through collective agreements with employers, would have a powerful educative influence on the working class towards co-operation with a bourgeois democracy.⁷⁰ A hope he had expressed in the Inaugural Address had been for the development of an aristocracy of the working class, which, partly through the economically educative influence of an organised labour movement would move towards political maturity and become a fitting ally for the bourgeoisie.⁷¹ The British model of industrial relations, as

advocated by Brentano, thus had for Weber a political significance also. Where the SPD was caught in the sterility of the German political structure, the trades unions, in his view, offered the working class a more positive way out.⁷²

It has often been pointed out that Weber's political position, as represented in these and similar proposals, was one which cut across the existing political parties. Since he broke with the National Liberals at the end of the 1880s for their failure to take issues of social policy seriously and their commitment to an 'outdated economic dogmatism', and at the same time criticised the more left-oriented 'Freisinnige' for their apolitical and anti-national character, there was no natural home for him in the German political system.⁷³ He was always at odds with the policies of the existing parties. The failure of the kind of programme he advocated to achieve anything has been taken as evidence either of his basic unsuitability for politics⁷⁴ or else of the incompetence of the Verein in propagating a progressive social policy. Certainly the Verein was largely ineffectual as a propagandist body, as Weber recognised. Yet the failure of the progressive national liberalism he represented was itself a product of the system and its incapacity for change. His analysis of the 'Obrigkeitsstaat' was acute, and his strategy for bourgeois democracy made good sense in terms of his own assumptions. That such a strategy never came to anything was mainly because the interests in perpetuating the existing system were too powerful and too deeply entrenched. Weber himself realised this. As he wrote in one of his wartime articles, 'There is no doubt at all that only the pressure of some absolutely compelling political circumstance could bring about any change here. Certainly a Parliamentary system does not arrive of its own accord.'⁷⁵ In the event it was only the threat of military collapse that could bring any change at all. Weber's reaction to this will be discussed briefly before proceeding to some conclusions.

WAR AND REVOLUTION

In the first instance the effect of the war, in Weber's view, was to strengthen the hold of the existing dominant groups over German politics. The influence of heavy industry on government policy increased, as did also the hold of the Prussian conservatives over the formal institutions of state. The characteristic product of this alliance was the proposal of the Prussian government in the middle of the war to extend the system of *fideicommissum* still further,

which Weber described as the 'most intolerable thing that could be ventured against the nation by a minority clinging to power by means of a plutocratic suffrage'.⁷⁶ As the war progressed, however, it also increasingly exposed the weakness of the German political system. The same defects which, Weber believed, had been responsible for the débâcles of prewar diplomacy, in particular the lack of any clear line of responsibility for policy, now revealed themselves in the conduct of the war itself. This was demonstrated not only in the chronic uncertainty over war aims, but in specific decisions as well, among which the decision to engage in unlimited U-boat warfare was to Weber the most damaging of all. The appeal of the admirals to public opinion against the Chancellor took the decision away from the sphere of careful strategic calculation and into the arena of demagoguery and 'Gefühlspolitik', and showed a degree of irresponsibility that would have been impossible in a Parliamentary system.⁷⁷ Previously the problem had been the political control of bureaucracy but now the military was added as well. As he wrote in an article towards the end of the war, there had existed in Germany from the start of the war, and openly from the beginning of 1916, not one but a number of governments, all contending with each other for the control of policy. All the official steps taken towards peace had been discredited by the publication of contradictory speeches and telegrams from dynastic or military circles, which were never placed before the appropriate political authorities for approval. This was the 'fatal weakness' which prevented the creation of a common political will in the German people.⁷⁸

The regime was further weakened by its persistent failure as the war progressed to make any political concessions to the troops at the front. Weber argued that giving them the opportunity to participate in the postwar reconstruction through the ballot box was not merely a matter of justice, but increasingly urgent if a bitter social conflict was to be avoided, which would make a German victory impossible and undermine her postwar development. 'If there is any further "no" to reform,' he wrote at the beginning of 1918, 'no one will be able to hold them back.'⁷⁹ It was in these circumstances, when the inability of the system of government either to maintain political direction over the war, or to meet the political aspirations of the men at the front, had become clear, that Weber published his two major series of wartime articles on the suffrage and Parliament respectively, which marked the culmination of his thinking about political institutions up to this point. The content of these articles has already been dis-

cussed, and will not be repeated here. Two considerations, however, are worth emphasising. The first is that Weber's series on 'Parliament and Government' contained an important final section, omitted from the analysis in Chapter 4, since it was not so relevant to his general theory of Parliament, in which he delivered a sustained attack on the Prussian three-class voting law and on the privileged position of Prussia within the Reich.⁸⁰ Both of these provided important supports for the perpetuation of Junker power. In the context of Weber's social analysis, democratisation was not merely a formal political device for encouraging leadership, but also a substantive measure to reduce the power of a particular class. Secondly, it is significant that Weber only turned to constitutional discussion at a point when a widespread mood for change had already developed, and when its introduction was now a more realistic possibility. Thus it was not simply a question of Weber himself becoming more alive to institutional factors at this point. It was equally a question of a change in public attitudes, which made institutional reform a more serious possibility.

