

## POLITICS AS A VOCATION

The lecture I shall give in response to your wishes will necessarily frustrate you in a number of ways. In a talk about politics as a vocation<sup>1</sup> you will naturally expect to hear my opinions on topical questions. But I shall say something about these only toward the end of my lecture, and then in a purely formal way, in connection with specific questions about the significance of political action in the context of our conduct of life in general. What will have to be completely ignored in the present talk will be all questions about *the kind* of politics that should be pursued, that is to say, the specific *policies* [*Inhalte*] that *should* be adopted in the course of our political activities. For such matters have no connection with the general question of what politics is as a vocation and what it can mean. This brings us directly to our subject.

What do we mean by politics?<sup>2</sup> The concept is extremely broad and includes every kind of independent *leadership* activity. We can speak of the foreign exchange policies of the banks, the interest rate policy of the *Reichsbank*, the politics of a trade union in a strike; we can speak of educational policy in a town or village community, the policies of the board of management of an association, and even of the political maneuverings [*Politik*] of a shrewd wife seeking to influence her husband. Needless to say, this concept is far too broad for us to consider this evening. Today we shall consider only the leadership, or the exercise of influence on the leadership, of a *political* organization, in other words a *state*.

But looking at the question through the eyes of a sociologist, what is a "political" organization? What is a "state"? A state, too,

<sup>1</sup> The German word *Beruf* has a workaday meaning of "profession" but, rooted as it is in *rufen*, "to call," has strong overtones of "vocation" or "calling." Both meanings are active in Weber's usage, and each has been used here where it seemed appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> *Politik* in German means both politics and policy. Here again the choice of word is determined by the context.

cannot be defined sociologically by enumerating its activities. There is almost no task that a political organization has not undertaken at one time or another; but by the same token there are no tasks of which we could say that they were always, let alone *exclusively*, proper to the organizations that we call political, and nowadays refer to as states, or that historically were the forerunners of the modern state. It is rather the case that in the final analysis the modern state can be defined only sociologically by the specific means that are peculiar to it, as to every political organization: namely, physical violence. "Every state is based on force," Trotsky remarked at Brest-Litovsk.<sup>3</sup> That is indeed the case. If there existed only societies in which violence was unknown as a means, *then* the concept of the "state" would disappear; *in that event* what would have emerged is what, in this specific meaning of the word, we might call "anarchy." Violence is, of course, not the normal or the only means available to the state. That is undeniable. But it is the means specific to the state. And the relationship of the state to violence is particularly close at the present time. In the past the use of physical violence by widely differing organizations—starting with the clan—was completely normal. Nowadays, in contrast, we must say that the state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a particular territory—and this idea of "territory" is an essential defining feature. For what is specific to the present is that all other organizations or individuals can assert the right to use physical violence only insofar as the *state* permits them to do so. The state is regarded as the sole source of the "right" to use violence. Hence, what "politics" means for us is to strive for a share of power or to influence the distribution of power, whether between states or between the groups of people contained within a state.

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This corresponds in all essentials to common parlance. When we say that a question is "political," that a minister or official is "political," or that a decision has been made on "political" grounds, we always mean the same thing. This is that the interests involved in the distribution or preservation of power, or a shift in power, play a decisive role in resolving that question, or in influencing that decision or defining the sphere of activity of the official concerned. Whoever is active in politics strives for power, either power as a means in the service of other goals, whether idealistic or selfish, or power "for

<sup>3</sup> That is to say, during the negotiations with Germany early in 1918 that led to the withdrawal of Russia from World War I.

its own sake," in other words, so as to enjoy the feeling of prestige that it confers.

Like the political organizations that preceded it historically, the state represents a relationship in which people *rule over* other people. This relationship is based on the legitimate use of force (that is to say, force that is perceived as legitimate). If the state is to survive, those who are ruled over must always *acquiesce* in the authority that is claimed by the rulers of the day. When do they do so and why? By what internal reasons is this rule justified, and on what external supports is it based?

