

## CHAPTER 6:

### THE DANGERS OF WEAK CONSERVATISM FOR DEMOCRACY IN GERMANY: LONG RUN LEGACIES INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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“[C]onstitutional safeguards are not enough to convince powerful economic groups of the convenience of operating within the democratic system: what is needed is a party of the right that is capable, if not of winning elections, of at least making a good showing and of maintaining the hope of winning in the future, or of influencing a center party so that, in practice, it defends its interests.”  
-Torcuato DiTella, 1971<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction

On a Spring evening on May 20, 1912, a group of black automobiles drove up the graveled side-driveway of Berlin’s Prussian House of Representatives, unloading a group of men in dark suits, Conservative Party MPs from the Reichstag, who had hurriedly left those chambers down the road in the middle of debate, to vote on a key piece of Left-liberal legislation in front of the Prussian state parliament that evening.<sup>3</sup> This exclusive group, mostly aristocrats representing rural constituencies in eastern Prussia, had dual mandates in both chambers and were called away by their Conservative Party leaders in the Prussian state assembly from the national Reichstag to exercise their vote: Important legislation was in front of the Prussian state parliament in Berlin that would have altered in a democratic direction the so-called “three-class” suffrage rules for the state House of Representatives in Prussia, Germany’s largest state. They cast their vote “to rescue” the three-class voting system and quickly returned to their still-waiting cars outside the building to

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<sup>2</sup> Di Tella, Torcuato S. (1971-1972) “La búsqueda de la fórmula política argentina.” *Desarrollo Económico*. 11(42/44): 317-325.

<sup>3</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt* May 21, 1912

speed them away. In that decisive vote, what at first glance appears to be the overwhelming power of conservatism of late Imperial Germany seemed to be on perfect display. Table 1 below summarizes the parliamentary vote. As Table 1 shows, the Conservative and Reich-Conservative Party votes, along with critical abstentions on behalf of the Center Party and National Liberal Party, as in the sixteen previous efforts at reform since 1869, killed the bill with a vote of 188-158.

Table 1: Prussia's 1912 Legislation on Reforming the Suffrage<sup>4</sup>

<i>Party</i>	<i>Total reps</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Abstain</i>
Conservative (K)	152	0	139	13 (0)
National Lib (N)	65	45	0	20 (13)
Center (Z)	102	58	0	44 (33)
Reichspartei (R)	59	0	49	10 (0)
Left Liberals (F)	36	33	0	3 (0)
Polish Party (P)	15	14	0	1 (1)
Social Dem (S)	6	6	0	0 (0)
Danes (D)	2	2	0	0 (0)
All	437	158	188	91 (47)

Given the Conservative Party's near veto-like power in Prussia, we might ask: Does it really make sense to blame this outcome, and all the other thwarted efforts to bring democratic institutional reforms to the Prussian and German political systems before 1914 on *weakly organized* or loosely-coupled political parties of the right, representing old regime interests, as described in the last chapter? After all, at first glance, it appears that landed elites were immensely powerful not weak in Imperial Germany. This latter point is certainly correct. But this chapter will make the case that because political parties that represented these old regime interests suffered from a long-

<sup>4</sup> Data for this is drawn from the minutes of the Prussian parliament. See *Verhandlungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten* 77. Sitzung, 21. Legislative Period, May 20, 1912, 6428-6432. In the abstentions column, the figures in parentheses refer to the number of delegates who "abstained without excuse." A discussion of this follows below.

run legacy, going back to 1848, of poorly institutionalized, loosely-coupled, and not nationally-encompassing organization that old regime elites realized their own party organization was uncompetitive under mass democracy, and thus making elites so *acutely* fearful of democracy. Further, it was paradoxically the very weakness of the party organization that allowed a narrow socioeconomic interest—landed elites-- to gain such exclusive control over the parties representing them, thereby keeping the old regime in place. In Germany, the result was profound: between 1890 and 1914, despite facing promising conditions, a democratic transition did not happen. And, as we will see in a focus fashion in the next chapter, the long-run effect of the inheritance of weak party organization on the electoral right subverted a potential consolidation of German democracy after 1918, especially in the face of economic crisis after 1929.

### **Germany's Stalled Democratization Before 1914: the Prussia Factor**

We can begin our analysis not in the years on either side of First World War, but deeper in the past, at the birth of the Germany's Empire in 1871. Even at this founding moment a question was present: Was Germany's Imperial political system doomed to authoritarian institutional stasis or was democratic reform possible?<sup>5</sup> A British journalist reportedly confronted Count Otto von Bismarck with precisely this question in the years after unification, when he asked "How far do you regard the present constitutional system of the Empire as final?" Bismarck apocryphally is said to have answered, with his characteristic mix of foresight and equivocation,

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the conceptual ambiguities of this framing, see James Retallack, "Meanings of Stasis" in *The German Right, 1860-1920: Political Limits of the Authoritarian Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 108-136

Final it is not. Doubtless we shall pass through the stages which you in England have passed through. But it will be a slow, gradual process and we cannot foresee the direction which development will take,<sup>6</sup>

Whether or not Britain is a useful frame of reference, on the eve of the First World War, Germany's Imperial constitutional order, forged during Germany's 1871 national unification, did indeed end up facing unprecedented agitation for change, as Bismarck might have expected; this agitation placed "democratic" reforms on the political agenda of the "commanding heights" of the German political state. The unusual hybrid political regime that Bismarck is chiefly credited with designing -- governed by a powerful monarch and his appointed chancellor, a weak national parliament, universal male suffrage, a federated executive in the form of a second chamber (Bundesrat), and powerful states with their own suffrage systems, systems of public finance, and bureaucracies--was not a static set of political institutions but one that did indeed face serious pressure for change.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in those last five years before the First World War, the grand goals of democratic institutional change met a disappointing fate.

On the one hand, the early twentieth century collision of three forces had generated very real impulses towards democratization in Germany, like in much of Europe at the time. These impulses included transnational revolutionary turmoil emanating from Russia's 1905 Revolution, an increasingly cohesive and self-confident center-left pro-democratic social coalition of German Left Liberals and Social Democrats, the latter of whom was by 1903 electorally the most successful socialist party in Europe; and state-led conservative efforts at a "political modernization" to catch

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<sup>6</sup> Cited by Walter Shepard, "Tendencies to Ministerial Responsibility in Germany" *American Political Science Review* 5 (1911), p. 57

<sup>7</sup> Each of these institutions has spawned a wide-ranging literature unto themselves. On the question of universal male suffrage for the Reichstag, see Anderson. On the power of the Reichstag, see Manfred Rauh (1977) Grosser (1970) Schoenberger (1999) Kreuzer (2001) on variations in state suffrage systems see, Laessig (1998), Retallack (2006) on state bureaucracies and systems of public finance see Witt (1970) and Schremmer (1994)

up with and compete with the global “leader” Great Britain and to head off more radical reform.<sup>8</sup> But, unlike the successful passage of analogous and important democratic reforms in the case of a global “leading” power such as Britain (1910), or in cases more similar to Germany of relative socioeconomic and geopolitical “laggards” like Sweden (1906), and Denmark (1901), Germany’s early century experience with political change in this period of political tumult across Europe ended in what we can think of as chiefly timid “non-events,” a collection of moments where, in A.J.P. Taylor’s memorable phrase, history “failed to turn,” but in this instance, not just once, but many times, over and over, and with increasing frequency as Europe’s statesmen tragically “slept walked” into the First World War.<sup>9</sup>

In part to make sense of the “German catastrophe” of the first third of the twentieth century, there is an uncomplicated but misleading retrospective historical image that Imperial Germany was a static and immobile society without democratizing forces at play (cf. Anderson, 2011; Retallack, 2012). This is mistaken and, indeed, severely misconstrues the central puzzle of the political regime: In Germany, democratic reforms were vigorously, articulately and passionately pursued, led by socialists like Karl Kautsky, Left Liberals such as Friedrich Naumann, and more tentatively before 1914 by Catholics such as Matthias Erzenberg. German cities such as Berlin, Dresden, and Hamburg were the scene of hotly contentious and well-organized social unrest, strikes, “suffrage storms,” and mass protest to reform reactionary suffrage rules.<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary showdowns over proposed democratic reforms over the secret ballot and parliamentary rules in the halls of the Reichstag and the Prussian House of Deputies captivated public minds and reverberated in press

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<sup>8</sup> These three forces have been the subject of a long-standing literature on the period. For some of the older but still important works, see: on the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905 on the German left, Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy: The Development of the Great Schism, 1905-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); on the potential of a “Lib-Lab” coalition of Liberals and social democrats, see Beverly Heckart *From Basserman to Bebel: the Grand Bloc’s Quest for Reform in the Kaiserreich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); on the importance of Germany’s competition with Great Britain as a shaper of political life in Germany, see X.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (Penguin Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. Richard Evans “Red Wednesday in Hamburg: Social Democrats, Police, and Lumpenproletariat in the Suffrage Disturbances of 17 January 1906” *Social History* 4 (1) 1979: 1-31; James Retallack “Citadels Against Democracy” in *The German Right, 1860-1920* (University of Toronto Press, 2006).

accounts.<sup>11</sup> And even in what we normally think of as the reactionary Prussian State Ministry, moderate proposals at political reform of suffrage rules were broached in growing sense of panic, after 1906.<sup>12</sup> In all of these instances, despite a great deal of political noise from the street and from a newly self-confident “progressive” and democratic proto-coalition of Social Democracy and Left Liberals, and bolstered by discussion buzzing in the pages of the popular press of the day, the political system appeared to be trapped in what contemporary political scientists would likely call a puzzlingly nonreactive “reform trap”(Scharpf, 1989), a political system in which societal preconditions appeared to make major reform extraordinarily ripe, but unmovable blockage in the political system appeared to make the most important reforms impossible.

To be sure, as useful recent interventions have made clear (Anderson, 2000; 2011; Retallack, 2012), it is a mistake to only emphasize, in one-sided fashion, political institutional stasis in Germany before the First World War because some significant and particular democratic reforms, did occur in this period. Political reformers altered the electoral systems—including redistricting, tax requirements for voting, etc.—for elections to the state parliaments of several of Germany’s smaller southern states between 1899 and 1914 (Laessig, 1997); the secret ballot was given more institutional reality with a national reform of Reichstag voting procedures in 1903 (Anderson, 2000); and the profile and power of MPs in the Reichstag was altered when reform in 1906 gave them, for the first time, regular salaries. Yet, despite these changes, the two defining political institutions of the pre-1914 political regime as whole, and that had also always attracted the most passionate of criticism from democratic activists of the day stubbornly persisted, untouched by reform.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Berliner Tageblatt* in particular. For an overview of heated academic debates about the constitution in this period, see Mark Hewitson (2001).

<sup>12</sup> A ten-volume record of German *Staatsministerium* minutes have recently been digitized and published by the Berlin-Brandenburg Akademie der Wissenschaften (eds.) *Die Protokolle des Preussischen Staatsministeriums, 1817-1934/38* (10 volumes, Hildesheim: Olms Weidmann, 1999)

First, despite proposals in the Reichstag and calls for the constitutional change, the political system remained, in deeply undemocratic fashion, a dualistic constitutional structure in which *the executive remained formally unaccountable to the parliament or popular control*.<sup>13</sup> Modeled after the 1814 French *Charte Constitutionnelle*, and pre-1848 German constitutions, and not unlike the Swedish, Danish and Norwegian systems until the early twentieth century, the King appointed the Chancellor, with no approval from the parliament required, and the government formally did not reflect the results of elections. But, unlike in Sweden and Denmark in the same period, reform did not come to Germany.<sup>14</sup> In federal Germany, the Chancellor's "cabinet," which was in reality a group of "state secretaries" and not cabinet ministers, were picked not from the majority party of Reichstag as one typically finds in the "fused" parliamentary systems such as the UK or France after the birth of the Third Republic, but instead selected by the Chancellor and King, and were career bureaucrats with no party affiliation; the parliament, in this sense, chiefly only had the power to approve and propose legislation.<sup>15</sup> While by the early twentieth century the Reichstag had gained sufficient leverage to be able, in least one high-profile instance, to eject the Emperor's hand-picked Chancellor from office when Chancellor Bernard von Bulow's 1909 Finance Bill, failed in the Reichstag (see Rauh, 1977, p. x), the Reichstag remained an outlier in never possessing, before 1914, the ability to *form* governments and pick ministers. It is for this reason that Christoph

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<sup>13</sup> For students of German political development, my label of an "unaccountable executive" or an absence of parliamentarization as "undemocratic" likely prompts some confusion requiring immediate clarification. Early twentieth century German observers (e.g. Max Weber) and contemporary constitutional historians (e.g. Schoenberger, 2001 Kuehne, 2005) very usefully distinguish between "parliamentarization" and "democratization," noting that an expanded suffrage and growing power of parliamentarization did *not* accompany each other but actually may have run at cross purposes. I also make this point in Ziblatt, 2006. Nonetheless for purposes of the discussion here, I follow our common contemporary usage (eg, Tilly, 2005; Diamond, 1999) which regards three institutional reforms under the broader conceptual or normative umbrella category of "democratization": 1) increased constraints on executives, 2) expanded scope and equality of electoral participation, 3) protections of civil liberties. Calling these reforms all democratic is not intended to suggest that there are not tensions between these institutions nor to suggest that they always travel together empirically. More on this below.

<sup>14</sup> Denmark's "parliamentarization" is normally dated as 1901; while Sweden's formally came in 1915, reforms in 1905 put party leaders at the head of government, in effect, parliamentarizing the system. For a comparative overview, see Collier (1999)

<sup>15</sup> A crucial constraint was Article 9 of the constitution which forbid members of the Bundesrat to also be a MP in the Reichstag, thereby, in principle, blocking parliamentarization of a ministry.

Schoenberger (2001) in the most recent assessment of this entire debate concedes that while the German national parliament had increasing power in the last years before 1914, the possibility of a “type-shift” from a dualistic constitution to a parliamentary system were limited by the very institutional tensions between the government and the Reichstag that have, from his view, mistakenly been called a “silent” parliamenterization”.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to an unconstrained executive, the second major fortification of the non-democratic Imperial political system, which also made it an outlier in cross-national perspective, was an institution that also emerged from before the founding the Reich: the Prussian three-class voting system for the Prussian state legislature, designed by officials in the Prussia Interior Ministry in the wake of the 1848 revolution.<sup>17</sup> In this electoral system for the Berlin-based state assembly for Prussia, though universal male suffrage was adopted, members of the assembly were elected indirectly via electors, no guarantees for a secret ballot existed, and most perniciously, the relative weight of the vote in constituency was dramatically skewed by total tax contribution: richer citizens votes in each district counted for more in the selection of electors than poorer citizens. By the first decade of the twentieth century, this became the main target of reformers who saw in this system severe violations of basic democratic norms, drawing attention to the fact that, by 1903, the wealthiest three-percent of the voters (who fell into the “First class”) had equal electoral weight in the selection of electors as the poorest eighty-five percent of voters (the “Third class votes”).<sup>18</sup> If we compare Prussia to the other major German states in terms of the basic elements of democratic franchise, as Table 2 summarizes, we see Prussia was, without equal, secret, or direct elections for

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<sup>16</sup> In a useful intervention in this debate, Markus Kreuzer distinguishes among three key dimensions that allow us to assess, in comparative fashion, the scope of parliamenterization: 1) the ability to dismiss governments, 2) the ability to form governments, 3) the ability to affect legislation. While on the first and the third dimensions, the Reichstag was growing in strength, in the decisive second dimension, it did not and looked more like the Swedish Riksdag and Danish x of the time. However, while those regimes

<sup>17</sup> Gruenthal, xxxx, p. x

<sup>18</sup> Kuhne, 1994, p. 423

its assembly an outlier in the regressiveness of its rules, an outlier, along with two cases that imitated the Prussian system only beginning in 1896 and 1906 (Hamburg and Saxony).