The circumstances in which Parliamentary democracy was finally instituted, however, were very different from those Weber had expected or hoped. It came 'burdened with the debts' of the old regime,⁸¹ its first task being to incur the odium of suing for peace at the insistence of the generals. It was further weakened by the refusal of the Kaiser to resign, which fanned the flames of revolution, and led directly to the proclamation of a republic.⁸² Finally, it was threatened by the 'antics' of the revolutionary socialists, which Weber believed could only pave the way for reaction.⁸³ In his letters and speeches at the end of 1918 he directed most of his animus at the activities of the revolutionary groups associated with the Munich and Berlin soviets. Their 'ecstasy of revolution', he argued, was a kind of narcotic, protecting them from the real hardship facing the country.⁸⁴ Their schemes for industrial reorganisation and for a revolutionary leap to a socialist society were pure fantasies, which bore no relation to the shattered state of industry, and would only breed disillusion if ever tried. 'I fear,' he wrote to Else Jaffe, 'that when it becomes clear that faith can certainly move mountains, but not save ruined finances and lack of capital, their disappointment will be intolerable, and leave them inwardly bankrupt.'⁸⁵ The only consequence of an uprising would be the invasion of the enemy and the consolidation of reactionary forces. It would follow the typical course of revolutions, and end up with the same powers in control as when it started.⁸⁶ The 'mad Liebknecht bands' would have to make their

putsch; this was unavoidable. The important thing was that they should be suppressed as quickly as possible, so as not to give an opportunity for wild reaction.⁸⁷ When the end finally came for Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Weber could express no sympathy. 'Liebknecht called up the street to fight,' was his comment; 'the street has dispatched him.'⁸⁸

Weber was much more favourably disposed towards the majority socialists of the SPD. He welcomed the sense of responsibility they had shown in seeking to control the revolutionary upsurge, and get the better of the 'Bolsheviks'.⁸⁹ This favourable attitude should not, however, be interpreted, as some have done, to mean that Weber was moving towards the left. This, like a number of other misconceptions about Weber's politics, can be traced to J P Mayer's book, in this particular instance to a mistranslation of one of Weber's speeches at the end of 1918, in which Mayer has Weber saying that he was 'so near to Social Democracy as to be indistinguishable from it'.⁹⁰ In fact what Weber said was that his position was indistinguishable from 'many of its economically sophisticated members'—that is, those who recognised the necessity of capitalism!—and in fact he went on in his speech to explain why he could not be a Social Democrat.⁹¹ Marianne Weber says explicitly that in his speeches for the Democratic Party at the end of the year he sought to move the party against the Left, which he criticised particularly for its 'stupid hatred of the entrepreneur'.⁹² A central theme of all these speeches was that the reconstruction of German industry could only be achieved by the entrepreneurial class, not by means of socialist experiments.⁹³ One reason for this was the desperate need for foreign credit, which would only be made available to a regime which had the confidence of the bourgeoisie. Any capable bourgeois entrepreneur, he argued, however penniless himself, would receive this credit much more readily than a socialist apparatus. Upon this 'iron fact' all schemes for industrial reorganisation on socialist lines by a dictatorship of the proletariat would fall down.⁹⁴ The bourgeoisie would only co-operate in getting the necessary credit if they were guaranteed an equal share in political power and a free hand in industry.⁹⁵ Besides the problem of international confidence, which Weber was concerned to spell out to any who were thinking of trying socialist experiments, he also stressed the indispensability of the business skills of the bourgeoisie to any reconstruction. A civil servant was no substitute for these, much less some half-baked theoretician from the Munich or Berlin soviet.⁹⁶ It was equally illusory to imagine that the skills of the

bourgeoisie could somehow be used without giving them a profit-making context to work in. Without their *free* co-operation, he insisted, a viable industrial order was impossible.⁹⁷

