

F. Moeller

## THE GERMAN REVOLUTION OF 1848–1849 — NEW PERSPECTIVES

The article examines the special character of the revolution of 1848/49 in Germany. The focus lies on the perspective of contemporaries to the events. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Period were the defining, mostly negative, experiences for the generations who were active in 1848. The ideas of 1848 arose in a pre-industrial, harmony-oriented civil society. The constitution demanded in 1848 was therefore not aimed at the legalization of a modern division of state and society, but it wanted a state-formation at the national level based on the idea of the Aristotelian *societas civilis*. The numerous conflicts of the revolution, social and national conflicts, and even the political division into democrats and liberals, were not weaknesses of the revolution. It was rather the lack of readiness for conflict which led to the failure of the revolution. From the point of view of the contemporaries the revolution failed, but the modernizing impulses of the revolution went on to shape further development. Refs 25.

*Keywords:* German Revolution 1848–1849, civil society, liberalism, modernization.

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## НЕМЕЦКАЯ РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ 1848–1849 — НОВЫЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

В статье рассматривается особый характер революции 1848–1849 гг. в Германии. Основное внимание уделяется перспективам современников. Французская революция и наполеоновский период были определяющим, в основном отрицательным опытом для поколений, активных в 1848 г. Идеи 1848 г. возникли в доиндустриальном, ориентированном на гармонию гражданском обществе. Поэтому конституция, требуемая в 1848 г., не была направлена на легализацию современного разделения государства и общества, но была нацелена на то, чтобы государственное образование на национальном уровне основывалось на идее аристотелевского общества. Многочисленные конфликты революции, социальные и национальные конфликты и даже политическое разделение на демократов и либералов не были слабостью революции. Скорее, отсутствие готовности к конфликту привело к провалу революции. С точки зрения современников революция провалилась, но модернизирующие импульсы революции сформировали дальнейшее развитие. Библиогр. 25 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* немецкая революция 1848–1849 гг., гражданское общество, либерализм, модернизация.

The German Revolution of 1848–49<sup>1</sup> is mostly associated with the barricade fights in Berlin and Vienna and the uprising in Baden. Additionally, it refers to the Frankfurt National Assembly that, unsuccessfully, attempted to establish German unity with a constitution. But do violent barricade fights and the milestone of a democratic constitution truly capture the character of the German Revolution of 1848–49? Five short, insignificant episodes provide a first insight into the open events.

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In late March 1848 a rumor that circulated in southern Germany, and was especially spread in the rural areas of Swabia, claiming that the new Republic of France had already set a huge army across the Rhine. In fact, France had in a circular letter of its foreign minister Lamartine questioned all international peace treaties. The rumor had the French advancing through the country, commandeering and looting as they had done in 1796 under General Moreau. Caused by this fear of the French (“Franzosenangst”), parts of the population went into hiding, even fleeing populated areas, until the rumor proved false a few days later [Valentin 1970, vol. 1, p. 471; Ruttmann 2001].

On 31 March 1848, the so-called pre-parliament convened in Frankfurt am Main. The members gathered from different German parliaments had been invited by a small group of revolutionary politicians to decide Germany’s further national path. The moderate liberals, who hoped for a German constitutional monarchy, gathered the night before. They were restless and full of worries because they feared the preponderance of the left. It was rumored that Itzstein, a politician from Baden, had abused his right of invitation and had invited an unlimited number of left-wing deputies. The proclamation of a republic was feared. As a precaution, the liberals had brought over 500 young men from Darmstadt who ran through Frankfurt with a flag that said “A German parliament and no republic!” In fact, all fears were unnecessary: the liberals had the majority in the pre-parliament and were also able to fill the seats of the Committee of 50 that was elected there entirely with their own men. [Valentin 1970, vol. 1, pp. 469–479; Mommsen 1998, pp. 140–145].

In May 1848, a so-called “Hat Emancipation Club” was founded in the Bavarian city of Augsburg as well as in other cities at the time. The announced goal of the club was to “eliminate the annoying taking-off of one’s hat in greeting, in favor of the more contemporary, simple military salute”. Each participant could purchase a badge that was attached to their hat or bonnet, signaling that its owner waived the tipping of the hat when being greeted. Within a very short time, the Augsburg club reached the enormous number of 1200 members. Clearly, the expectation was that the abolition of the hat-tip would also lead to a leveling or at least toning down of social hierarchies that stood behind the custom [Moeller 1998, pp. 302–304].