Table 2: German States: Suffrage Regimes, 1913

	Criteria #1 <i>Universal Male?••</i>	Criteria #2 <i>Equal?</i>	Criteria #3 <i>Secret?</i>	Criteria #4 <i>Direct</i>	Criteria #5 <i>Lower Chamber: All elected?</i>
<b>Prussia</b> <sup>19</sup>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Saxony <sup>20</sup>	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hamburg <sup>21</sup>	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bavaria <sup>22</sup>	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Baden <sup>23</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wuerttemberg <sup>24</sup>	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lübeck <sup>25</sup>	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hesse <sup>26</sup>	Yes*	No***	Yes	Yes	Yes

\*signifies census or direct tax requirements;

\*\* all states require citizenship; acquisition of citizenship is at times associated with a fee that might dissuade people from gaining citizenship;

\*\*\* citizens older than 50 had one additional vote, which kept the inequality quite moderate<sup>27</sup>

The significance of these rules, and the differences between southern Germany and Prussia are clear in retrospect but also were to contemporaries at the time, both to their critics and their defenders. When liberalizing reforms passed in Wuerttemberg in 1906, for example, the Prussian Conservative newspaper *Kreuzzeitung* fearfully reported to its readers in the 12 July 1907 issue,

<sup>19</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, 351-382.

<sup>20</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, 401-410.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Wilhelm Eckardt, *Von der privilegierten Herrschaft zur parlamentarischen Demokratie: die Auseinandersetzungen um das allgemeine und gleiche Wahlrecht in Hamburg*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hamburg: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2001), esp. 46, 50f.

<sup>22</sup> For all states, Wilhelm Heinz Schröder, *Sozialdemokratische Parlamentarier in den deutschen Reichs- und Landtagen 1867-1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1995), 825-889; Mark Hallerberg, "Tax Competition in Wilhelmine Germany and Its Implications for the European Union," *World Politics* 48.3 (1996): 324-357; Bernhard Vogel, Dieter Nohlen, and Rainer-Olaf Schultze, *Wahlen in Deutschland* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1971), 70f, 79, 87, 120ff. On Bavaria, Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte Seit 1798*, vol. 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart; Berlin; Köln: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1994 [1969]), 385-400.

<sup>23</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, 415-418.

<sup>24</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, 412-414.

<sup>25</sup> Hartmut Fuchs, *Privilegien oder Gleichheit. Die Entwicklung des Wahlrechts in der freien und Hansestadt Lübeck 1875 bis 1920* (Diss. Kiel, 1971), 36-164, esp. 46 and 138.

<sup>26</sup> Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, 418-421.

<sup>27</sup> Simone Lässig, "Wahlrechtsreformen in den deutschen Einzelstaaten," *Modernisierung und Region im wilhelminischen Deutschland*, ed. Simone Lässig, Karl Heinrich Pohl and James Retallack (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1998), 137.

“The reform mania is an epidemic illness of the southern states.” But, reassuringly asserted, “It will not, however reach up north of the River Main [into Prussia].”<sup>28</sup> The Prussian system was not only uniquely regressive within Germany, in cross-national perspective, as reported by Stein Rokkan (1970) and Dieter Nohlen (1986) in separate analyses of the history of elections in advanced democracies, the Prussian case was an outlier in pre-1914 Europe, as the only case still *without* a secret ballot and *with* indirect parliamentary elections among the future 22 OECD member states before World War I.<sup>29</sup>

But most important of all, the centrality of this particular electoral system within Prussia to Germany’s national political system makes it worth closer attention. On the one hand, there has been a careless and frequent conflation of Prussia with Germany in the longstanding historiography, leading some historians, for example to erroneously imply that the German Reichstag had a three-class voting system (see, e.g. x) or incomprehensibly and inaccurately to operate from the assumption that Prussia (only approximately 2/3 of German territory) *was* in fact all of Germany before 1914 (see y). This has understandably produce ire among careful political historians who in recent decades, have explored and emphasized the importance of developments *outside* of Prussia as a way of both offering a “de-centered” corrective of German political development that is not so fixated on Prussia as being “identical” with Germany and as a strategy for highlighting the diversity of political and social developments across Germany (e.g. Blackbourn, 1981; Laessig, 1997; 1998; Weber, 2004). As valuable as this corrective has been, it is equally crucial not to make the opposite mistake of diminishing the unusually important institutional linkages between the Prussian political system and the federal political system, chief among these, the critical three-class voting system. Thus rather than either conflating Prussia with Germany, on the one hand, or understating Prussia’s role in Germany, on the other, more important is a careful and realistic reconstruction of the

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<sup>28</sup> 12 July 1906 Kreuzzeitung

<sup>29</sup> Both are authors are cited by Kuhne (1994), p. 26

intricate and subtle institutional inter-connections between Prussia's three-class voting system and national politics, which were arguably decisive in shaping the national political regime as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

As a first move in this direction, we can note that these two institutions of pre 1914 Germany--rules governing constraint over executive power at the national level (parliamentarization) and rules governing the scope and equality of political participation in the single state of Prussia (the three class voting system)—were not entirely discrete domains of political life as they are sometimes treated but were instead tightly interlinked, creating a self-reinforcing bundle of authoritarian institutions that were tricky to unwind unless done so simultaneously, thereby providing the defining contours of the broader political regime. Together, these institutions elevated Prussia's importance within Germany and protected Prussia and its broader "way of life" within Germany.<sup>31</sup> When the First World War neared its end, Max Weber (1917), provided a clue to how these institutional links operated as he forcefully noted in an important essay on the future of German constitutionalism. He argued that even had constitutional reforms passed before 1914 to make Germany's chancellor and his state secretaries' appointment reliant on a vote of the national Reichstag, the persistence of an unreformed three class voting system for Prussia's state legislature would have resulted in majorities for the Conservative Party in Prussia, indirectly blocking national parliamentarization because of the distinctive structure of Germany's second chamber.<sup>32</sup>

Without a reform of the three-class voting system, Prussia's seventeen delegates to the fifty-eight member executive second chamber, the Bundesrat, would still have continued to reflect the

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<sup>30</sup> In a review essay, Thomas Kuehne (2005) also makes this argument.

<sup>31</sup> One clue of this elevated power is recounted by Reinhold von Sydow (Reich State Secretary of the Treasury) who, Retallack (2006) cites, as having "recalled in his memoirs that one question was repeatedly asked...when a crucial question of domestic policy was discussed: 'What does Hydebrand [Conservative Party chair in the Prussian chamber of deputies] think of this?'"

<sup>32</sup> The Bundesrat consisted of fifty eight seats, occupied by delegates of the member-states of the federation. The body had legislative and administrative functions and was occupied chiefly by ministers of the member states. The Prussian Minister President (typically also the Imperial Chancellor) was chair of the body (Article x). And because the Prussian system, while formally not

deeply undemocratic Prussian electoral system which blocked Social Democrats from representation in that body. The result is that conservative-minded Prussian Ministers, as Prussian delegates in the Bundesrat, would have maintained their virtual absolute veto over all Reichstag legislation, since only fourteen votes in the Bundesrat could stop any legislation coming out of the Reichstag, in effect thwarting popular sovereignty and parliamenterization.<sup>33</sup> In this way, as Max Weber (1917) put it, the three-class voting system “poisoned the political system as a whole” and parliamenterization could only come to national politics in Germany not merely through more parliamentary control over the Chancellor, but through a democratization of Prussia.<sup>34</sup>

To gain a sense of the institutional interconnections between the single state of Prussia and national politics it is useful to compare this relationship to the relationship of the U.S. South and national politics in the United States until the second half of the twentieth-century where a similar “subnational” authoritarian political system affected the character, extent, and outer limits of *national democratization* in important ways. Here, like in Germany, as well as in other federal systems in more recent such as Argentina and Mexico where subnational authoritarian enclaves have existed (see Gibson, 2012), a variety of elaborate institutional mechanisms exist by which powerful authoritarian subnational subunits, also governed by a restricted suffrage regime generating near single-party rule, could exert disproportionate influence on national politics (see, e.g. Katznelson, 2013). As in Germany, in the U.S., this occurred primarily through the U.S.’ own second chamber (the U.S. Senate) but in the U.S. via the Senate’s own rules that gave powerful committee chairmanships, including the Judiciary Committee which approved Supreme Court appointees, to the most senior members of the Senate, usually a southerner because of low

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<sup>33</sup> Important for understanding this is that Prussian Ministers, while formally not required by the constitution to be reflective of election results had themselves undergone a dramatic “parliamenterization,” but in this instance a conservative parliamenterization that benefited the German Conservative Party. See, Frauendienst (195x, p. y).

<sup>34</sup>The quote about the Prussian electoral system is from Max Weber, *Das Preussische Wahlrecht* [1917] (1984), in *Max Weber Zur Politik im Weltkrieg* (Tuebingen: JCB Mohr): 233; the second claim is found in a Letter to Alfred Weber cited by Mommsen

competitiveness in those districts (see, Key, 1949). Also, in the U.S., the single-party “solid” Democratic south exerted disproportionate influence on the national political system via the presidential candidate selection process which required a 3/5 majority, thereby de facto giving the South a veto, not unlike the Prussia’s veto in the Bundesrat, on the selection of U.S. presidential candidates.<sup>35</sup> In short, to democratize the United States as a whole required *democratizing* the U.S.’ own “authoritarian enclaves” (Mickey, 2013) within the national political system.

Similarly, Prussia was the pivot of the German national political regime as a whole. As one early political scientist, vividly put it in 1911, influenced by Max Weber’s own writings on the topic, the three-class voting system was the “the citadel of the powers” of autocracy and bureaucracy in Germany. This early American political scientist continued, “Its abandonment would give the enemy possession of the entire fortress.”<sup>36</sup> Though it is sometimes argued, Germany’s early universal male suffrage for the Reichstag without parliamentarization perniciously shaped Germany’s democratic trajectory (see Dahl, 1971; Schoenberger, 2001), just as important in shaping political developments in Germany is that even had there been a national parliamentarization, with no suffrage reform within the pivotal state of Prussia, a nondemocratic national political regime would have remained in place until war and revolution demolished *both* sets of institutions. In sum, the three class voting system was arguably the thread that held the whole political regime together, and that if tugged, brought the whole regime down with it. We see, in sum, why the theme “abolish three-class voting system!”—became the main slogan of the democratic activists of the age; and, why at a DKP Party Congress in December 1907, Manteuffel ominously and provocatively warned

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<sup>35</sup> See Edward Gibson’s comparative account *Boundary Control* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); for a classic discussion, see V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949)

<sup>36</sup> Walter J. Shepard, “Tendencies to Ministerial Responsibility in Germany” *American Political Science Review* 5 (February 1911), 66.

that any Prussia minister that would dare propose the Reichstag franchise for the Prussian Landtag *should be charged with treason!*<sup>37</sup>

### **When an Unstoppable Force Meets an Unmovable Object: the Puzzle of Germany's Durable Authoritarianism before 1914**

The stakes, thus, were high in Prussia for Germany as a whole. But, why did the system persist for so long? If authoritarian regimes survive in large part because they are lucky enough (or perhaps skilled enough) to rule quiescent societies with fragmented, timid and disorganized oppositions, thereby buying political stability for themselves, the endurance of authoritarianism in the Prussia state, and hence Germany, is puzzling.<sup>38</sup> Germany, and especially the Prussian state after 1905, faced anything but a quiescent society; rather, it was a state under siege, facing what looked to be unstoppable challenges to the old regime which took increasingly disruptive, organized, and highly visible forms. Further, even if “economic backwardness” had been a barrier to democratization until the 1890s, both Germany as a whole, and the state of Prussia after 1890 and certainly by 1910, with its transformative industrialization, had now joined the ranks of the capital abundant advanced economies of the world, and thus was now ripe for democratization.

First, strictly in terms of socioeconomic development, it is of course correct that “economic backwardness” is normally considered to be a barrier to democratization (Lipset, 1959; Boix, 2003). In the German context, the dominance of the infamous industrialist-landlord “iron-rye” protectionist coalition that was also anti-democratic in political orientation (e.g. Gerschenkron, 1948) has frequently been called upon as a powerful explanation to link relatively late industrialization to

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<sup>37</sup> Cited by Retallack, 1988, p. 163

<sup>38</sup> Accounts that emphasize the role of well-organized “working class” or “threat of unrest” as cause of democratization run from classic sociological accounts (e.g. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, 1992) to contemporary political economists (eg. Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001; 2006). It should be added, “threat of unrest” is of course not always treated entirely as “exogenous”—it can be suppressed, bought-off, redirected, and otherwise suffocated. See X.

stalled political development. In his analysis of the impact of expanding global trade on political coalitions, Ronald Rogowski (1992), provides one of the most incisive accounts to link socioeconomic development to political coalitions for democracy. Extending the Stolper-Samuelson theorem (Stolper & Samuelson, 1941), Rogowski (1992) argues that in developing “backward,” or in more precisely capital poor societies, (e.g. Germany before 1900), growing exposure to trade in a context of abundance in labor (note the massive out-migration of Germans) but scarcity in land tends to generate a reactionary cross-sectoral coalition of protectionist industrialists and rural landlords, a configuration that certainly matches traditional accounts of German political life until at least the 1890s (see Gerschenkron, 1948; Rosenberg, 1964). In Rogowski’s (1992) account, this contrasts to the impact of growing trade in a “capital advanced economy (e.g. Britain) in which both labor and capital are abundant and only land remains scarce. In this latter scenario, a progressive pro-free trade alliance between free-trade minded labor and capital that backs democratic reform is expected to form against the reactionary and protectionist interests of landed elites, an account which has an eminent plausibility for the British context, as reconstructed in Frank Trentmann’s (2009) powerful work on the consequences of free-trade ideology on British political development.<sup>39</sup>

However, the German and Prussian puzzle for these accounts, is that even if they provide an account of the dominance of the Junker-industrialist alliance in Germany in the mid/late nineteenth century, by 1890, and certainly by 1914, Prussia as the heartland of Germany’s heavy industrialization (Herrigel, 1996) had joined the ranks of the “capital abundant” advanced economies, and yet, the Lib-Lab coalition that is expected to, and did in fact follow (see discussion below) in its wake to challenge the old Junker-industrialist dominated political system, did not bring democratic change to Prussia or to Germany. Thus, it remains a puzzle: by 1911, Germany, with

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<sup>39</sup> Frank Trentmann *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Prussia at its core, was a leading edge of Europe's industrializing economy, along with the United Kingdom, Belgium and Netherlands, as the only four countries on the entire continent with less than 10 percent of their populations employed in the agricultural sector, while the eastern, southern, and northern peripheries of Europe (e.g. Sweden and Denmark) lagged far behind with over thirteen percent and up to eighteen percent of their populations in the agricultural sector.<sup>40</sup> Further, Germany became a net exporter of capital after 1890 (Feis, 1965; Garst, 1998) and the nature of its exports shifted away from low capital intensive products such textiles, leather, and silk to the capital-intensive electrical, engineering, and chemical sectors.<sup>41</sup> By all accounts, Germany actually surpassed Britain in total industrial output before World War I. And, Prussia with x percent of its population in the agricultural sector (Hohs and Kaelble 1989). was at the forefront of these developments within Germany. Yet, reform did not come to the most significant *national* barrier to democracy, the three-class voting system *within* Prussia.