The issues involved here, and the contrast between the 'extreme' socialists in the soviets, and those who 'responsibly' accepted the need for a capitalist order, are treated in a more theoretical form in Weber's student address on 'Politics as a Vocation', in his distinction between the ethic of pure conviction and the ethic of responsibility.⁹⁸ The distinction he makes is between two different ways of holding to principles, the absolute and the contingent. On the one hand is the demand that a person should act rightly, regardless of the consequences. What matters is remaining true to principle, 'keeping the flame of pure intention undampened,' even where this might lead to harmful results.⁹⁹ On the other hand is the ethic of responsibility. As its name implies, this involves the demand that the individual take responsibility for the total consequences of his action. If by acting on principle, consequences ensue which are damaging to his cause, this cannot simply be shuffled off on to the evil world or the stupidity of others. The individual must accept the ethical ambiguity of the world—the fact that good does not follow from good, nor evil from evil—and be ready to compromise on principle, if this is the only way to ensure that the cause he seeks to promote is not set back or rendered ineffectual.¹⁰⁰ Of the two types of ethic, Weber regarded only the second as appropriate to the condition of politics. The first was an apolitical, other-worldly attitude, since it failed to recognise that the consequences of an action often stood in paradoxical relation to its intention, and that the means the politician used (the achievement and maintenance of *power*) were frequently at variance with the ends he sought to achieve.

Although in this distinction between the two types of ethic, Weber was highlighting a universal problem of political morality, its polemical purpose and context should be obvious.¹⁰¹ The distinction was a useful device for banishing his political opponents to a category of the apolitical, where they could be shown to be caught in self-contradiction: they were trying to achieve aims in the world with attitudes which were essentially other-worldly. Thus, in the case of pacifists, the consequences of their position would not be to bring peace, but only make war more likely; their only consistent position was complete retirement from the world.¹⁰² Weber used a similar argument against syndicalists, who believed that any industrial action as an expression of class solidarity must be right, even if in practice it produced reaction and

class oppression. This made sense as an ethic of conviction, but those who held it should give up the pretension that their aim was this worldly achievement. In reply to Michels, who argued that every strike must work in the direction of socialism and therefore be right, Weber wrote:

Now we have the perfect syndicalist, Michels. Michels the syndicalist might (and should) say: the conviction which a strike expresses is always the 'right' conviction. . . . But what weakness to pay any attention to its results! And then to do violence to the clear facts!¹⁰³

In Weber's view the clear facts were that lost strikes not only damaged the trade unions, but could delay the progress of the class movement for decades.¹⁰⁴ Weber extended this argument to the socialist position in general. It was argued, for example, that the war should be prolonged in order to achieve revolution. But what could such a revolution produce? Only a bourgeois economy, stripped of its feudal elements.¹⁰⁵ As Weber frequently insisted, any attempt to impose a socialist economy would discredit socialism for centuries.¹⁰⁶ Such a position made sense in terms of an ethic of conviction, but it was inconsistent with this-worldly achievement.

Weber's argument sought to put socialists into a category which would rule them out as serious politicians—men with passion, perhaps, but no perspective. The weakness of his argument was that it presented as a difference of moral categories what could equally be presented as a disagreement about the consequences of political action, or about whether the longer-term rather than the short-term effects should be considered. A syndicalist who insisted on the unity of class action, or a socialist who demanded prolongation of the war to achieve revolution, would presumably disagree with Weber about the consequences of such policies. Not everyone would agree that a lost strike produced reaction, or, if so, that there might not be longer-term consequences to justify it. Nor would everyone agree that the only outcome of a revolution would be a bourgeois economic system, even if this was what 'every scientifically trained socialist' accepted.¹⁰⁷ Weber was right to insist that, if his opponents were serious about this-worldly achievement, rather than the salvation of their souls, they should stand on the ground of empirical argument about consequences. But he was wrong to speak as if there could be only one possible correct view about these consequences. Lenin provided an effective, if crude, answer to this. Weber had written in one of his

articles on Russia that the December uprising of 1905 was a 'senseless *putsch*', since it no longer enjoyed the support of the bourgeoisie, and could only strengthen the forces of reaction.¹⁰⁸ In reply Lenin pilloried the 'cowardly bourgeois professor' for his 'scientific' view. Weber's assessment of the possibilities was not only mistaken; it was 'a subterfuge on the part of the representatives of the cowardly bourgeoisie, which sees in the proletariat its most dangerous class enemy'.¹⁰⁹ Lenin was naturally quick to appreciate the polemical context of Weber's assessment.