On 11 July 1848, Archduke John, who had been appointed by the National Assembly as Germany’s provisional head of state, made his entrance to Frankfurt. His procession through Austria, Moravia, Silesia, Saxony and Thuringia had already shown the tremendous enthusiasm his election had caused. The reception in Frankfurt was a glittering folk festival. Adolf von Zerzog, a liberal member of the National Assembly in St. Pauls Church, pointedly describes the national rapture that was also intensified by alcohol: “At this moment, only a few very stubborn republicans are sober. The patriots are lying and staggering around in all streets, gloriously drunk!” [Chrobak, Mages 1998, no. 18].

On November 24, the president and vice president of the National Assembly, Heinrich von Gagern and Eduard Simson, together with the Westphalian deputy Georg von Vincke, traveled by train from Frankfurt am Main to Berlin. Though Vincke was a liberal, he had acted more as a defender of Prussia’s rights in the Frankfurt National Assembly. Meanwhile, the counterrevolution had begun in Prussia. At the beginning of November, the Prussian National Assembly had been moved from Berlin to Potsdam by the king, which it countered by drawing up a tax resistance resolution. The three men on the train were now planning the future together. The counterrevolutionary Prussian government seemed to them to have shown itself weak in these events, which fueled their expectation

that Vincke would be appointed the new Prussian minister-president. This would finally enable close cooperation between Berlin and Frankfurt with the aim of erecting a national state under Prussian leadership. Immediately upon arrival, these plans proved to be delusions. [Valentin 1970, vol. 2, pp. 282–286; Meinecke 1962, pp. 327–328].

These five episodes from the German revolution of 1848 remained without impact on the big picture and the course of the revolution. They do, however, convey something of the atmosphere of that time. The open, undefined situation of that year is evident. Anything — good or bad alike — seemed possible; the future was indeterminate and unknown. It becomes clear that revolutions are a specific mental state in which changes are expected, hope grows wings, and the impossible seems possible. Euphoric as well as anxious moods arise. Hopes and fears for the future alternate uncontrolledly. These fantasies and dreams of contemporaries are frequently lost to historians who know the outcome of the revolution and therefore lose sight of the open situation at the time.

In order to situate the revolution of 1848–49 in German history, it is important not only to regard its impact to the present day. This would quickly lead to a perspective as it is evident in the official remembrance politics of the Federal Republic of Germany. History is then merely seen as a train heading toward the present, sometimes slowly, sometimes at high speed. If one regards the revolution as an open situation, however, the point of interest is not only whether someone was for or against an apparent development in 1848; instead, the entire future was open and had yet to be determined. Returning to the image of the train, the question was not whether to slow down the train of progress or else to jump on the bandwagon, but rather how one should adjust the track switches and thus to direct the train's course. Simply setting up the binary opposition of progress versus backwardness is no expedient approach.

Three questions are to be treated in the following: 1. Where can the German revolution be located in time and space? 2. What did a constitution as the central demand of the revolution actually mean for those affected? 3. What made up the dynamic of the revolution? From where did it draw its strength? How did its main lines of conflict proceed and influence the course of the revolution? In a final outlook, the result of the revolution will be evaluated. Each of these questions shall be answered with a brief thesis statement from the contemporaries' point of view.

## The Place of the German Revolution

The “long” 19th century, from the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 to 1914 and the First World War, or the Russian October Revolution of 1917, is regarded as the bourgeois century, as the century of the breakthrough of modernity. The European revolutions of 1848–49 can therefore be seen as the mid-point. The immense constitutional thrust of 1848–49 also is at the exact center of German constitutional development. The emergence of the first modern constitutions mark the beginning — in Europe there is the Polish constitution of May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1791, and the French constitution of 1792, in Germany the Bavarian constitution of 1808 and of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach 1809. The end of German constitutionalism brought forth the revolution of 1918 and the Weimar Constitution of 1919. The inclusions of the citizens' rights from the Frankfurt Constitution of 1849 in the German constitution of 1919 illustrates its bridging function. [Kuehne

1998] Following this rationale, the revolution is a step on the way to modernity. It is the “Departure to Freedom” as the great exhibition commemorating the German Revolution in 1998 was called [Gall 1998]. From the constitutional point of view, the German Revolution of 1848 ended neo-absolutism in Prussia and the pseudo-constitutionalism in the rest of Germany, and for the future provided the model for a constitution based on popular sovereignty.