If it is difficult to blame insufficient socioeconomic development as a cause of the pre-1914 persistence of the institutional pillars of Germany's authoritarianism, it is even more implausible to place the burden of Germany's stalled democratic transition on an *absence* of social contention, unrest, and working class mobilization on the eve of the First World War. Before 1914, Germany was not a quiescent authoritarian state; it was a state under assault on two related fronts: extraparliamentary contention in the form of labor unrest, strikes, and protests, on the one hand, and an irrepressibly rising Social Democratic Party that represented a major electoral challenge within the realm of formal parliamentary politics. A wide-ranging literature, ranging from Dahl, (1971), Rueschemeyer Stephens, and Stephens (1992) and Tilly (2005) to Acemoglu and Robinson (2000), makes clear that social conflict or social "threats" on the part of a disruptive and well-organized opposition, in the form of working-class (see Eley, 2002) or other types of anti-regime mobilization,

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<sup>40</sup> Data from B.R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics, Europe, 1750-2000* (Fifth Edition) (New York: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 143-162.

<sup>41</sup> J. Daniel Garst, *Comparative Political Studies*, 1998

are critical to changes in political regime. The impact of contention is typically thought to come by injecting an acute fear in the minds of incumbents elites who, in a classic democratic “transition game” (e.g. O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1985) may quickly become convinced they are stuck between a “rock” (i.e. growing unrest and contestation) and a “hard place” (i.e. democracy), leaving democratic reform increasingly preferable to what is regarded as an unsustainable *status quo*.<sup>42</sup> Real political change, it is thus often asserted, requires serious contestation and a strong opposition.

While this logic certainly captures a key ingredient in the process of dislodging old elites and their undemocratic networks of power, if we rely on it as the singular pivot of our explanation, then the pre-1914 German context in which it appears, in brief, that *an unstoppable force ran directly into an unmovable object*: protests, strikes, and opposition to the old regime were *more* well-organized, disruptive, and visible in Germany than in other European country before 1914 (e.g. Sweden, Britain), but the contention achieved far *fewer* substantive democratic concessions than much lesser contention achieved in these others cases. In the years before 1914, chiefly in the peak years of 1899, 1905, and 1912, the dockyards of the major shipping ports along Germany’s northern coast (e.g. Hamburg), the coal mines of the Ruhr Valley in Prussia’s west, and the streets of nearly all Germany’s cities became the site of an unprecedented social mobilization that stood out even in the contentious days of *fin de siècle* Europe. With his eye on the reverberating impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905, Carl Schorske (1955) has called the year 1905 a “turning point in European history,” but notes its particularly ferocious edge in Germany,

Repercussions of the Russian Revolution were felt throughout the European labor movement, but above all in Germany, where indigenous sources of class antagonism were strengthened by the Russian example. Labor conflict of unprecedented scope dominated the

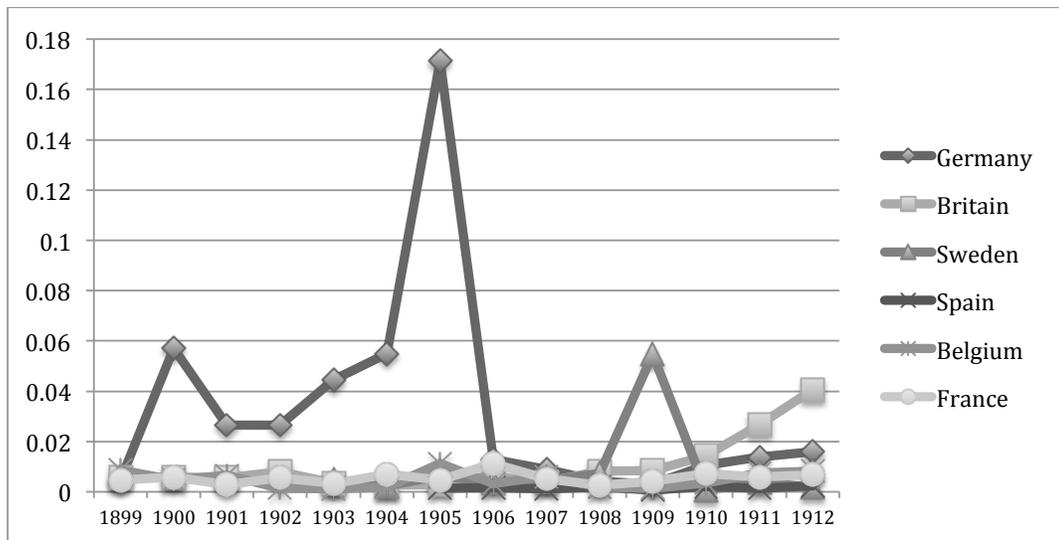
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<sup>42</sup> In Dahl’s (1971) classic formulation, social contention and protest alter the calculations as elites weigh the “costs of toleration” vs. the “costs of suppression,” and when the latter outweigh the former, democratic reform becomes a possibility.

economic scene in 1905-06. In politics there began a mass movement to democratize the discriminatory suffrage systems in the federal states . . .”<sup>43</sup>

To put harder numbers on Germany’s pre-1914 political environment within a comparative context, Figure 1 reports national census data on the total number of industrial strike participants annually (per capita) for the period before 1914 for the major European countries for which data are available. We see that for nearly the entire period, Germany not only did not lag other European countries but actually far outpaced the rest of Europe, only matched in the years 1910-1914 by Sweden and Britain.

Figure 1: Annual Number of Total Striking Workers per capita, 1899-1912<sup>44</sup>



Yet, again, while suffrage was reformed in some German states, in its largest state, Prussia, where most of the strikes occurred, reform was non-existent.<sup>45</sup> To grasp the puzzle more fully, we

<sup>43</sup> Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917, The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 28

<sup>44</sup> Data drawn from B.R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics, Europe, 1750-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), strike data: pp. 172-185. Population data: pp. 3-8.

must identify the causes of the ground-swell of social unrest presented in Figure 1. First, after the lapsing of the anti-Socialist Law in 1890, the 1890s were “the decade of trade unions” with a rapid growth of “free” Social Democratic unions encompassing 27 percent of all laborers by 1913, a level matched only by other advanced economies of the day.<sup>46</sup> A similarly crucial though often underestimated role was played by other increasingly well-organized unions as well, including the Polish coal miners’ union (*Zjednoczenie Zawodowe Polskie*), which recent literature has made clear, represented the vast number of Polish-speaking miners in the Ruhr (in Prussia) and helped spearhead mass mobilization in the area in 1899 and 1905.<sup>47</sup> Responding to real injustices and pursuing real ambitions, the German working class, broadly understood, became, in historian Mary Nolan’s assessment “the best organized workers movement in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>48</sup>

A second decisive factor that explains the ballooning of protest is that unions altered their main strategy of agitation, abandoning the older plant-by-plant “one-off” strike (*Einzelabschlachtung*) to adopt, quite controversially, the coordinated, and later, the general strike, motivated in large part by the example of the Belgian suffrage strike of 1902 (Schorske, 1955, p. 33). Even the moderate revisionist Eduard Bernstein embraced the new and remarkably effective “radical” strategy of mass mobilization with an explicitly political goal of securing universal and equal suffrage.<sup>49</sup> Finally, crucial for the broadening impact of the German labor movement was

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<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that in my analysis of data that I discuss more fully below, between 1899 and 1906, half of all industrial strikes took place in Prussia. See *Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, Streiks und Aussperrung im Jahre 1909* (Volume 239), 1910

<sup>46</sup> Bartolini, 2000, p. 531; Garst, 1998, p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> See John J. Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement: Xenophobia and Solidarity in the Coal Fields of the Ruhr, 1871-1914* (Providence: Berg, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Mary Nolan, “Economic Crisis, State Policy and Working Class Formation in Germany, 1870-1900” in Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg *Working Class Formation: Nineteenth Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 352

<sup>49</sup> See Eduard Bernstein, *Der politische Massenstreik und die politische Lage der Sozialdemokratie in Deutschland : Vortrag gehalten im Sozialdemokratischen Verein* (Breslau, 1906). For a discussion of Bernstein’s place in the evolution of German social democracy, see Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

how political and institutional goals (e.g. suffrage reform) came to be linked as part of the same reform agenda with every-day uncoordinated economic fights over pay, work conditions, and control of the shop floor, the kinds of more immediate concerns that had motivated Ruhr Valley coal miners and Hamburg dockworkers onto the streets. The issue of how “private problems” become “public concerns” is of course a critical one, and no small part was played by the recalcitrance of the Prussian House of Representatives itself which in 1906 rejected the Prussian government’s own proposal to introduce state monitoring of Prussian mines, in response to the January 1905 coal miners strike. This move sparked renewed outrage against the three-class voting system that blocked workplace reforms. But certainly elevating suffrage as an issue was a second key development: the spectacular rise of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany.

Indeed, this was the second major front of the challenge to Germany’s old regime. Though restricted in its activities by Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws until 1890, the SPD’s organizational prowess allowed it to compete in nearly all electoral districts long before its competitors, contesting nearly all constituencies by 1898; its official coordination with the German Free Trade Unions that began at the Mannheim Congress of 1906 gave it an organizational apparatus that helped create a mass base (with associated “proletariat” civic associations), and provided the party a mass membership in which SPD members were, by 1912, 23 percent of the SPD electorate.<sup>50</sup> These trends were most visible in Prussia. As the introduction of free and fair elections in Prussia after 1918 shows, without restrictions on the equality of the vote, because of the advanced level and nature of heavy industrialization in Prussia, socialists would come to dominate political life in Prussia matched in few of Germany’s other states.<sup>51</sup> But for the period before 1914, the rise of the SPD at a national level was just as impressive. Figure 2 provides evidence of the growing electoral dominance of the SPD, with an outright plurality of SPD seats under universal, equal, direct, and

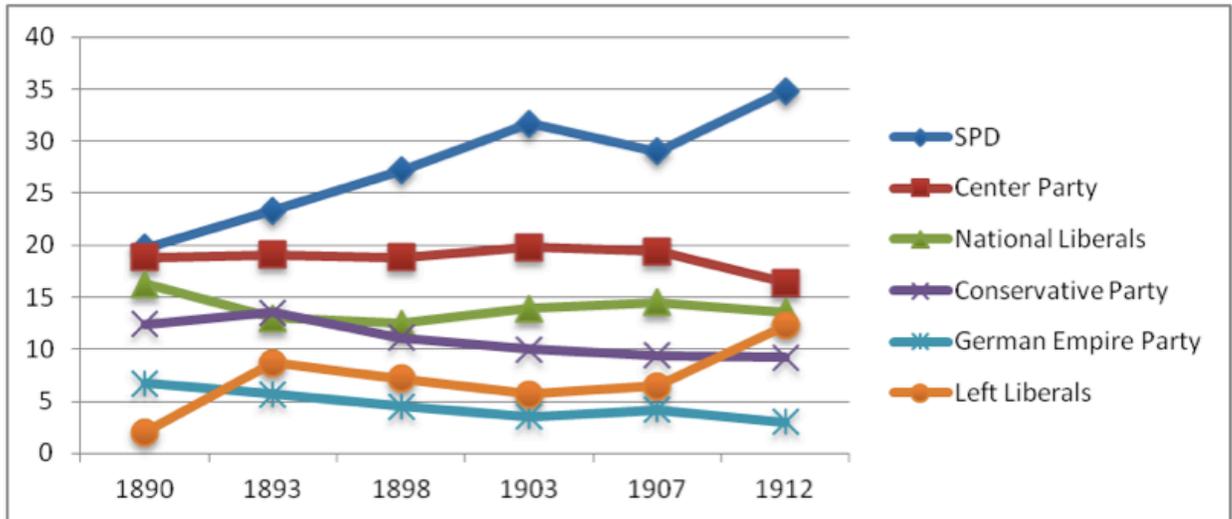
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<sup>50</sup> Stanley Suval, *Electoral Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. x

<sup>51</sup> See Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia, 1918-1912, The unlikely Rock of Democracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986)

secret ballot after 1890 in Reichstag elections, outperforming socialist parties *anywhere* in Europe at the time.<sup>52</sup>

Figure 2: National Reichstag vote Share of SPD, 1890-1912<sup>53</sup>



Growing intensity of strikes in the international context of the Russian Revolution of 1905 coupled with this threatening electoral rise of the behemoth of Social Democracy represented a major challenge, causing panic, scrambling, and innovative efforts at founding new reactionary pressure groups, parties, and organizations at self-defense.<sup>54</sup> As innovative as these response were, democratic reform of the state, however, was not forthcoming.

Given the arguments of Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992), Eley (2002), and Acemoglu and Robinson (2000), we must ask: why not? One intuitive but ultimately

<sup>52</sup> Stefano Bartolini, p. x

<sup>53</sup> This simply reports Reichstag results under universal, equal, direct, and secret ballot. Of course, the SPD's performance in state elections varied enormously because of the variation in suffrage systems. For example, though SPD possessed the second largest delegation of Reichstag members from Prussia with 22 members, in the Prussian state legislature, the same voters, with a different electoral system elected only 2 members (Kuehne, 1994, p. 381). In all states, however, Laessig (1998) has reported that the "parties of order" (Ordnungsparteien), nervously eyed Reichstag results to track what kind of socialist opposition they faced.