Any appearance of a move leftwards by Weber at the end of the war is thus something of an optical illusion, and is evidence of a change in the Social Democrats as much as in Weber himself. In so far as he approved of them, it was because they had now demonstrated the political maturity that he had found lacking in the prewar SPD, and which he had looked forward to one day in his early writings as the necessary condition for a working-class movement to which the bourgeoisie could 'extend the hand of co-operation'.¹¹⁰ In the economic sphere, he believed, most of them now accepted the necessity of a social order led by the bourgeoisie, not the proletariat, at least for the time being. Politically, they had shown a realistic grasp of possibilities, and a sense of responsibility in keeping a curb on their wild elements. They had thus proved themselves fitting partners in a bourgeois democracy.

The crucial question for the future of Parliamentary democracy, therefore, remained for Weber what it had always been: whether the bourgeoisie as a class could develop the political character capable of supporting free Parliamentary institutions. As he wrote in his article on Germany's future constitution, this was more important than constitutional details:

For decades now they have been dominated by the spirit of 'security': of feeling safe in the protection of authoritarianism, of frightened concern at the riskiness of any change—in short, a cowardly will to impotence. It was precisely the technical excellence of the administration, and the fact that as a result things by and large went well for them materially, that reconciled whole strata of the population (not only the bourgeoisie) to this cage, and stifled that sense of civic pride, without which even the freest institutions are a mere shadow. The republic has put an end to this 'security. . .'. The bourgeoisie is now cast as exclusively on its own resources as the working class has been for a long while. Under the social conditions prevailing for the foreseeable future it must not be afraid to face the test of

its indispensability and its unique qualities. It is just this test that, we hope, will do good for its self-confidence.¹¹¹

Weber's hope was, however, tinged with pessimism. It could only be bad for this self-confidence, he went on, that democracy had not come to Germany, as it had to other nations, as the result of a victorious struggle or an honourable peace, but as the consequence of defeat. The shadow of the 'Obrigkeitsstaat' hung heavy over it. 'The shameful bankruptcy proceedings of the old regime, with which the democracy is burdened, intervene to darken its political future.'¹¹² And it was not many months before Weber was himself to question the advantages of the new Parliamentary system.¹¹³

POLITICS AND CLASS

A fuller discussion of the theoretical assumptions involved in Weber's account of German politics will be given in later chapters, but a number of points can be emphasised here briefly. The first of these concerns Germany's failure to develop Parliamentary institutions. Of the different reasons Weber gave for this, the chief one was the way the bourgeoisie came to be assimilated into the traditional system of the Junkers. In an academic lecture on rural society which he gave on his visit to the United States in 1904, he singled out the tension between the traditional rural society of the east and the industrial west as the chief problem in Germany's political development. 'For Germany,' he said, 'all fateful questions of economic and social policy and of national interests are closely connected with the contrast between rural society of the east and the society of the west, and with its further development.'¹¹⁴ He went on to congratulate the United States for not possessing an ancient aristocracy and for thus avoiding the 'tensions caused by the contrast between an authoritarian tradition and the purely commercial character of modern conditions'. The nub of his analysis of Germany's socio-political structure, as portrayed in this chapter, was that these tensions were kept in a state of balance by the developing needs of industry being met within the Junker political system, and by the assimilation of the bourgeoisie into that system. Weber recognised the irreversible character of industrial development in Germany,¹¹⁵ and saw that the entrepreneurial class would inevitably wield a political influence consistent with their economic power. The question was, what form this political influence would take: whether a 'liaison behind closed doors' with the bureaucracy, support for the

'Obrigkeitsstaat' and the assimilation of industrial life to its authoritarian outlook; or alternatively that of a challenge to the system, and support for Parliamentary democracy. Either was possible. Which development took place was not determined by economic conditions alone; indeed, as we shall see particularly from his analysis of Russia, Weber saw no particular connection between modern large-scale industry and free political institutions. It was a question rather of the political character of a class, and the variety of historical and contemporary factors which conspired to mould it.