This place in time, however, looks quite different when we take into account the perspective of the persons involved. Considering, for example, the generational affiliation of the actors of 1848–49, one can see very clearly which experience shaped the course of action in the revolution [Moeller 2003]. For the German Revolution of 1848, a division into five political generations seems fitting, each about 15 years apart:

1. The “ancient” 80-year-olds who were born before 1780. In 1848, they were already seen as relics of the eighteenth century. Many members of this generation were disavowed because of the cooperation in the Napoleonic times. In 1848, only those who had been in opposition to French rule were tolerated. Among them are the early German nationalists Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (born 1778) and Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769), who were elected as deputies to the National Assembly in 1848.
2. The over 60-year-old champions of political liberalism, born around 1790. They had experienced the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, but were decisively influenced by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period. Here are the founding fathers of German liberalism such as Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann (1785), Ludwig Uhland (1786), and Carl Theodor Welcker (1790).
3. The generation of 50-year-olds, born around 1800. They were the real leaders of the revolution. Too young for the Napoleonic period, though having consciously witnessed the fight against Napoleon. They perceived themselves as the generation of the liberation wars, that was cheated out of its prize for the struggle against Napoleon by the German Confederation. These include, for example, the president of the National Assembly, Heinrich von Gagern (1799), the president of the provisional German government and representative of Austria, Anton von Schmerling (1805), the democrat and founder of the Central March Association, Christian Schueler (1798), the Wuerttemberg liberal and jurist Robert von Mohl (1799) and the democrat Robert Blum (1807), who was executed in Vienna.
4. The political offspring of the 35-year-olds, born around 1815. In contrast to the members of the Third Generation, who are characterized by idealism, they have already been socialized by the economic and social changes of early industrialization. They are more realistic, they are attentive to social problems and therefore more often found on the left. Among them are Eduard Simson (1810), Friedrich Daniel Bassermann (1811), Theodor Mommsen (1817), Georg Herwegh (1817), and Friedrich Hecker (1811). On the side of the conservatives, Otto von Bismarck is the most famous representative of this generation.
5. The young, born after 1825, were those not active in big policy, but rather locally and were also the real fighters on the barricades. They are the ones politically socialized by the revolution, who will then enter decisive positions in the German Empire after 1871. Among them is, for example, the later leader of the national liberals Johannes Miquel (1828).

When the generation of the fifty-year-olds is understood as the political decision-makers of the revolution, the influence of the experience of the Napoleonic period becomes clear. They have an idealistic, pre-industrial world view not based on social interests but on the belief in the common good. The antagonism against France is the defining background. The members of this generation criticize the older Germans and also the German monarchies because of their submission to the dictator Napoleon. They therefore derive from their experience a claim to political change, which, ironically, reverts to the constitutional state developed in France.

The importance of the Napoleonic past is also evident in spatial location. How can one explain active and more passive regions of the revolution? There are the unconquered opponents of Napoleon in Europe, in which no revolution took place in 1848, namely Great Britain and Russia. On the other hand, there are especially those countries and territories in which princely sovereignty had suffered during the Napoleonic period and where the 1848 revolutions were particularly intense. The core regions of the revolution in Germany were, therefore, the Prussian Rhineland and the German southwest, i.e. Wuerttemberg and Baden, Hesse, Franconia and Swabia. These are all former members of the Confederation of the Rhine, as well as the areas that experienced a change of rule during the Napoleonic period and the Congress of 1815. Here the German Revolution of 1848 was particularly heated.

Thus, the German Revolution of 1848 marks the end of a phase begun by the French Revolution. On the one hand, feudal society was largely abolished, but on the other hand pre-industrial policy-making was still axiomatic. The German Revolution of 1848 therefore must be understood by the generation of its actors and the areas of action as a revolution *after* the French Revolution.