<sup>54</sup> On older work on the response of the right to the rise of socialism is Dirk Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks: Parteien und Verbände in der Spätphase des Wilhelminische Deutschlands* (Köln: Kippenheuer & Witsch, 1970); more recently see Heinz Hagenlücke, *Die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei: die nationale Rechte am Ende des Kaiserreiches* (Düsseldorf: 1997)

unsatisfactory alternative to the argument I develop in this book about the weakness of conservatism is to argue that the high incidence of strikes in Germany and the very strength of the SPD backfired, making reform coalitions actually *more* difficult than in countries with a “tamed” reformist left because old regimes in the former context are more likely to stubbornly resist democratization than they might otherwise have done.<sup>55</sup> The argument is certainly appealing at first glance. However, it is deeply misleading in the German context for three central reasons, suggesting a more general gap, without a focus on conservatives, in our understanding of how contention, unrest, and democratization are related. First, if one examines the strike data from Figure 1 above closely, one sees that the only other national cases in which industrial strike movements areas strong as Germany’s (e.g. Sweden and Britain) are cases that are normally considered “settled” cases of democratization. In these cases, unrest did not bring de-democratization, and the case of Sweden, with a major general strike in 1909 occurred alongside the successful adoption by *Conservatives* of democratic reform before 1914. By contrast, a case of low strike participation, Spain, experienced no equivalent democratization before 1914, suggesting it is a mistake to assume a direct link between strikes and de-democratization.

Second, to blame the ideological radicalism of the Prussian left for failure to reform the three-class voting system is, if we examine the timing of political events in those years around 1906-1912, to reverse the actual historical sequence; it is the long-standing and repeated intransigence of the regime, and in particular the particular terms of the Prussian government’s long awaited three-class voting reform proposal released on February 4, 1910 that triggered the “final break” of Prussian Socialists, planting the seeds for the “Swing to the Left” or what Carl Schorske (1955) famously called “the Great Schism” between socialists and communists that emerged during the First World War. The details of the period, as Schorske (1955) has most precisely elaborated,

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<sup>55</sup> This argument is implicit in Luebbert’s (1991) analysis of what he calls “abortive Lib-Labism” (p. 115). I discuss the cases of Saxony and Hamburg below.

are crucial: At their September 1909 national Leipzig Congress, the SPD had agreed to a positive parliamentary agenda to collaborate with Liberals to push for a “joint offensive” for constitutional reform in Prussia, and even warned its rank and file “against excessive street demonstrations or demonstration strikes which might weaken the united front.”<sup>56</sup>

But the potential Lib-Lab coalition began to fissure at the Prussian congress in January 1910, a month before the Government released its proposed suffrage reform and the Party Congress called for a “suffrage storm.” Exacerbated by the modesty of the reforms released in February 1909, the socialist daily paper *Vorwärts* criticized the bill proposal as a “brutal and contemptuous declaration of war.”<sup>57</sup> Two days later, mass street protests were the direct response. Schorske describes the dynamic this way, “The proposed reforms were so inadequate that far from satisfying democratic opinion they only aroused it further” (p. 177). He also writes,

That the Prussian wing would have reversed the trend toward a reform coalition...was not unnatural. The Prussian comrades lived under the three-class suffrage system; they had had the spirit of compromise beaten out of them by years of petty persecution at the hands of the Prussian administration and courts. The ire of the rank and file...could not easily be converted into friendship for the Liberals (p. 175).

More broadly, in the most definitive cross-national study of the determinants of radicalism and reformism before World War I, Gary Marks and his collaborators (2009) analyze party ideology of the socialist parties of 18 countries in 1900 and 1914 on a 12-point scale, demonstrating that a pre-history of restricted or unequal suffrage, along with several other factors, on average,

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<sup>56</sup> Schorske, 1955, p. 173

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 177

radicalizes socialist parties.<sup>58</sup> The broader point is this: to blame the radicalism or the strength of the German left for stalled democratization is to reverse the causal arrow that underpins the relationship, leaving open the core question of why some regimes responded to threats with repression and others with democratic concessions of an expanded suffrage.

A third, more general problem with the view that radicalism, or opposition strength on its own prompts de-democratization or stalled democratization is theoretical: it requires an intricate, if not slightly convoluted causal logic, given the insights of Dahl (1971), Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992). If both claims are correct—that democratization requires social unrest *and* that it can also lead to de-democratization—it becomes necessary to construct an argument that some contention is necessary for democratization but too much contention is not helpful for democratization; indeed, this precise argument has been innovatively proposed and elaborated in theoretical terms by recent formal work.<sup>59</sup> But, *empirically* identifying the charmed “goldilocks” middle ground without being forced to rely on *post hoc* “just-so-stories” becomes, at best, tricky business.

Such theoretical contortions, however, become unnecessary if we shift our analytical starting point altogether and place a key actor, the political representative of the main social elite of the nondemocratic system at the center of the action. We can concede that socioeconomic changes may alter coalitional dynamics, giving rise to a push for democratization. Also, mass unrest, strikes, and demonstrations as well as the rise of a well-organized electoral challenger may place democratic reform on the political agenda of defensive and retreating state elites, altering the terms of political debate. But, facing such unrest, at least three options exist for old regime incumbents and allies: 1) democracy may be successfully blocked, 2) repression or crackdowns may follow, or 3) democratic

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<sup>58</sup> Gary Mark, Heather Mbaye and Hyung-min Kim, “Radicalism or Reformism: Socialist Parties before World War I” *American Sociological Review* 74 (2009): 615-635

<sup>59</sup> This is the innovative argument about a “u-shaped” relationship between inequality and democratization elaborated by Acemoglu and Robinson (2006).

reforms can be adopted. What determines whether the third option, and not the first two, follows from social unrest and changed socioeconomic conditions?

As elaborated more fully in Chapter Two, democratization is usefully conceived as a “two-step” process, that are analytically distinct: 1) demands for democratization may emerge from structural conditions, but 2) how the political representatives of nondemocratic regime’s elites respond—i.e. repression, blocked reform, or democratization--hinges on the organizational resources of the incumbent elite at the moment they are challenged. First, *with* party organization, old regime elites can concede with greater self-assurance that they can survive electorally, whereas *without* party organization, the dilemma of being between a “rock” (i.e. unrest) and a “hard-place” (i.e. democracy) is exacerbated, and the latter option both is much less appealing and less likely to be adopted since the prospects of survival in free and fair democratic competition only worsen. Party weakness intervenes at a second step in the causal chain: even if party elites within an old regime perceive “democracy” as preferable for a variety of reasons, without tightly-coupled party organization, they have a harder time containing the backlash of hardliners or a potential reactionary base which will thwart the strategies of more moderate conservative reform-minded office-seekers, blocking the faintest reform tendencies of party leaders. In short, even facing propitious conditions, *without party organization, incumbents may be simply too weak to acquiesce.*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The analysis that follows focuses for reasons elaborated above on the decisive three-class voting system. A similar analysis could be done of the absence of “parliamentarization” in Germany in the same period. Indeed, Dieter Grosser, *Vom monarchischen Konstitutionalismus zur parlamentarischen Demokratie* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970) among others have made clear that a major hindrance to parliamentarization in Germany was that aside from the Social Democrats who were in favor of parliamentarization, no party had sufficient electoral prowess to win an outright majority, thereby diminishing their enthusiasm for cabinet responsibility to a parliamentary majority. Thus, in addition to the barrier of the three-class voting system that I elaborate here, it was also, as Grosser (1970) and others argue, precisely the fragmentation of parties due to the kinds of religious and confessional divides I have identified above as critical (see, e.g. Otto Hintze, [1970] ), that made parliamentarization difficult in Germany (cf. Rauh, 1977).

## **Too Weak to Acquiesce: Conservatives and Blocked Suffrage Reform in Prussia, 1910 and 1912**

The logic becomes visible if we explore the details of two major moments of potential but *failed* democratic reform in Prussia: 1910 and 1912. It is one task to show how party organization aided the navigation of successful democratic reform (as we undertook in our analysis of how British Conservatives survived the 1884 Reform Act in Chapter 4). The challenge we take up here, however, is the inverse: to analyze a case of a “dog that did not bark”—that is, to show how, even though left Liberal and Socialist agitation put suffrage reform on the political agenda in Prussia after 1908, it was organizational weakness on the part of regime-defending Conservative Parties via two dynamics: *electoral concerns and dynamics of organizational capture* that thwarted suffrage reform until war and revolution came to Germany in 1918.

### *Too Weak to Acquiesce: Electoral Concerns of a weak conservative Party*

We can begin with the electoral considerations that flowed from the weakness of party organization possessed by the German Conservative Party. But, first, how did suffrage reform get onto the agenda of the German government in the early 1900s, and was there ever a real possibility of reform?<sup>61</sup> The most serious efforts came before the First World War as suffrage was being reformed across Germany’s states. But the 1910 Reform, the most likely to have succeeded in Prussia in the period, was originally initiated by the government’s new and ambitious Chancellor Theobald Bethmann Hollweg, who did not merely expect reform, but thought substantial suffrage reform was inevitable. He had reflected, before taking up his chancellorship, when initially broaching the subject in 1906,

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<sup>61</sup> There were repeated efforts at reform from 1848 until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some from the side of the government to bolster the three-class voting system, others symbolic proposals to eliminate it altogether. Kuehne (1994) provides the most thorough overview of all sixteen reform proposals to be discussed and voted on in the Prussian Chamber of Deputies.

Our Prussian franchise is impossible to preserve in the long run... Its Conservative majority is so banal in spirit and so complacent in its feeling of inviolable power that it must be humiliating to any progressively minded man; we *must* find a new basis.<sup>62</sup>

The perception that reform, even if modest and at the edges, was not only desirable but *must* be achieved, reflected the very real structural dynamics of socioeconomic change, social unrest, and socialist electoral success described above. Further, Bethmann Hollweg, like his predecessor Bernhard von Buelow, viewed suffrage reform as part of a broader package of “modernizing” institutional reforms, such as public finance reform, internal improvements (e.g. canal-building) that would allow Germany to compete on the international stage with Great Britain and other great powers over colonies and global influence.<sup>63</sup> But, the issue of suffrage reform initially forced itself onto the political agenda, ending up as a commitment made by the Prussian King himself at the opening session of the Prussian Chamber of Representatives in an October 1908 “Crown Speech” (*Thronrede*) during Chancellor von Buelow’s chancellorship, through a more proximate practical channel: suffrage reform became the political price the government had to pay to pursue its global project of political and institutional “modernization” while sustaining an anti-socialist governing coalition in the Reichstag.

How did this happen? Throughout its history, the government’s need for parliamentary majorities for its legislative program remained essential and was met by cobbling together ever-shifting *ad hoc* coalitions (dubbed *Sammlungspolitik*) in the Reichstag to get its legislative agenda through the parliament *without* the aid of growing number of seats held by the SPD. After

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<sup>62</sup> Emphasis in original. Cited by Retallack, 1988, p. 163

<sup>63</sup> There is an extensive literature on the connections of international politics to domestics but most recently, see Conrad, Sebastian and Osterhammel, Jürgen (eds) *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914* (Goettingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004)

Bismarck's fall and the socialist law's expiration in 1890, however, the shrinking non-socialist vote gave rise to a governing coalition of an increasing number of political parties, including National Liberals, Conservatives, Free Conservatives and the Catholic Center Party, thereby only excluding Left Liberals, Social Democrats, and other smaller minority parties. Until 1906, the *Sammlung* governing grouping, as Kuehne (1994, p. 494-495) reports, maintained reasonable consensus on economic policy (e.g. protectionism) and on Prussian constitutional questions (i.e. anti-reform), but often split over foreign policy and cultural questions (e.g. education) with the pivot of the coalition, the Catholic Center Party often critical and unsupportive of the government on the latter questions. By 1906, the coalition was, however, becoming less stable as the Crown and his chancellor sought to pursue a more expansive foreign and colonial policy, and in the process unintentionally elevated suffrage reform as a key political issue.

Facing the prospect of an irrepressibly growing SPD plurality in the Reichstag, the fissures in the government's coalition appeared on multiple fronts. First, in 1905-06, the Catholic Center Party, the hinge of the government's parliamentary coalition, became more critical of Germany's brutal response to uprisings in east Africa, making the government nervous about relying on Center Party allies in the future. Second, socio-economic development, as Rogowski (1982) predicts, heightened tensions between National Liberals on the one hand, another key coalition partner, and Conservatives on the other, increasingly splitting these two groupings over trade policy that seemed to disproportionately benefit agrarian interests against the interests of new industrial interests as well as the nearly tax-exempt status of Conservative-defended landed and agrarian wealth in the countryside (as opposed to industrial and city wealth).<sup>64</sup> Thus, National Liberals began to converge

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<sup>64</sup> Imperial Germany's system of fiscal federalism and public finance had long been notoriously defective since the national parliament (governed by universal male suffrage) only had access to tariffs and weak indirect taxes on consumption while it was only the states (with restricted suffrage rules) that had access to the potentially very substantial income taxes and land taxes. The result was a growing fiscal crisis of the Reich which increased the risk premium on German government bonds and resulted in insufficient resources to fund the government's own ambitious military goals (Schremmer, 1994; Ferguson, 1994).

and collaborate with Left Liberals, both in election campaigns and in parliamentary debates, against Conservatives in their shared critique of Germany's decentralized fiscal system as well as the three-class voting system in Prussia that together provided key institutional protection for the latter group's special tax status in Prussia.<sup>65</sup> Also, the rise of socialists in urban districts and demands for suffrage reform in "suffrage strikes" put new pressure on Liberals of all stripes for a non-socialist reform agenda.<sup>66</sup> Even the National Liberals, who were historically ambivalent if not outright reactionary vis-à-vis suffrage issues, also announced their support for the secret ballot at its October 1907 Wiesbaden Congress.<sup>67</sup> Taken together, with fractures materializing all around its allies in the parliament, the government decided a new foundation for governance was necessary to pursue its goals of a) providing more solid fiscal basis for the state, for the purpose of b) building a more powerful and expansionist foreign policy (*Weltpolitik*).

The result was the 1907 Reichstag election, which marked a pivot point in the evolution of the Prussian suffrage system.<sup>68</sup> In this national election, the government's strategically selected election campaign focused on issues of nationalism and patriotism that sought to remake, in a move of Rikerian (1982) heresthetics, the coalitional landscape by *excluding* Catholics and for the first time *including* Left Liberals, thereby creating a more solid statist pro- Imperialist coalition that could pursue an expansionist foreign policy with more robust centralized public finance basis. The new nationalist majority of 1907 gained 216 of the Reichstag's nearly 400 seats and consisted of

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<sup>65</sup> This subtle shift of Left Liberals and even National Liberals, who represented urban and industrial interests along with Left Liberals, was decisive; they had historically supported the oligarchic three class suffrage system for electoral reasons had begun to shift on this issue because of their view that growing SPD success that would result from suffrage reform was a reasonable price to pay for decrease greater access to the protected wealth that the three-class voting system protected (Kuehne 1994, p. 495).