Professor L M Lachmann, in an essay in which he attempts to deduce a theoretical structure from Weber's articles on 'Parliament and Government', detects in Weber's analysis a functionalist model 'of a crude kind'.¹¹⁶ According to Lachmann, Weber assumed as a principle 'the need for homogeneity among all the institutions of modern industrial society' and thereby made the kernel of his critique of Germany's political structure its inappropriateness to its developing industrial base.¹¹⁷ This interpretation entirely misses the point of Weber's analysis, and what he conceived the central problem of German politics to be. The problem was that it was perfectly possible for capitalist industry to find 'security' and satisfaction of its material goals within an authoritarian political system. All it needed for this was an efficient administration of a modern bureaucratic type,¹¹⁸ and this of course the German system provided in ample measure. In so far as there is an argument from appropriateness and 'homogeneity' in Weber's account, it is of a different kind. Weber argued that there must be a compatibility between the tasks set by a government, and the political system necessary to carry these out. In the case of Germany he detected a basic inconsistency between its attempt to play a world political role and its traditional structure of government. The deficiencies in the definition of policy and in the consistency of political determination shown by the 'Obrigkeitsstaat' demonstrated its inadequacy for world politics, as evidenced by its pre-war foreign policy and the conduct of the war itself. If Germany wanted a world political role it could only achieve this through a Parliamentary democracy. This argument of Weber's was not a 'functional' one, but a question of choice, of the means appropriate to a given end. Germany could choose whether to be a world power or not; if it did, then its political arrangements must measure up to the task.

Central to Weber's analysis, in fact, was not so much an assumption about the functional interrelationship of institutions, but

rather an assumption about class and class power. Regimes persisted or changed according to the configuration of classes which supported them. The German 'Obrigkeitsstaat' persisted, despite the declining economic position of the Junkers, because the particular interrelationship between the country's economic and political development had put the bourgeoisie on its side, and because the Junkers knew how to use their monopoly of political position and social status to reinforce this support. In like manner, Parliamentary democracy was only possible if the configuration of class support changed, and the political character of the bourgeoisie was altered. The necessary complement to Weber's account of Parliamentary institutions, as set out in Chapter 4, was thus a theory of class. A similar assumption about the relationship between class and political structure will be seen to underlie Weber's analysis of Russian politics, considered in the next chapter.

REFERENCES

- 1 GASW, p 471.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 GPS, p 20.
- 4 SVS, vol 55 (1892), p 796; GASW, p 474.
- 5 *ibid.*; cf *Mitteilungen des Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses*, 6 (1892), p 5.
- 6 SVS, vol 55 (1892), pp 802-3.
- 7 GASW, p 473.
- 8 *ibid.*; cf GASS, p 388.
- 9 SVS, vol 55 (1892), p 773; GASW, pp 449, 475-6.
- 10 'It is impossible for him in the long run to promote the national interest, when his workers are Poles.' GASW, p 454. SVS, vol 55, pp 795-6.
- 11 *ibid.*; GPS, p 19.
- 12 See Weber's article 'Agrarstatistische und sozialpolitische Betrachtungen zur Fideicommissfrage in Preussen', GASS, pp 323-93.
- 13 SVS, vol 55, pp 795-6.
- 14 GASS, p 389; cf pp 380-1.
- 15 GM, p 373.
- 16 GPS, p 351; cf pp 401-2.
- 17 GPS, p 401, n 1.
- 18 GPS, pp 178, 282-3, 351, 400-1.
- 19 GPS, pp 405ff.
- 20 GPS, pp 300-1. cf p 402: 'Whenever the material or the social power interests of the strata which stood behind the ruling party were at stake, the throne always remained powerless . . . ' There is a splendid example of Weber's exposure of the conservative ideology in GASS, pp 380-90. The conservatives sought to hide the material interests involved in the *fideicommissum* proposals under a screen of 'romantic idealism'.
- 21 Quoted in W J Mommsen, *op cit*, p 109.