### Constitutional Demands of 1848

“The European revolutions”, says Dieter Langewiesche, “had a common goal: the transformation of the order of state and society” [Langewiesche 2004, p.110]. This goal was expressed in the demand for a constitution with civil rights. But what did “constitution” actually mean in 1848? We have become accustomed to the modern definition: A constitution is the central legal document of a state. That is why we usually focus on the formal constitution. This approach also seems like a natural choice for 1848: in the German-speaking countries in 1848–49, new constitutions were adopted in almost all German states. Moreover, a long constitutional tradition connects the document of the Frankfurt Constitution of spring 1849 and the Basic Law of the modern Federal Republic of Germany.

The historian Manfred Gailus discovered in a large evaluation of social protests in the German Revolution of 1848 just how much the members of the lower classes were characterized by traditional values of a fair and moral economy. The revolution of 1848, therefore, is to him “a final rebellion of masses of the people on the basis of pre-industrial goals and anti-capitalist norms and values at the historical threshold of the breakthrough of bourgeois, industrial-capitalist society” [Gailus 1990, p. 516]. For Gailus, therefore, the revolution of the people is separate from the bourgeois revolution of the parliaments. The constitution of society as it was demanded by peasants, craftsmen, and workers, has nothing to do with the constitution developed by the bourgeois dignitaries. But can the social

and parliamentary revolution really be viewed so separately? Two examples will illustrate how much both were related.

There is the known incident of the Odenwaelder peasants, who demanded “freedom of the press” in March 1848. But what they meant was freedom from oppression, the freedom to no longer be pressed and exploited. This story was mentioned by conservatives as early as 1848 itself as proof that the peasants certainly did not know what they were talking about. It allegedly showed, that they were actually too stupid for the new political freedom. One historian followed up the notion of these conservatives and analyzed the peasants’ misconception as a “confusion of terms” [Wirtz 1979]. But perhaps the peasants were not as foolish as is often assumed? When they demanded “freedom of the press”, they ultimately demanded a constitution with civil rights. Perhaps more from the gut and without knowing anything about legal terms they recognized how they could achieve and secure their new equality and rights. According to this argument, the constitutional question of 1848 must be more closely understood in terms of the expectations and aims of ordinary people than is often assumed. If the demand for a new constitution of state and society could also appeal to peasants in 1848, then obviously it was not just about a legal constitution. The citizens’ rights demanded in the German Revolution are often understood as modern individual rights. In fact, on closer examination it can be seen that they were not. Many requirements of March 1848 express social ideas which do not correspond with our modern civil rights. This is true for the demand of peoples’ armament with free choice of officers, the demand of jury courts in which the Latin written law was to be replaced by German spoken law, or for the demand of a freedom of the press which did not aim for pluralism but for the articulation of the majority opinion.

Another example are the conflicts about the fundamental rights decreed by the National Assembly in early 1849. The conservative government of Bavaria rejected these and tried to pull the Bavarian craftsmen to its side. It was proclaimed that the freedom of trade declared in the fundamental rights would damage the Bavarian craftsmen. And in fact, there was a strong artisan movement in Bavaria, which wanted to return to the old guilds. The craftsmen wanted to prevent their impending impoverishment with a stronger protection of their trade. A trade regulation was to ensure their social security. In April/May 1849 the so-called “*Reichsverfassungskampagne*”, the dispute over the recognition of the constitution adopted by the Frankfurt Assembly, also took place in Bavaria. Interestingly, it turned out that, despite the disliked freedom of trade, the craftsmen in Bavarian-Swabia and Franconia made statements and petitions on the side of the Frankfurt Constitution. In their opinion, national unity and a Constitution provided the best framework for advocating their own economic interests [Moeller 1997].

The examples show that simple peasants and craftsmen were interested in national policy. Social demands were introduced into the great political context of the revolution. Dieter Hein thus summarized the connection between the peoples’ revolution and the bourgeois revolution: “Insofar as the right of a social group or a local community to determine or to influence its own ways and forms of change was defended, the actions were connected to the bourgeois model of civil society” [Hein 1998, p. 69]. It is clear that more and more Germans acted in the frame of national and liberal politics, so that Dieter Langewiesche rates the end of the revolution as more civil than its beginning.