<sup>66</sup> A further factor inducing a convergence of Left Liberals, Liberals and even Social Democrats was their increasingly reliance on each other in election campaigns in Prussia. For systematic data on the frequency of alliances over time, see Kuehne, 1994, pp. 264-265.

<sup>67</sup> Kuehne, 1994

<sup>68</sup> On the 1907 election, see George Crothers, *The German Elections of 1907* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

Free Conservatives, Conservatives, National Liberals and for the first time in the twentieth century, Left Liberals, who seemed prepared to support the government's agenda.<sup>69</sup>

But, the majority came at a political price: Left Liberals, the new pivot of the coalition, unlike the former pivot, the Catholics, elevated a new issue, Prussian suffrage reform, as a condition of cooperation for the reasons described above.<sup>70</sup> The criticisms of "Empire" and cultural questions over education had been the central cleavage in the previous government dividing the Catholic Party and its conservative and National Liberal allies. After 1907, these issues were successfully submerged, but Prussian suffrage reform now became the new dividing line among the government's own parliamentary allies, thereby making it a pressing issue of government action in order that headway could be made on its chief priority, reforming German public finances. In his memoirs, the future head of the German Conservative Party in the Reichstag, Count Kuno Westarp reports that the even the precise wording of the King's throne-speech was fine-tuned by the Chancellor himself with the very precise goal of communicating sufficient enthusiasm to assure Left Liberal support for public finance reform.<sup>71</sup> In short, to hold the coalition together to pursue its broader *Weltpolitik* goals, suffrage reform in Prussia landed, as a not entirely intended byproduct, of other forces at the center stage of Prussian politics and the Prussian state elections of June 1908.

Yet, despite its pressing nature for the government's goals, between 1908 and 1914, no reform was achieved. Reform made no headway despite facing what was thought to be the mutually-reinforcing unstoppable forces of economic development, social unrest, the government's coalition needs, and SPD electoral success. Why, precisely? To show that, ironically, the Conservative Party, the purported electoral wing of the old regime, was simply too weak to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> According to Kuehne, 1994, a key point came with the publication of Left Liberal MP Friedrich Naumman's agenda-setting article in *Berliner Tageblatt* on July 31, 1907 which asserted the critical importance of suffrage reform to the new governing bloc.

<sup>71</sup> Westarp quotes Bulow's explanation that the King's words were necessary so that "mood of the Liberals would not be damaged for the [upcoming] public finance reform" Graf Westarp, *Konservative Politik im letzten Jahrzehnt des Kaiserreichs*, Volume I (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1935), pp. 99-100

acquiesce, we must distinguish between two separate questions: first, why did the transformative and sweepingly democratic alterations of the three-class voting system of the type envisioned by Left Liberals and Social Democrats after 1907 that would have included *equal, direct, secret, and universal male suffrage* repeatedly fail?<sup>72</sup> And, second, perhaps more realistically, why were even the government's own modest reforms, with myriad institutional safeguards included, in effect non-starters for suffrage reform? We know, in comparative terms, nondemocratic monarchs, under massive social pressure, in the case of Britain in 1884 or Sweden in 1906, for example, could "buy off" initially-reluctant Conservatives to concede democratic reforms when such safeguards were included. In Germany, however under no conditions, it appeared, could Conservatives pivot from their resistance.

We first demonstrate how electoral motivations shaped by weak party organization increased *unwillingness* of Conservatives (as well all others without party organization) to support the dramatic and transformative variety of suffrage reform that Left Liberals and Social Democrats sought. The empirical analysis that follows first focuses on the roll call results in the Prussian Parliament of two revealing votes that occurred on bills, both proposed by Left Liberals, that would have introduced among the most sweeping reforms considered in Prussia in the period. The first is an amendment offered by Left Liberals to the Government's own more modest bill, voted upon on March 11, 1910.<sup>73</sup> The second is a stand-alone bill offered by Left Liberals in May 20, 1912. The benefit of analyzing these two bills side-by-side, even if neither ultimately had a real prospect for passing through the *Herrenhaus* (upper chamber) is that we can cast light on the *sources* of opposition to major democratic reforms, ranging from structural attributes of districts to electoral dynamics facing individual MPs. Both bills would have added a) secret ballot and b) direct elections

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<sup>72</sup> Left Liberals and Social Democrats were committed to a wholesale reform; National Liberals were advocates of secret and direct elections; Free Conservatives conceded to allow the elimination of indirect elections and only the German Conservative Party remained stalwart against all reforms. See Bohlmann, 2009, p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Below We will discuss the fate of the modest yet nonetheless failed government bill which initially passed the Chamber of Deputies on March 16, 1910.

to the Prussian suffrage system, and thereby provide a revealing window on barriers to far-reaching dramatic suffrage reform in Prussia.<sup>74</sup>

Following the argument in Chapter 2 and the general insights of Schattschneider (1942) and Llavador and Oxoby (2005), I can test the hypothesis that electoral motivation or “office-seeking” motivations, shaped by strength of electoral machinery/organization (and presumably other factors as well) at the disposal of political parties, especially old regime parties, shapes willingness to embrace suffrage reform *above and beyond* the kinds of structural variables that the literature typically emphasizes.<sup>75</sup> With access to “stronger party organization” we would expect more willingness to accept suffrage reform; with “weaker party organization” we would expect less willingness to accept suffrage reform.

But how do we test whether “party organization” and its associated electoral benefits shaped willingness to accept suffrage reform? While the kind of detailed constituency-level party organization data that would allow us to directly test this hypothesis for this period is not available, fortunately, the Imperial German multilevel electoral system does offer an unusual and revealing source of data that allows us to test indirectly this hypothesis for both the 1910 and 1912 roll call votes. Since the proposed rule change for Prussia would institute a system that would more closely approximate the universal, direct, equal, and secret ballot already in place in national Reichstag elections, we can assess whether politicians of all parties, with poorer prospects of electoral success under elections that approximate the new rules, are in fact *more* resistant to democratic reform, as a perspective that emphasizes the importance of “party organization” would expect.

For the 1910 vote, I match up electoral results from the most recent Prussian state election (1908) with the most recent Reichstag elections (1907) to construct an “electoral incentive” variable

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<sup>74</sup> Part of this analysis (the analysis of the May 20, 1912 bill) draws on Daniel Ziblatt, “Does Landholding Inequality Block Democratization?” *World Politics* (2008)

<sup>75</sup> As I discuss below we will control for these types of “structural variables” at the level of the electoral constituency: agrarian employment, landholding inequality, population, population density, and religious profile of district. See below for more details.

for nearly every member of the Prussian state parliament. I also do the same for the 1912 vote, constructing a variable “electoral incentive” that contrasts the results from the 1908 Prussian elections with the 1912 Reichstag elections. This variable is built by asking: how much better or worse off would an individual legislator be, given the last national elections, if the national electoral system were adopted for state elections?

I also include three main control variables that measure different structural features of a member of parliament’s home constituency that we might think would shape prospects of supporting reform. First, following a long-standing view that Junker landed wealth was the barrier to democratization in Prussia that counteracted the democratizing impact of mobilized labor, turning Germany into an unmovable political system (see e.g. Rueschemeyer Stephens, Stephens, 1992), I include a measure of landholding inequality from the 1895 agricultural census for each district (discussed in Chapter 5) with the expectation that higher land inequality in a district would make a MP less likely to support democratic reform. Second, following the basic expectation that socioeconomic modernization promotes democratization, I include a variable that measures the percentage of the population employed in the agricultural sector for each constituency, with the expectation that a higher portion of the population in the agricultural sector, the more likely a MP is to resist democratization. Third, I include a variable that measures the religious makeup of a constituency, measured by the percentage of the total population in each constituency that was Catholic in the same year, with the expectation that greater religious heterogeneity makes support for democratization less likely.<sup>76</sup>

For the 1910 and 1912 votes, I conduct two separate analyses but code the dependent variable (support for democratic reform) in several ways for purposes of robustness. First, I code “yes” votes as 1 and all other votes (“no’s and absentions) as 0. Second, I focus on “yes” and “no”

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<sup>76</sup> For more details on these control variables, measurement issues, and sources, see Ziblatt, 2008, pp. 629-630.

votes only and exclude abstentions from the analysis. Finally, I also include an ordinal ranking where I code “yes” votes as 2, abstentions as 1 (since abstentions were used strategically) and “no” votes as 0.<sup>77</sup> The coding of dependent variables makes little difference. Table 3 summarizes the findings

Table 3: Probit and Ordered Probit Analysis of Roll Call vote on Prussian Suffrage Reform (March 1910 and May 1912)

	1910			1912		
	Yes vs. all Other Votes	Excluding Abstentions	Ordinal ranking	Yes vs. all other votes	Excluding Abstentions	Ordinal Ranking
Electoral Incentive	0.01*** (0.004)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Land inequality (Gini)	0.06 (1.17)	0.16 (0.89)	0.08 (1.05)	-0.77 (1.08)	-3.11** (0.02)	-1.20 0.195)
Agricultural Employment	-0.03*** (0.006)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)
% Catholics	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.01* (0.01)	0.01** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
# Observations	264	240	264	264	214	264

We see that across all specifications, even holding all other variables constant, the more a MP is to lose out *electorally* with the new suffrage rule, the more likely he is to oppose suffrage reform. We also see, unsurprisingly, that many of the other control variables are also statistically significant: MPs from more rural regions are consistently found to more likely oppose reform in all specifications and landholding inequality makes MPs from such districts to be less likely to support reform in some specifications.<sup>78</sup> For purposes of illustrating the impact of the “electoral incentive” variable on support for reform, we can simulate the relative impact of “electoral incentive” and landholding inequality on likelihood of supporting electoral reform. Building from Model 1 (from

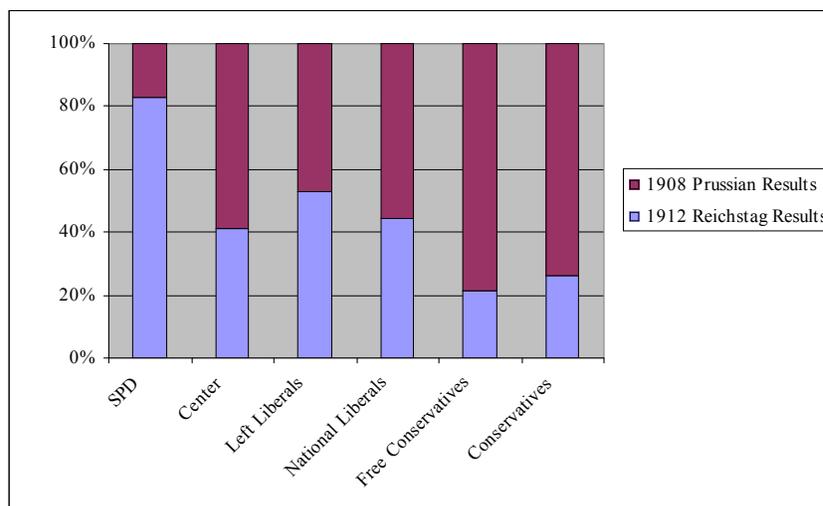
<sup>77</sup> See, Ziblatt, 2008, pp. 623-624.

<sup>78</sup> In several models not reported here, this variable is more important (e.g. when a broader sample of districts is included). But the electoral incentive variable remains important in *all* specifications.

1910), Figure 4 simulates the probability of supporting suffrage reform, showing that all other variables held at their mean, increasing the amount of electoral losses incurred with a shift in suffrage rules decreases resistance to reform. A similar logic, although not linear, holds for the traditional structural variable: increasing rural employment, decreases likelihood of supporting reform.<sup>79</sup>

Conservatives (both Free Conservatives and German Conservatives) had most to lose electorally under Reichstag suffrage rules, as Figure 5 below illustrates. And, the Social Democrats, with their expansive and robust nationally-integrated party organization, had the most to gain. We see, therefore, why in addition to any ideological motivations, instrumental electoral calculations were certainly not far from the minds of MPs: with the kind of weak organization described in the last Chapter, Conservatives were simply *too weak to acquiesce* to transformative suffrage reform.

Figure 5: Vote Share by Each Party in Prussian state elections and Federal Reichstag Elections, 1908/1912



We see, furthermore, an additional motive behind the claims of Prussia's Conservative Party leader in the Prussian State Assembly, Ernst von Heydebrand who decried suffrage reform in

<sup>79</sup> Report simulations here.

parliamentary debate in 1912 in high-minded ideological terms as “an attack on the laws of civilization.”<sup>80</sup> Certainly not far from consideration behind such rhetoric was the short-run instrumental calculation consistent with the argument here, and that the DKP itself used in a campaign brochure published in time for the June 2, 1908 election, with the argument for why voters should vote for Conservatives: “Hold tight on to what the [Prussian] suffrage rule still protects! An elimination of the [three-class] suffrage and its substitution with the general Reichstag suffrage rule represents the final domination by the masses!”<sup>81</sup>

*The Second face of weakness: The Dynamics of Organizational Capture*

But, what about even more modest bills? In Britain (1884) and Sweden (1907/1909) suffrage reform came with safeguards that would help secure the interests of existing old regime parties. Was not the same possible in Prussia? Though likely not altering the political regime as a whole, the reform proposed by the Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg himself in February 1910, with the crown’s endorsement, to adjust more modestly, the Prussian suffrage in a democratic direction had an even better chance of success. While disappointing Left Liberals and Social Democrats, it was potentially far-reaching and involved direct interventions of the King’s Chancellor, not unlike the British crown’s intervention to reform the House of Lords in Britain in 1910 or the Swedish crown’s interventions in parliamentary reform in 1907 and 1909. The Prussian reform, spearheaded by the government, like most democratic reforms by “elite negotiation” (Collier, 1999) of course had ulterior and not strictly democratic motives but nonetheless it would have 1) substituted direct elections for indirect elections (eliminating electors), 2) increased the size of electoral districts to reduce the worst forms of income malapportionment, and 3) provided educated

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<sup>80</sup> Stenographische Berichte, 1912, p. x

<sup>81</sup> KZ 256 2 June 1908 cited by Bohlmann, 2012, p. 88

and other groups access to “first-class” voting status who did not qualify under income qualifications.<sup>82</sup>

The proposal was, however, admittedly modest insofar as it did *not* introduce the secret ballot, nor, most decisively did it eliminate the three-tiered class voting itself. Though largely a move to bolster the *status quo* while appeasing Left Liberal democratic reformers, government officials made clear, as the archival record of State Ministry discussions indicate, the goal was not unlike democratic reforms elsewhere in history, to empower a more moderate center-right collaboration of National Liberals and Conservatives, and to reduce the broad social unrest (“*Beruhigung im Land*”) that was becoming rampant in suffrage strikes, strikes and protests.<sup>83</sup>

The ultimate failure of the bill, however, owed to some small missteps of the government (Kuhne, 1994, p. 568) but the chief barrier was two-fold: first, the inability of party leaders to impose electoral losses on their own party’s incumbents (what Disraeli in 1867 had called his own party’s “dying swans”), a necessary ingredient in any democratization reform, as British reforms in 1867 and 1884 make clear. Second, as Kuhne (1994, p. 567) has also argued, the intense urban-rural rivalry that had developed between the two partners that Benthmann Hollweg had hoped would carry the bill, National Liberals and the German Conservative Party, made finding an alliance between the two was more difficult than the crown had imagined. The potential center-right reform coalition was not forthcoming despite Bethmann Hollweg’s own hope that the suffrage reform bill would “help the Conservatives make good the errors they had committed” and to “help them regain touch with the mood of the people.”<sup>84</sup> But, the Prussian Conservative Party leadership,

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<sup>82</sup> The results for reducing the worst income malapportionment of the existing system were modest, increasing the portion of voters in the first class from 3.8% of the electorate to 7%; voters in the second class from 13.8% to 17% and reducing the portion of third class voters from 82.4% to 76%. The more significant reform would have been the introduction of direct elections. See Bohmann, 2012, p. 89.