- 22 GPS, pp 20–2, 393, 441–2.
- 23 GPS, p 21.
- 24 *ibid.*
- 25 GASS, p 403; GPS, p 448.
- 26 GPS, pp 276–7.
- 27 GPS, p 337.
- 28 e.g. in the 'internal market' policy. *Verhandlungen des 8. Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses* (1897), p 109.
- 29 GASS, pp 395–9.
- 30 GASS, p 395.
- 31 GASS, pp 396–7.
- 32 GASS, p 391.
- 33 GASS, p 331.
- 34 GPS, pp 184ff.
- 35 GASS, p 386.
- 36 GASS, p 379.
- 37 'Verhandlungen des IV. deutschen Hochschullehrertages', Dresden, 12–13 Oct 1911 (Archive Document no 35, Max Weber Institute, München), pp 67, 86; also Weber's reply to criticism of his speech in *Berliner Tageblatt*, 27.10.11. (Arch Doc. no. 38).
- 38 'Neither membership of a reserve regiment nor the possession of letters patent are in themselves any indication that their possession is suited to that hard, sober work, without which our bourgeoisie will be unable to maintain Germany's dominant world position in the sphere of trade and industry.' *ibid.*, cf GASS, p 390, n 1.
- 39 *Verhandlungen des 8. Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses* (1897), p 113.
- 40 GM, p 373.
- 41 GPS, p 233; cf p 402: 'The fear of the bourgeois plutocracy in the face of "democracy", which it saw embodied in the Reich suffrage and the Reichstag itself, gave support to the dominant party interests in Prussia.'
- 42 GPS, p 28.
- 43 *Archiv*, vol 20 (1905), pp 550–3.
- 44 *ibid.*
- 45 GASS, pp 407–12, especially 408–9.
- 46 *ibid.*
- 47 GASS, pp 404–5.
- 48 'Zur Gründung einer national-sozialen Partei', GPS, pp 26–9.
- 49 *ibid.*
- 50 *Verhandlungen des 8. Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses* (1897), p 113.
- 51 GASS, pp 323–93; GPS, pp 178–86.
- 52 GASS, p 393.
- 53 GASS, pp 377–9; GPS, pp 185–6.
- 54 GASS, pp 407–12.
- 55 GASS, p 409. 'And I do not see what danger bourgeois society should see in that.'
- 56 GASS, p 410.
- 57 GASS, p 411.
- 58 Letter to R Michels, 15.10.07, quoted in W J Mommsen, *op cit*, p 123.
- 59 Letter to Michels, 6.11.07: *ibid.*
- 60 D Lindenlaub, *op cit*, pp 198ff. Boese talks instead of a Left and a Right wing, and shows how the conflict broke out into the open at the Mannheim meeting of 1905 over the issue of trade union rights. The two Webers and

- Sombart were leaders of the Left, he writes, with Brentano their 'authoritative protector'. Schmoller's attempt to maintain a middle line from the chair with a savage criticism of Naumann for demagoguery led to a demand for his resignation from Weber. F. Boese, *op cit*, pp 108–20.
- 61 See J J Sheehan, *op cit*, *passim*.
 - 62 D Lindenlaub, *op cit*, pp 198–203.
 - 63 *ibid.*, p 204.
 - 64 GASS, pp 394–9.
 - 65 GASS, p 396.
 - 66 *ibid.*
 - 67 GASS, pp 398–9.
 - 68 'Rundschreiben' (copy in Max Weber Institute, München). For a discussion of the context see B Schäfer's article in *Soziale Welt*, 18 (1967), pp 261–71; also W J Mommsen, *op cit*, pp 133–7.
 - 69 'Rundschreiben,' pp 2–3.
 - 70 Thus he contrasts such a movement with the sterility of the SPD and the subservient attitudes towards the party authorities it generated. GASS, pp 405–6.
 - 71 GPS, p 23.
 - 72 In a wartime discussion Weber compared the German trade union leadership favourably with the unruly 'politics of the streets' in other countries. In contrast with those irresponsible elements, he wrote, the industrial proletariat was 'a power, which is at least capable of ordered and disciplined direction under its leaders, i.e. when they are rational thinking politicians. Everything now depends on these leaders, and that means in Germany the trade union leaders, achieving supremacy over the instincts of the moment.' GPS, p 275. In Weber's view, a liberal social policy would strengthen the position of such leaders.
 - 73 *Jugendbriefe*, pp 234, 249, 297–9.
 - 74 W J Mommsen, *op cit*, p 137.
 - 75 GPS, p 356.
 - 76 GPS, pp 185–6.
 - 77 GPS, pp 218–19, 284.
 - 78 GPS, p 433.
 - 79 GPS, p 282.
 - 80 'Parlamentarisierung und Föderalismus', GPS, pp 394–431.
 - 81 GPS, p 442.
 - 82 GPS, 1st edn, pp 477–9.
 - 83 He was hostile to the revolution, writes Marianne, and called it a 'bloody carnival which does not deserve the honourable name of revolution'. *Lebensbild*, p 642.
 - 84 GPS, 1st edn, pp 481–2.
 - 85 *ibid.*
 - 86 GPS, p 473.
 - 87 GPS, 1st edn, pp 481–2.
 - 88 Quoted in *Lebensbild*, p 653.
 - 89 *ibid.*, p 644.
 - 90 J P Mayer, *op cit*, p 97.
 - 91 GPS, p 472.
 - 92 *Lebensbild*, p 653.
 - 93 GPS, pp 446–8, 470–1, 473–5.
 - 94 GPS, p 474.