But the closeness between the peoples’ revolution and bourgeois revolution is also explained by the fact that the bourgeois conceptions of the revolution did not correspond

to modern market society, but were still oriented towards a locally organized *societas civilis* in the sense of Aristotle. A society of middle men, who in open discourse determined the common good, was to be at the heart of the state. Therefore the liberals of 1848 could very openly be against the free market and individual egoism. The liberal Karl Brater, for example, demanded quite clearly that, in place of self-seeking, “the consciousness must arise that individual welfare is inseparable from the welfare of the whole [...]. Selfishness will always be inseparable from human nature, but it can be transformed into a sense of community which, by promoting the more general interests, at the same time secures own, personal interests” [Brater 1854, IV]. Thus, in 1848, the goal was not to overcome traditional society with an individualist market society, but to arrive at self-determination against autocratic rule. It is not without reason that many rural regions of the German southwest, where the revolution was particularly strong in 1848, are also the areas where the peasant wars against feudal domination had taken place 300 years before.

Since the constitutional ideal of 1848 was based on the civil rights ideas of the *societas civilis*, it meant a definite end to the remnants of feudal society. In addition, this idea got modernized by being expanded to the national level. The self-determined order was supposed to start in the local community but be concluded in the nation. Particularly the national Parliament had a special function: it was intended to not only represent the nation, but also build and constitute the nation. Opposed to the particularism of the princes and the population of the single German states, the Germans should feel themselves as a nation in the national parliament. This also explains the vehement rejection of an integration of the entire Hapsburg monarchy, since, according to the idea of the liberals, in a mixed-national parliament the common good could not be found.

Whether it was the demand for communal self-administration or the autonomy of universities or clubs, at the core of all these constitutional efforts stood the idea of popular sovereignty. Even the course of compromise by the liberals in the Frankfurt assembly, who sought to obtain the consent of the princes for their constitution, was not a departure from the principle of popular sovereignty. The constitutional liberals, although skeptical about the power of ordinary people, demanded the assertion of popular sovereignty out of the pragmatic reasoning that otherwise national unity could not be realized at all. The president of the Frankfurt Assembly, Heinrich von Gagern, a constitutional liberal at heart, declared at its opening that the “sovereignty of the nation” had brought the deputies together. Similarly, the liberals maintained that solely the National Assembly might advance the constitution, without needing the consent of the princes. Precisely by calling for a constitutionally limited monarch for Germany the German Revolution of 1848 meant the end of monarchical legitimation.

The constitution demanded in the German Revolution of 1848 did not aim at a modern separation of state and society, but wanted a national state based on the idea of the Aristotelian *societas civilis*.

### The Dynamic of the German Revolution

From where did the revolution in Germany get its power, its political dynamic? For this question one has to look at the conflict levels that propelled the revolution further. Three conflict levels have to be examined: the social question; i.e. the conflicts about the impoverishment of large sections of the population, the national question and finally the

division of the revolutionary movement into liberals and democrats. Usually these conflicts are seen as problems of the revolution: The common interpretation that the revolution failed because of the multitude of tasks it had to solve is based on the assumption that there were too many different conflicts.

The social question stood at the beginning of the revolution. The so-called pauperism, reinforced by the hunger crisis of 1846–47, was the direct cause of the revolution. With pauperism began the delegitimization of the existing authorities in Germany who showed themselves unable to adequately solve this problem. Members of the urban and rural lower classes were the participants of the unrest and revolts that made the political changes in March and April 1848 possible. And the social protests accompanied the revolution and aroused the fear of a “red threat” in the German bourgeoisie. Although there was no sufficiently large number of industrial workers or supporters of communism, the fear of communism played an important part. It strengthened the feeling that change and improvement of the economic and social situation was urgently needed.

The political goal of the revolution, the unity of Germany and a democratic constitution with civil rights, was also seen as the solution to solve the social question. The liberal March ministers, for example, combined the suppression of insurrections and protests with a strategy of replacing the unjust remnants of feudal society to achieve social improvement. Even the introduction of a national state with a closed economic area was meant to mitigate social problems. As mentioned, more and more of the poor and also peasants came to see legalization as a tool for social improvement. As a result, the governments in the reaction era did not dare to take back the abolition of the last feudal remains. There is therefore much evidence that the social question, despite all the internal conflicts that it created, was an impulse and not an obstacle to the revolution. As a matter of fact, the easing of social problems through the good harvest of the summer of 1848 probably played a part in the revolution's failure.