<sup>83</sup>“Sitzung des Staatsministeriums am 26 Februar 1910.” in Berlin-Brandenburg Akademie der Wissenschaften (eds.) *Die Protokolle des Preussischen Staatsministeriums, 1817-1934/38* (Hildesheim: Olms Weidmann, 1999), Volume 10, p. 54

<sup>84</sup> Retallack, 1988, p. 164

under von Heydebrand, chose to resist the government's plans, proposed its own initiative without National Liberals in March 1910, and ultimately voted against its own bill after it had reemerged in May 1910, significantly amended in the Prussian *Herrenhaus* (upper chamber) by members of the chambers "Neue Fraktion" in ways that had been encouraged by the Bethmann Hollweg to be appealing to National Liberals in the Prussian Assembly.<sup>85</sup> But , while National Liberals supported it, the gap between National Liberals and the Conservative Party appeared too great as the German Conservative leadership replayed a strategy, criticized as "demagogic" by Bethmann Hollweg in 1911, that it had first adopted in opposing the government's internal modernization and canal-building projects (1899, 1901, 1904) as well as the government's modernizing public finance bill in 1909 that would have removed tax privileges of landed wealth, bills that both Left Liberals and National Liberals supported.

The new ultra-conservative strategy, in Retallack's (2006, p. 347) words, of playing the role of "*plus royaliste que le roi*" ["more royalist than the king"] left German Conservatives, the historically loyal electoral wing of the Prussian crown, increasingly antagonistic towards the King's government, and isolated in the German political system, increasingly unable to forge alliances with any party except the Catholic Center Party.<sup>86</sup> Behind the irresolvable tensions between National Liberals and Conservatives, and this increasingly demagogic strategy itself, was rooted in a consequence of weak party organization: the *geographic isolation* of the party. The German Conservative Party, by lacking nationally-encompassing party organization was increasingly concentrated in a smaller number of districts (as Figure 6 below shows), chiefly in eastern Prussia, representing districts that by any estimate had starkly difference median preferences

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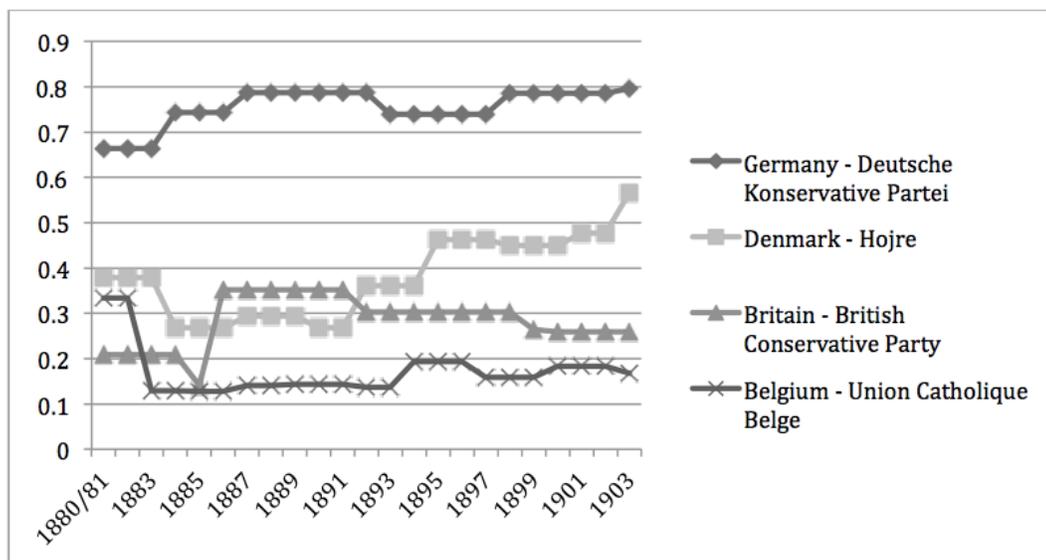
<sup>85</sup> For an account of the bill's passage through the upper chamber, see Hartwin Spenkuch *Das Preussische Herrenhaus: Adel und Buerkertum in der Ersten Kammer des Landtages, 1854-1918* (Duesseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998), pp. 542-548

<sup>86</sup> In addition to the instability of parliamentary coalitions, Kuhne's (1994, p. 264) data on which parties formed electoral coalitions with other parties makes clear that Conservatives' electoral cooperation with Left Liberal and National Parties was in decline after 1890, but increasing only with the Catholic Center Party.

about the suffrage than the increasingly reform-minded National Liberals and Left Liberals, who represented very different districts, and who viewed secret and even direct elections as a way of reforming Prussia's state.

Following Jones and Mainwaring (2003) who propose a Party Nationalization Score (PNS) based on a gini-coefficient of electoral support that assesses the degree to which a party wins equal vote shares across all subnational units (in this case electoral constituencies), Figure 6 reports gini coefficients for the traditional right or conservative party in parliamentary elections in four countries for which systematic over-time data are available.<sup>87</sup> In this case, the higher the value, the higher the spatial concentration of the votes. We see as Figure 6 shows, the German Conservative Party, in Reichstag election, was unique among similar traditional right parties by gaining most of its votes in a much more concentrated set of districts, a figure which shows that as of 1903.<sup>88</sup>

Figure 6: Geographic Concentration (Gini-Coefficient) of Conservative Party Vote Share, National Parliamentary Elections, 1881-1903<sup>89</sup>



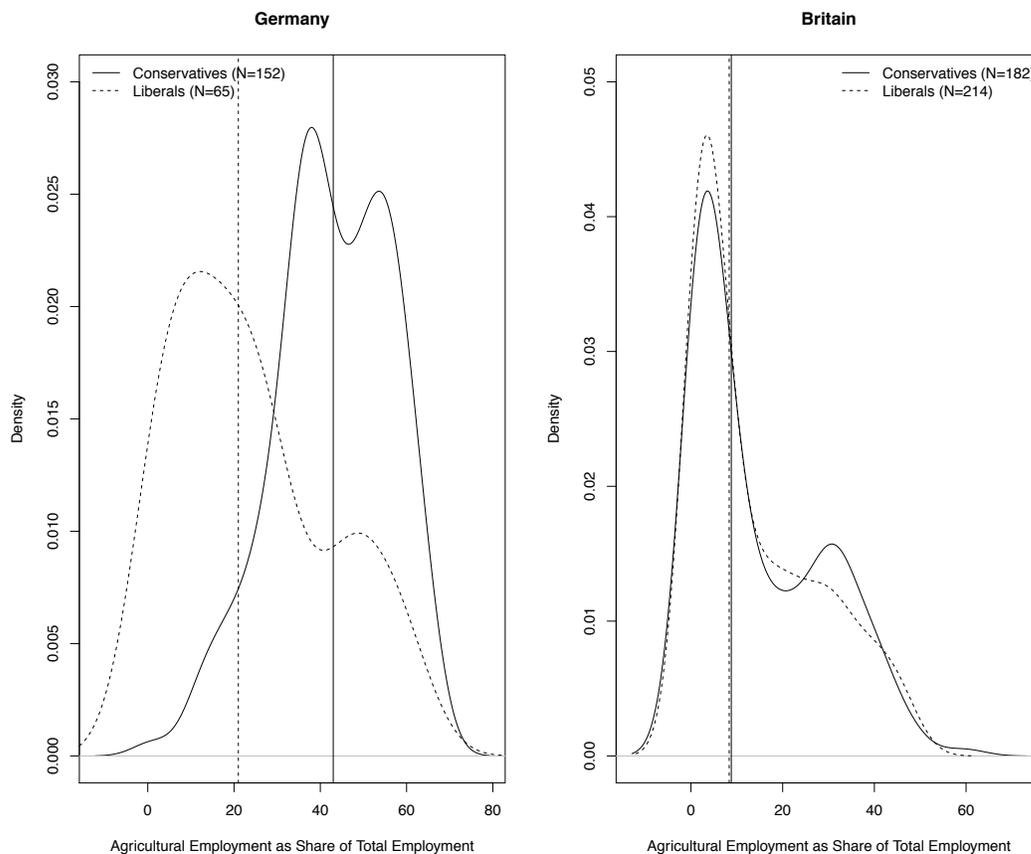
<sup>87</sup> For an elaboration of the method, see Mark Jones and Scott Mainwaring, "The Nationalization of Parties and Party Systems: an Empirical Measure and Application to the Americas" *Party Politics* 9 (2) (2003): 139-166. Data source is from Daniele Caramani, op.cit. (2003).

<sup>88</sup> Equally intensive concentration was found also with the Prussian Assembly delegation where 126 MPs were from east of the Elbe River (the heartland of "eastern Prussia") and only 17 were from west of the Elbe River. Retallack, 1988, p. 167.

<sup>89</sup> The figure reports gini-coefficients in vote share across electoral districts for all national parliamentary elections between 1880 and 1903. For a description of the data, see footnote#85.

If a political party's electoral support is spatially concentrated, this raises the potential that its median voter (the median voter of its median district) is very different from and very ideologically distant from the median voter of the country as a whole.<sup>90</sup> Further, it suggests that MP incumbents have been able to resist party leaders' own efforts to more efficiently distribute their electoral victories, indicating party weakness. Figure 7 illustrates that this was the case in Germany, by plotting agricultural employment as a share of total employment on the x-axis (as a proxy of the type of district), against the density of seats won by Conservative and Liberal Parties.

Figure 7: Median and distribution of Conservative and Liberal Party Seats across varying levels of agricultural districts in Germany and Britain in years of suffrage reform (1910 and 1885)<sup>91</sup>



<sup>90</sup>See Jonathan Rodden, "The Geographic Distribution of Political Preferences" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2010 13: 321-340.

<sup>91</sup> Data source: xxxx.

We can both see greater overlap in the kinds of districts won in Britain (the right-hand panel), suggesting that Conservatives and Liberals won very similar types of districts (strictly in terms of agricultural employment. Like, the median victorious districts were nearly identical. By contrast, in Germany (the left panel), Conservatives won in much more rural districts with less overlap with Liberals, and a very different median type of district. Thus unlike in Britain, where British Conservatives competed over similar suburban districts with Liberals, in Germany, the profile of German Conservative Party districts were starkly different demographically--more rural, marked by low population density, a higher portion of Protestants, and high landholding inequality, assuring their constituencies' preferences were likely far from other parties'.<sup>92</sup> The result was simple: without the necessary party organization to reach beyond safe seats *without losing their base*, the German Conservative Party's stances on highly ideological questions such as suffrage was constrained by the simple fact that its median voter was arguably very distant from the center of the political space and very distant from those parties who were necessary partners to negotiate suffrage reform.

But even more than being constrained by a different median voter, "party weakness" is a concept that implies an *organizational logic*: unlike Swedish Conservatives in 1907 or British Conservatives in 1884, German Conservatives Party leadership because of its weakly nationally-encompassing organization and resulting geographic concentration in rural districts was both more vulnerable to, more dependent upon, and thus more easily "captured" by a narrowly-focused and effectively organized Agrarian League (BdL) as described in Chapter 5.<sup>93</sup> As noted earlier, between 1898 and 1912, all Conservative Party MPs in the Reichstag were endorsed by, and took pledges to

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<sup>92</sup> See Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser's Voters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For parallel evidence on Prussia, see Ziblatt, *op.cit.* 2008

<sup>93</sup> The idea that interest groups can more effectively capture political parties when parties are spatially concentrated in their support is not one, as far as I know, that exists in the literature. However, there is good theoretical reason, building on basic theories of collective action (Olsen, 1966) as well as theories of regulatory capture (Stigler, 195x) to think that spatially concentrated actors are more vulnerable to capture

support the BdL; and the interpenetration of the interest groups' leadership and party leadership was extensive.<sup>94</sup> Further, as Chapter 5 demonstrated, Conservative MPs were disproportionately reliant on campaign financing and logistical support from the BdL. With the ever present threat that the BdL might run its own candidates against disloyal DKP members (as Chapter 5 showed), the result, given the concentration of the Conservative Party in rural districts, was that this interest group, that defined itself as the exclusively defending agrarian interests, exerted enormously leverage. This was seen in stages, as it first unleashed internal factionalism in the party on infrastructure bills, tariff bills, tax bills in the early years after 1900, and, second, as it definitively shaped the stances of the Conservative Party on the issue of voting rights and suffrage in 1909/1910 entirely out of proportion to the importance of agriculture in the broader German economy.

It is correct that in the years after 1903 and especially in wake of the rejection of the Government's public finance bill in 1909, a movement within the Conservative Party developed to "step across the Elbe" to free the party of its nearly exclusive reliance on agrarian interests of eastern Prussian and, to "ride to the west" by building local party associations (*Vereine*), and to run campaigns outside of the east-Elbian heartlands in a new "urban conservatism" modeled in part on British Toryism.<sup>95</sup> For example, the mayor of Dresden, Dr. Beutler, a Conservative, argued that Conservatives' anti-industrial views were limiting its prospects in Saxony. Dr. Beutler, at the Conservative Party Congress of December 1909 criticized his fellow delegates, asserting "There is a widespread understanding that the party has become a complete dependent of the BdL."<sup>96</sup> Also, in reaction to the failure of the government's public finance bill at the hands of the BdL dominated

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<sup>94</sup> Also exerting influence in the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, 122 of 152 Conservative MPs in the Prussian Chamber of Deputies in 1908 declared themselves in favor of the BdL program and received campaign assistance in exchange. See Retallack, 1988, p. 166.

<sup>95</sup> A prominent figure in this movement was led by Dr. Adolf Grabowsky, a prominent publicist and later political scientist whose 1911 article "Cultural Conservatism" explicitly compared British and German Conservatism, arguing the latter had been "deformed" and required fundamental organizational and ideological reform.

<sup>96</sup> Deutsche Konservative Partei (ed.) *Der Allgemeine Delegiertentag der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei. Stenographischer Bericht, 11 December 1909* (Berlin: Hauptverin der Deutch-Konservativen, 1909), p 27.

DKP Reichstag caucus, disaffection emerged among a group of Berlin suburban Conservative *Vereine* from the leafy suburban districts outside of Berlin including Lichterfelde, Moabit and Pankow, not so dissimilar from the districts that British Tories thrived in outside London beginning in the 1880s. In addition to policies that would benefit cities (i.e. tariff reform, public finance reform), they advocated more sweeping suffrage reform, and a political program based around the revealing slogan,

“More contact with the people!  
Independence from the Agrarian League!  
Equity between city and country!  
Away from the Center Party!  
Back to the Bloc concept [alliance with National Liberals] against Social Democracy!  
Then the Conservative Party will become a *Volkspartei!*<sup>97</sup>

However, these groupings were too far from the seats of power within the party leadership, already occupied by agrarian BdL insiders, in the Reichstag and the Prussian Assembly and *Herrenhaus* parliamentary groups (who along with a single Saxon MP) constituted the central decision-making body in the party’s executive, the so-called “Committee of Twelve.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, facing a party leadership already dominated by a well-organized agrarian interests, these new provincial groups, as others have also argued, could gain little immediate influence, and instead left a simmering grass-roots factionalism in the provincial *Vereine* that would re-emerge after 1918.<sup>99</sup> A legacy of the past and internal party politics blocked what would have been a rational strategy to maximize votes.

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<sup>97</sup> On this group’s stance on suffrage reform, see Bohlmann, 2012, p. 92; on the group’s program, Retallack, 1988, pp. 182-183

<sup>98</sup> Retallack, 1988, p. 229. By 1912, the highest body in the party, the so-called “committee of twelve” consisted of Wedel, Heydebrand, Beutler, Buch, Erffa, Klassing, Kroeher, Limburg, Mehnert, Mirbach, Normann, Pappenheim, and Westarp.

<sup>99</sup> Retallack, 2006, pp. 378-383

How did this dynamic of “organizational capture” at the top of the party shape the party’s stance on democratization? And, why would an agricultural interest group have such a strong position on reforming the electoral system? Though Ernst von Heydebrand, nicknamed the “uncrowned King of Prussia” is said to have run the Conservative Party with an “iron fist” and was widely regarded as a brilliantly “talented” politician, by 1910, the impact of agrarian interests via the organized channel of BdL influence was far-reaching. Indeed, part of von Heydebrand’s unusual political talent was precisely his ability to act on behalf of a narrow interest while simultaneously being regarded as in full command of the party.<sup>100</sup> However, illustrating one of the classic paradoxes of the exercise of political power (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962), the full scope of influence and capture between the two organizations is difficult to identify empirically unless, as one account recently suggested, the analyst moves further back in the causal chain to trace how *over time* open conflict between the organizations gradually was muted while the scope of maneuver of the organization targeted for capture simultaneously was being narrowed.<sup>101</sup> We can see this unfolding process at work in the years (1902-1909) of the earliest ultra-conservative stances *contra* the Chancellor over the canal bill (1899, 1902, and 1905), tariff bills (1902), and the public finance bill (1909) where we can see simultaneously, overt uses of threats and rewards from the BdL to Conservative Party MPs as well as open power struggles between the two groups. But over time, these overt struggles were submerged, the BdL’s leaders occupied a greater portion of leadership positions in the DKP, and the political positions and actions of the two groups became increasingly difficult to disentangle.

The first great clash came in 1899 when the King’s government pushed for a “modernizing” canal to link western Prussia and eastern Prussia, and when the bill was introduced into the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, which sparked a sharp split in Conservative Party, with the BdL releasing

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<sup>100</sup> A range of opponents, from National Liberal Eugen Schiffer to left Liberal newspaper editor Theodor Wolff express admiration. See Retallack, 2006, p. 387

<sup>101</sup> Paul Pierson “Power and Path Dependence” (Unpublished Paper, 2013).

agitational materials decrying the “incursion” into eastern Prussia that a canal would cause, and also proclaiming the effects of the massive infrastructure project would be to increase labor movements to the west (driving up the price of labor in the east) and decrease the price of grain by depressing the costs of foreign imports. Under a well-organized campaign in the Summer of 1899 from the BdL, that included threats to Conservative MPs who expressed support for the bill that they would lose BdL campaign endorsement support as well as the wholesale adoption of Conservative Party MPs of the BdL’s rhetoric, the bill was defeated at the hand of nearly all Conservative MPs (only eight MPs voted for the bill).<sup>102</sup> But the BdL’s influence was by no means complete; the so-called “Canal rebels” came under a major counter-attack by the King’s government: the government announced no BdL members would be welcomed to the court, and more importantly, all current and future officials in the government instantly drop their BdL membership.

Yet, the government’s actions, while important only heightened the stakes of the BdL-DKP battle. Three years later, similar open conflicts between the party and its main interest group erupted over efforts to increase Caprivi’s old low tariffs on grain. In 1902, though tariffs were ultimately raised, BdL chairman Wangenheim threatened to form his own party to run against the thirty-four Conservative MPs who had voted for the modest tariff bill because the bill had not lead to sufficiently *large* an increase in tariff rates. While “governmentalist” Conservative MPs critiqued the power of the BdL over the party, the BdL Chair Wangenheim vociferously intervened in public debate, decrying in one letter to a colleague that too many Conservative MPs defect to the government’s side “only out of weakness.”<sup>103</sup> The conflict erupted into the open: while some high-ranking party leaders such as Manteuffel called for the expulsion of Wangenheim from the party, Wangenheim himself and the BdL leadership ran fifty five candidates of their own in the next Prussian elections (1903), to apply new pressure on the thirty four MPs who had supported tariff

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<sup>102</sup> Bohlmann, 2012, p. 57

<sup>103</sup>

increases. It is true that in the 1903 elections, only five of the BdL candidates won seats. But, a message had certainly been sent, and by 1905, the balance of power had begun to tilt in favor of the BdL: Oskar von Normann, the Reichstag caucus leader favored Wangenheim in his 1903 conflict with his party opponents, and a new party chairman of the Prussian Chamber, Ernst von Heydebrand was elected, and BdL chairman Wangenheim wrote, full of praise, that of all the candidates, Heydebrand was “the only one who would lead the cause energetically and along agrarian lines.”<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, by 1908, when von Bülow’s government introduced its major public finance bill that would have removed the tax privileges of landed wealth, the BdL and the party leadership now worked closely together to defeat the bill on June 24, 1909, with only six deputies from the entire DKP Reichstag caucus voting for the bill with the rest voting against it, which in turn led to the eventual fall of Chancellor von Bülow, and the passing, with Center Party’s support, of an alternative bill that the BdL leadership and the Party leaders jointly wrote that would tax “mobile” wealth and not landed wealth. The future party leader, Count Kuno von Westarp recalled in his memoirs a revealing private moment in the heated public debate over the public finance bill,

On April 20, 1909 as I was preparing to speak to a Conservative gathering in Charlottenburg...I received two letters from the two chairman of the Bund der Landwirte [including von Wentzel] in my home constituency...they had heard that I would make the case for the inheritance tax and they had to tell me that the Agrarian League had raised protest at constituency meetings and would not support my future candidacy and insisted I lay down my mandate. I telegraphed von Wentzel “Assumption of letter is false. Am astounded that that threat was even necessary.”<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, by the Fall of 1908, when the King made his “throne speech” calling for reform of the three-class voting system, the next battle came into view but the alignment of the BdL and at least the DKP’s main leadership on key issues was apparent; it was longer necessary to make

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<sup>104</sup> Berlin Lichtenfelde archive. Find source.

<sup>105</sup> Westarp, op.cit. 1935, pp. 64-65.

threats against party leaders to implement the BdL agenda, though it is certainly true that subterranean resistance and criticism did persist, especially from western *Vereine* and disgruntled associations about the state of the party's reliance on the BdL.<sup>106</sup> The convergence on key policy issues, including suffrage, between leaders of the BdL such as von Wangenheim and leaders of the DKP such as von Heydebrand was become clearer. In the case of the three-class voting system, the DKP and BdL shared a common nemesis: the suffrage system was a buffer inside Prussia, protecting the immediate electoral interests of DKP MPs, but also blocking the passage of potential damaging tax initiatives (since major direct taxes existed *only* at the state level) on rural property and land.

At their annual general gathering in 1909, BdL delegates in a series of typically raucous speeches criticized plans of suffrage reform. One Prussian BdL member and Reichstag Conservative MP Herr von Oldenburg-Janaschau made clear the importance of the three-class voting system in Prussia. In view of liberalizing suffrage reform in southern German states, to the applause of his colleagues, he proclaimed, "We will defend the Prussian dam for you all to maintain the influence of the countryside and the strength of the monarchy!"<sup>107</sup> Another, BdL member, F. von Bodelschwingh-Schwarzenhasel followed, in a meandering speech, defending the three class voting system in even more pernicious terms and with a warning to MPs who might defect from the BdL's agenda,

Gentleman, I know that in some places people are shy to criticize Judaism or to name oneself as an opponent of Judaism. It is a weakness of our times to not want to call things by their proper name...With all emphasis, I would like to speak out against a changing of the suffrage/constituency boundaries which will reduce the influence of the countryside. And, I would like to add: from my view, any of the MPs from one of the parties that is close to us that have come out unconditionally for the redrawing of electoral districts, *should find no support and no contact from us.*<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> For examples of this see X

<sup>107</sup> Korrespondenz des Bundes der Landwirte, Stenographische Bericht ueber die 16 General-Versammlung des Bundes der Landwirte, Nr. 15 February 23, 1909, p. 66

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

But, the BdL leaders, Roesicke and Conrad von Wangenheim though just as firmly opposed to any suffrage reform, now after the experiences of the past ten years, and the shifted balance of power between the DKP and BdL argued against taking too overt of a stand. After all, von Heydebrand proved a reliable ally. Though von Heydebrand had initially proposed a secret ballot in 1910, proving his “loyalty” to the crown to the annoyance of many in his party, it remains unclear whether he may have simply been playing both sides of the issue, as a masterful politician. After all, the bill, as it stood had no chance of surviving the Herrenhaus (Kuhne, 1994, p. x), and in the end, he led a vote *against* the final version of the government bill in 1910, making clear the ultimate stance he took on the suffrage question. In short, the BdL toned down and in correspondence from G. roesicke to C von Wangenheim on November 2, 1908, Roesicke argues precisely against an overly “aggressive” and “open” stance against the King’s plans and proposes an alternative strategy of resistance, stating,

If we take up an *open* struggle against the suffrage plans of the King, this will lead to renewed tensions. These tensions will deeply annoy a large number of the members of the Conservative faction. Nonetheless, we can, prevent a change in the suffrage rules that would run counter to our position while avoiding tensions and this break by furthering the enlightenment of the public that we began in the last campaign, a shaping of the public mood that von Buelow will take into consideration.”

One can argue that open conflict from the side of the BdL was no longer necessary; and yet, following this subtle strategy, the BdL achieved its aim: the three-class voting system remained untouched until war and revolution destroyed the entire political regime in 1918. The King’s own effort at suffrage reform was defeated despite the presence of mass unrest and support for major suffrage reform, across the political spectrum, from Social Democrats to National Liberals, that is from “Basserman to Bebel.” In short, given the importance of the three-class voting system to the dualistic constitutional structure of pre-1914 Germany, we see that with the repeated failure of suffrage reform before 1914, a paradoxical reality was on full display: an organizationally weak old

regime party, arguably in decline, precisely because of the weakness of its organization and the resulting narrowness of the interests that controlled it, could ironically block the reform of an unwieldy nondemocratic political regime in the center of Europe. The failures of organizational innovation in 1848 haunted Germany until at least 1914, if not beyond.

**Epilogue: Why We Can't Just Blame Germany's Agrarian Elites and the Lessons of a  
"Crucial Case"**

We return, therefore to the central claim: it was the nature of the political parties that represented Germany's socioeconomic elite that made any possibility of democratic transition in Prussia, and hence in Germany, so difficult before 1914. But, to lay the heavy burden of Germany's pre-1914 political development on what we might conceive of as highly de-personalized factors such as "political organizations," "political parties" and "interest groups," is, one might contend, to offer an acontextual view of political history that does not take seriously the deeply embedded character of the social structure, groups and individuals being represented. After all, a long line of literature from Gerschenkron (1948), Rosenberg (1964), Wehler (1966), through to Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) and others note that it was above *agrarian elites* in Prussia, who sitting atop highly concentrated landed wealth possessed, as a result, deeply anti-democratic cultural orientations, and thus were the true culprits, doing all they could *directly* to thwart democratization, whether or not they had effective political party organization. Recent historiography (Malinowski, 2003) has certainly not given us a more flattering picture of the political orientations of Germany's and Prussia's landed elites.<sup>109</sup> Also, most compellingly, there are good *theoretical reasons* (Boix, 2003; Acemolgu and Robinson, 2006) to believe that the holders of immobile assets such as land,

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<sup>109</sup> Sebastian Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer. Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat*, (Berlin 2003).

such as east Prussian Junkers, no matter how they are organized politically, will be particularly formidable defenders of nondemocratic political regimes, even in the face of great social unrest.

The case studies from Prussia presented above, though using wide ranging sources of quantitative and archival evidence to illustrate the importance of party organization, at a basic level, do not fully absolve agrarian elites of their direct responsibility for one simple reason: Prussia may be a case of weakly organized political parties representing socioeconomic elites, but it is also a case where agrarian elites were present. Indeed, the co-existence of *both* weak party structures representing socioeconomic elites allied with the old regime, on the one hand, and a highly visible anti-democratic agrarian elite, on the other, aggravates the challenge of disentangling the relative importance of each of these factors on their own. Both factors were present, so to speak, at the scene of the crime. Indeed, the evidence I presented in my own analysis above of Prussian roll call votes on suffrage reform in 1910 and 1912 not only points to the importance of “electoral incentives” flowing from weak party organization, but also partially confirms the conventional account: members of parliament from more rural districts, and to some degree, in districts with higher land inequality, disproportionately found in the heartland of agrarian power in eastern Prussia, were more likely to oppose democratic reform, whether or not they had effective party organization.

To be able to assert, and confirm, the *exogenous* impact of party organization on the evolution of democratic political institutions, therefore it would be helpful to find a case with the following attributes: a) intense social unrest and working-class mobilization demanding democratic reform, b) a homogeneously non-agrarian or even “bourgeois” socioeconomic elite that is at the center of a nondemocratic regime, that in turn c) did *not* possess party organization. Without the presence of an agrarian elite, would stalled democratization still be the result? If so, we could have greater confidence that weak party organization is not simply an outgrowth of to a particularly type

of rural social structure; and we could more self-assuredly assert the importance of party organization of an elite associated with a nondemocratic political regime, no matter its socioeconomic or socio-cultural complexion.