Today's commemoration of the revolution in Germany looks mostly at the progress of freedom and justice. So the significance of nationalism for the revolution of 1848 is often underestimated. The national state was not only an important, democratically founded constitutional demand of the revolution, nationalism itself was an essential motivation which led the Germans to revolution. The historian Paul Nolte in his work accurately describes the locally developed basis of the revolution in Baden [Nolte 1994]. One is irritated, however, to find that his Badenens act at the municipal level in what he calls a “communal revolution”, but seem to have no national aims. In fact, both the Baden liberals and the Baden radicals were nationally oriented. German nationalism of 1848 wanted a nation-state with a strong position in foreign policy. Historians criticize the bourgeois movement in Germany to have placed power instead of freedom at the center of its objectives. In reality, however, there was the view in the liberal movement that a powerful German state was necessary to protect freedom. The liberal movement had learned from its failed attempt to organize political freedom at the level of the German individual states in the 1830s, an attempt repressed by the German Confederation. The idea of a “*Voelkerfruehling*”, the peaceful cohabitation of nation states, after the end of autocratic rule and secret diplomacy, had long given way to the idea of national egoism.

Even the outbreak of the revolution in Germany was nationally motivated. This was expressed, for example, by the Mannheim petition of February 27, 1848, the famous first revolutionary demand: “An immense revolution has transformed France. Perhaps within



a few days, French armies will be at our frontiers, while Russia will gather her own in the north. [...] Germany may no longer patiently watch itself being trampled” [Bold 1971, p. 99]. The danger of war was therefore pointed out as reason for and legitimation of the petition’s national and democratic demands. The revolution in France was not, as is usually asserted, a model to be imitated, but a danger against which one could only defend oneself with a nationally united and renewed Germany. The left-wing professor Johannes Fallati formulated the following: “Almost universally, the mood is to wage war, but at the same time to assure oneself at home that it is not just for the interest of the princes” [Fallati Diary 1848]. The German revolution already started with an Anti-French impulse.

Even the pro-Polish policy demanded by many Germans at the beginning of the revolution was not merely the expression of a democratic “*Voelkerfruehling*”, but was seen by the liberals as part of national power politics. Thus the new, liberal minister-president of Hesse-Darmstadt, Heinrich von Gagern, judged that: “The great and general interest which Germany has in the restoration of an independent Poland has an added special moment. It is the war with Russia, for the sake of the Baltic Sea and the Baltic provinces, for Poland, for the Danube, and the conditions of the East, finally for Schleswig-Holstein. This war was inevitable sooner or later for Germany and it seemed expedient to start it early. [...] A war with Russia was the most popular throughout Germany” [Gagern 1856/57, vol. 2, p. 775]. So the diplomatic mission of the by-now liberal single states in Berlin called for a war against Russia by the Prussian king. This was intended to increase the popularity of Prussia and to bind the Prussian king firmly to the revolution. Even the more and more pervasive “Lesser German Solution”, the idea of a Prussian-led Germany without Austria, included the idea that Austria had to be strongly supported so that it could represent German interests in the Balkans.

This national egoism can not be assigned to the right or left in the political camp. Apart from the reactionary forces, especially the Prussian nobility, who feared the revolutionary dynamic of national war, German nationalists could be found on all sides of the political spectrum. The idea that the social question could be channeled through national enthusiasm, that the imminent internal conflicts could be diverted to the outside, was shared by all revolutionaries. The German democrats showed less national interest in the question of the province Posen with its Polish majority, because divided Poland had a symbolic meaning for the struggle against oppression. But they engaged much more in the question of Schleswig and Holstein against Denmark. The liberals, on the other hand, were committed from the outset to Germany’s historical right to the Polish territories in Posen and the Czech and Italian territories of Austria. In Schleswig-Holstein, on the other hand, they were ready to compromise in the summer of 1848, in order not to damage the political relations between the new Reich and Prussia [Kittel 2002].

For Germany, the weakness of the revolution is often attributed to the division of the revolutionary movement into constitutional liberals and more or less republican democrats. The historian Dieter Langewiesche has made clear how this split is explained by the social question: Democrats would have wanted to integrate the lower classes into the bourgeoisie by means of political equality. Liberals, on the other hand, wanted the lower classes to first accept bourgeois civilization before they were given political rights. Until then, a “class state” was to protect society. He emphasizes how much this split weakened the revolutionary movement [Langewiesche 1980]. In fact, however, one must see the strength the revolution gained by acting on two political wings. The great successes of the

liberals, the establishment of the March Ministries in the German States, the convocation of the National Assembly and the adoption of the Frankfurt Constitution, which was recognized by many German states, were possible because the liberals acted as “savior from the radical revolution”. The threat of a real or invented danger of a Jacobin left was the real strength of constitutional liberalism. In March 1848 in particular, it brought about the complete surrender of state institutions. For the division of the bourgeois movement, the actual contents of democratic politics were less decisive than the connotations the liberals connected with the democrats, the radicals, and the “red republic”. The split into democrats and liberals was thus not the cause of the revolution’s failure, but rather the basis for many successes of the bourgeois movement. Even in April 1849, many conservatives feared a new, more radical revolution, and hoped to avoid it by agreeing to the Frankfurt Constitution. Quite aptly, the already cited deputy Zerkow recognized how advantageous the left uprisings of May 1849 were: “Threatening dangers are more useful to our purposes than eliminated ones” [Chrobak, Mages 1998, p.199].

The negative model of the French Revolution had contributed greatly to the nonviolent success of the German Revolution. For fear of a radicalization, a rule of the Jacobins, the old powers, which had lost authority and legitimation, yielded in March 1848 and left the liberal March governments in power. But the liberal strategy of threatening with a more radical revolution and presenting oneself as savior from the radicals ultimately stood on weak feet as it was the German bourgeoisie itself that had the greatest fear of a development as in the French Revolution. The liberal path of the revolution failed in the moment when Prussia did not shrink from the threat of civil war but actively used it as a means of counterrevolution. It failed when the bourgeoisie saw that the liberal, non-violent revolution of the Frankfurt National Assembly and its new Constitution could no longer be understood as a savior from insurrection and chaos. At the point when the counterrevolution made the liberal revolution become the cause for civil war, the bourgeoisie withdrew its support [Seidl 2014].

It seems that the opposing conflicts of social and national nature were not weaknesses of the German revolution, but instead caused its dynamic. It was rather the lack of readiness for conflict, which in turn was marked by the memory of the “*terreur*” of the Jacobins in the French Revolution, which caused the revolution of 1848–49 to fail.

### Prospect

With the revolution, a specific social constellation ended, that had here found a political expression for the last time. The historian Lothar Gall has described this society with its specific ideas as a “classless civil society”, emphasizing, above all, the integrating aspect of this form of society that was largely organized in small cities and communities [Gall 1975]. It is not the modern, individualistic and capitalistic society, that is recognizable in the German Revolution, but the ultimately Aristotelian notion of a harmonious society that has also influenced the revolution’s aspirations for a social and political constitution of Germany.

The actors of 1848 experienced the revolution as a failure. Their essential aims, national unity and a free constitution, the self-administration of society, and an end to the social question were not realized. Individually, the end of the revolution also meant the failure of personal lives. Executions, for example in Baden, 1849, emigration of many dem-

ocrats to the United States, and the resignation of many liberals followed. Nevertheless, historians have pointed out the successes of 1848. They emphasize the final disappearance of the last feudal prerogatives, the constitutionalization of Prussia, and the long-term effect of the revolution on national and democratic politics.

The failure of the revolution appears as a success of the autocratic states and their reactionary politics. However, this success had to be bought with a learning process, at least in Prussia. Not only the constitutionalization of Prussia, i.e., the maintenance of the modified constitution of 1848, is to be mentioned here. Conservatism also had to modernize itself and become a party. Bismarck was a product of this development. His rise as a parliamentarian, his position as party leader of the conservative party, his career as a Junker in state administration and government was only possible in a modern state. Above all, however, his policy of national unity, the cooperation with the liberals, and the introduction of a modern constitution for Germany, was the manifestation that modern civil society and its principles could no longer be ignored.

The end of the revolution and the subsequent industrialization also meant a complete change in the social question and thus a transformation of the social groups involved. Instead of community orientation and ideas of social harmony, the class formation process finally took place. On the one hand, the lower classes developed into a modern proletariat, which with socialism accepted the idea of progress and modernization, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie became the class of economic possession. The modernization of the state, as well as the development of the bourgeoisie into a social class, finally made possible an alliance of the bourgeoisie and the state, which became the basis of the imperial empire of 1870–71. One could pointedly argue about the result of the German Revolution of 1848: the revolution has failed, but modernity has triumphed!

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