A case within pre-1914 Germany allows us to analyze precisely this scenario: Hamburg in 1906.<sup>110</sup> A long independent and self-governing republican and economically-vibrant commercial hub on Germany's North Sea, Hamburg, like Lübeck, the city portrayed in Thomas Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks* had roots to a distant past as a medieval trading port. But, unlike Lübeck which went into relative decline, Hamburg in the nineteenth century, became Germany's second largest city and also one of Germany's wealthiest states. Initially dominated by a group of distinguished merchant family firms built on an expansive global trade across the Atlantic, Asia, and Africa, the city also became the site of massive shipping and ship-building industry as well as growing financial and service sectors. Crucially, for our purposes, like all states in Germany's fiscally loose federation, Hamburg had jurisdiction not only over its own constitutional and suffrage rules but its own tax and fiscal systems, making its two representative bodies, the Citizens Assembly and *Senat*, consequential elected bodies.

Beyond this, three factors are particularly revealing of the dynamics outlined in the rest of the chapter. First, it was a state, *without* an agrarian elite, and arguably more politically and culturally dominated by an urban merchant-class bourgeoisie than any state in Europe at the time. If, there is anything to Barrington Moore's (1966) famous quip-- "no bourgeoisie, no democracy"--Hamburg, a city with a long republican tradition with a self-confident urban elite, certainly qualified as a promising case for democratization. As an almost entirely urban state in the German federation, Hamburg, by 1914, had a greater share of world trade than any port in continental

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<sup>110</sup> The following brief case study builds on an extensive literature, but major works it relies on are Richard Evans, Madeleine Hurd, *Public Spheres, Public Mores, and Democracy: Hamburg and Stockholm, 1870-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Jennifer Jenkins, and Meike Schallert *Why the Poor Organized and Lost Their Vote: Suffrage Robbery in Hamburg* (A.B. Honors in Government, Harvard University, 2008)

Europe and was furthermore a financial center in Germany, with a stock exchange equaled in activity only by Frankfurt.<sup>111</sup> The economic elite of the city, as Niall Ferguson (1995) notes in his important monograph on Hamburg, included “merchant houses like Shuback & Soehne; the shipping lines of R.M. Sloman, the Hapag, and the Woermanns; the Shipyards Blohm & Voss, and Vulkan and Reihersteig.”<sup>112</sup> This dominant economic class that oversaw this burgeoning economy furthermore, was a close-knit group of bourgeois families, with their wealth primarily drawn from international trade, ship-building, and the trading houses of Hamburg. With no royal bureaucracy or agrarian elite, the Hamburg merchant classes were not only political dominant, they were also culturally hegemonic, supporting a rich urban culture of theatres, natural history museums, art museums, public libraries and public spaces for the general public.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to a strong bourgeoisie, Hamburg, by the 1890s, was arguably the “capital of the labor movement” in Germany, the home of a particularly strong working class, aligned with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and increasingly organized in trade unions. For theorists who emphasize not the role of the bourgeoisie, but the role of the organized working class as “torchbearers of democracy” (Eley, 2006), it is a case where conditions were ripe for democracy. On the one hand, Hamburg was electorally-speaking, a socialist stronghold even during the time of the anti-socialist laws between 1878 and 1890.<sup>114</sup> And, after 1890, all three of Hamburg’s seats in the national legislature (*Reichstag*) were in the hands of social democrats, thanks to the universal male suffrage system in place for national elections. As displayed in Figure 6.8, the SPD held a higher percentage of votes in Hamburg than in all other German states, including Bremen, Lübeck,

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<sup>111</sup> Gömmel, R. (1992). Entstehung und Entwicklung der Effektenbörsen im 19. Jahrhundert bis 1914, in H. Pohl (ed.), *Deutsche Börsengeschichte*, Fritz Knapp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M., pp. 133–207

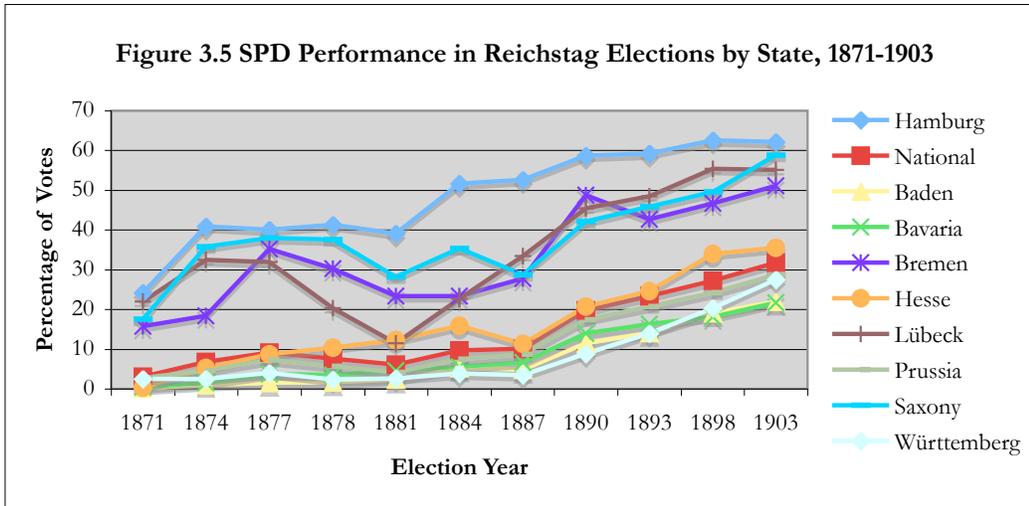
<sup>112</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Paper and Iron: Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897-1927* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-Siecle Hamburg*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

<sup>114</sup> Helga Kutz-Bauer, “Arbeiterschaft und Sozialdemokratie in Hamburg vom Gründerkrach bis zum Ende des Sozialistengesetzes,” in *Arbeiter in Hamburg. Unterschichten, Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung seit dem ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert*, edited by Arno Herzig, Dieter Langewiesche, and Arnold Sywottek (Hamburg: Verlag Erziehung und Wissenschaft, 1983), 179-192.

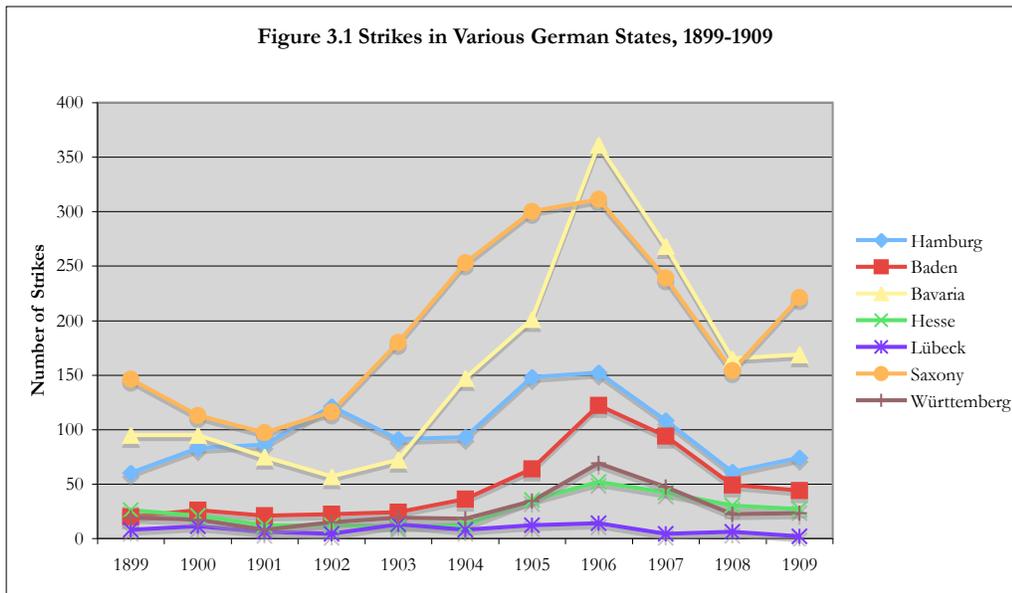
and Saxony, similarly urban, industrialized states with sizeable labor movements. In 1871, Hamburg's SPD received four times as high a vote share as nation-wide; in 1903, its support was twice as high

Figure 6.8. Electoral Support for SPD, by German State in Reichstag Elections



Source: Schröder, *Sozialdemokratische Parlamentarier in den Deutschen Reichs- und Landtagen, 1867-1933*, 825-889.

In addition to electoral politics, the working class increasingly exerted pressure through extraparliamentary means. Hamburg, as historian Richard Evans (2005) makes clear, became the central site of massive labor strikes in the years before 1910, attracting attention across Europe. In the dockyards of Hamburg, for example, and in response to the Cholera outbreak in 1892 and the city's failed response to this crisis, social pressure grew to improve working and living conditions, and to alter the suffrage. Summarized in Figure 6.9 below, we can draw upon German census industrial strike data, reported by state, to show that despite Hamburg's small size, the incidence of strikes in Hamburg was matched only by the much larger German states of Saxony and Bavaria.

Figure 6.9: Strikes in German states, 1899-1909<sup>115</sup>

Source: Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt. ed., *Streiks und Aussperrungen im Jahre 1909*, Statistik des Deutschen Reichs, Vol. 239 (Berlin: Verlag von Puttkammer & Mühlbrecht, 1910), 49-58.

Hamburg, in short, was a center of German bourgeois *and* working class power. In short, few cases seemed as over-determined, by our theories, for democratic success. What was the result of a strong bourgeoisie coming face-to-face with a well-organized working class demanding political representation? In Hamburg, the result, ironically, was what historians and activists at the time called a “*Wahlraub*” (“suffrage robbery”). In 1906, facing massive social unrest, the political elite of Hamburg, already protected by a highly restrictive franchise in comparison to the rest of Germany introduced a remarkable *retraction* of political rights by reducing political equality, leaving it with not only among most restrictive franchises in Germany, but now also a highly inequitable one.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> This figure excludes Prussia because of its size and readability.

<sup>116</sup> See Schneider, 1955. Only 4% of Hamburg’s residents could vote in state elections, a remarkably low figure, lower than that found in Bavaria, Hesse, Baden, Wuertemberg, Prussia, and Saxony, which averaged over 90% of residents with the right to vote. See X.

Facing similar unrest after 1900, many southern German states, including Baden (1904), Bavaria (1906), and Württemberg (1906), democratized their voting systems in important ways. Hamburg, however, followed Saxony (1896) and Lübeck (1902, 1905), to introduce new restrictions, and most importantly, modeling itself after Prussia, reduced the equality of the vote.<sup>117</sup> More specifically, the Hamburg government, using an elaborate system of income malapportionment divided up the general electorate into two income-based classes and gave them highly unequal voting rights.<sup>118</sup> Between 1879 and 1906, the general curia (which included both high income and lower income citizens) had elected 80 of the 160 representatives while the second curia of high-income notables elected 40, and the third curia of high-income property owners elected 40, together adding up to 160 seats.. After the 1906 reform, however, a new distinction was added to the first, general curia category, giving the highest 1/3 segment of that general curia the right to elect a disproportionate 48 representatives while the lower income remaining 2/3 of the general curia elected only 24, representatives. The citizens of outlying districts elected remaining 8 representatives,, while notables and property owners preserved their respective shares of 40 representatives each. In short, facing socialist mobilization, power was removed from the poorest of citizens.

The result was dramatic: within the general curia of the 1907 Assembly elections, one third of Hamburg's citizens now elected twice as many representatives as the remaining two thirds, a fact compounded by the continued existence of the privileges of notables and property owners.<sup>119</sup> The consequences were felt: after 1906, Hamburg's low-income citizens thus elected only 24 of 160 representatives, among the most disproportionate electoral systems in Germany.

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<sup>117</sup> Accordingly, the increase in the percentage of voting-age population after 1906, depicted in Figure 1.2, does not contradict the impact of the 1906 reform.

<sup>118</sup> Eckardt, *Privilegien und Parlament*, 40-49. This account draws on Schallert's account (2008).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

How was this possible? Given existing theory, why, with a well-organized bourgeoisie, a well-organized working class and no agrarian elite, was de-democratization and *not* democratization, the result of social contention? The puzzle remains outstanding unless we focus on the exogenous impact of the *political party organization* possessed by Hamburg's economic elite facing mass unrest. Though an urban, merchant class, holding mobile assets (Boix, 2003), Hamburg's economic elite did not possess effective party organization. In a revealing analysis of Hamburg's economic elite, Meike Schallert (2008) argues that the political parties that occupied the decision-making bodies of Hamburg's governing institutions indeed were "party-precursors" and not political parties. Though assembled in the Hamburg Assembly as Right, Center, and Left, the groupings were not political parties for four reasons. Unlike their well-organized socialist opposition, the bourgeois "notable" politicians, first of all, formed factions *after* elections, not before, thus also not possessing a party program. Second, as a result, the "parties" did not exert any party discipline in decision-making in the Assembly, indeed, regarding such measures as "distasteful."<sup>120</sup> Third, the groupings did not collect membership dues nor did they raise funds, have any staff or publications.<sup>121</sup> In sum, with none of the hallmarks of party organization, Hamburg's bourgeois elite lacked the electoral machinery necessary to compete with its socialist rival that was thriving in Hamburg in national elections.

It thus comes as no surprise that leading figures in Hamburg politics such as Senator O'Swald, of a prominent merchant family critically summarized the opposition the Hamburg elite now faced with nervousness,

[Social democratic] power is based on tight organization... such excellent organization as I would wish for other political parties... [The social democrats] are used to tight discipline, a type of discipline that one can hardly find in the military... the social democrat who as a worker cannot take care of political affairs betakes himself into the hands of the leaders of the SPD, and as such he must follow the leader's orders, he has no independent will. The

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<sup>120</sup> Schallert, 2008 p. x

<sup>121</sup> Schallert, 2008. P. x

social democratic leaders do not accept opposition and if a social democrat fails to obey rules, he will simply be expelled or admonished... This is why social democracy won 12 seats in the last half-time renewal of the Assembly.<sup>122</sup>

Facing such a political reality, and with a mix of acute fear and loathing, it is not surprising that Hamburg's bourgeois elite, like Prussia's agrarian elite, just as *any* economic elite likely would, without party organization, repressed and de-democratized rather than democratized. Hamburg, like Prussia, and Germany, as a whole, suffered from the consequences of poorly institutionalized political parties representing economic elites. This problem only became *more* acute in the Weimar period: the DNVP was the poorly institutional successor organization to the DKP, which failed to guarantee buy-in for right-wing elements in the Weimar period, the long-run result of which was a tragically unhinged process of democratic consolidation into the 1930s.

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<sup>122</sup> William H. O'Swald, Stenographische Berichte der Hamburger Bürgerschaft, 18<sup>th</sup> session, May 24, 1905, 454, cited by Schallert (2008)