To start with the internal justifications: there are in principle three grounds that *legitimate* any rule. First, the authority of "the eternal past," of *custom*, sanctified by a validity that extends back into the mists of time and is perpetuated by habit. This is "traditional" rule, as exercised by patriarchs and patrimonial rulers of the old style. Second, there is the authority of the extraordinary, personal *gift of grace* or charisma, that is, the wholly personal devotion to, and a personal trust in, the revelations, heroism, or other leadership qualities of an individual. This is "charismatic" rule of the kind practiced by prophets or—in the political sphere—the elected warlord or the ruler chosen by popular vote, the great demagogue, and the leaders of political parties. Lastly, there is rule by virtue of "legality," by virtue of the belief in the validity of legal *statutes* and practical "competence" based on rational rules. This type of rule is based on a person's willingness to carry out statutory duties obediently. Rule of this kind is to be found in the modern "servant of the state" and all those agents of power who resemble him in this respect.

It is quite obvious that in reality this compliance is the product of interests of the most varied kinds, but chiefly of hope and fear. This includes fear of the vengeance of magic powers or of the ruler, and hope of a reward in this world or the next. More about this in a moment. But when we inquire into the grounds of the "legitimacy" of this compliance, what we discover is these three "pure" types. These ideas of legitimation and their internal justification are of considerable importance for the structure of rule. Admittedly, these types rarely occur in their pure form in reality. But it is not possible today to enter into a discussion of the highly complex variations, transitional forms, and combinations of these pure types. All that belongs to the problem of "general political theory."

What interests us here above all is the second of these types: rule based on the acquiescence of those who submit to the purely personal "charisma" of the "leader." For this is where we discover the root of

the idea of "vocation" in its highest form. Submission to the charisma of the prophet or warlord or of the great demagogues of the assemblies, the *ekklesia*, of ancient Greece or of Parliament means that such men are held to be the inwardly "chosen" leaders of humankind. People do not submit to them because of any customs or statutes, but because they believe in them. Such a leader does indeed live for his cause and "strives to create his work,"<sup>4</sup> if he is anything more than a narrow-minded and vain upstart, a passing product of his age. But the devotion of his followers, that is, his disciples and liegemen, or his entirely personal band of supporters, is directed toward his person and his qualities. Leadership has manifested itself in all parts of the globe and throughout history in the shape of two dominant figures of the past: the magician and prophet on the one hand, and the chosen warlord, gang leader, and *condottiere* on the other. What is peculiar to the Western world, however, is something of greater concern to us: *political* leadership in the shape, first, of the free "demagogue" who emerged in the city-state, a political form confined to the West, and in particular to the Mediterranean world, and then, following him, the parliamentary "party leader" who grew up in the constitutional state, an institution that is likewise unique to the West.

These men are politicians by virtue of their "calling" in the deepest meaning of the word. But of course in no country are they the only influential figures in the machinery of political power struggles. What is decisive is, rather, the kind of resources that they have at their disposal. How do the ruling powers set about the task of asserting their dominant position? This question holds good for rule of every kind, and hence also for political rule in all its forms: for the traditional type, as well as for legal and charismatic rule.

Every ruling apparatus that calls for continuous administration has two prerequisites. On the one hand, it requires that human action should be predisposed to obedience toward the rulers who claim to be the agents of legitimate force. On the other hand, thanks to this obedience, the rulers should have at their disposal the material resources necessary to make use of physical force where required, in other words, the administrative personnel and the material resources of administration.

Like any other apparatus, the administrative personnel that constitutes the external form of the political ruling apparatus are not

<sup>4</sup> This is effectively a quotation from Nietzsche: "My suffering and my pity—what of them! For do I aspire after *happiness*? I aspire after *my work!*" Thus Spoke Zarathustra, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 336.

just bound in their obedience to the ruling powers by the idea of legitimacy of which we have just spoken. It is bound equally by two other factors that appeal to personal interest: material reward and social prestige. The fiefs of vassals, the livings granted to patrimonial officials, the salaries of modern civil servants—knightly honor, the privileges of the estates, the status of the official—these are the rewards, and it is the fear of losing them that cements the ultimate and decisive foundation of the solidarity that exists between the administrative personnel and the ruling powers. The same thing holds true for charismatic leadership: glory in war and booty for the military, while the followers of the demagogue look for “spoils,”<sup>5</sup> namely, the license to exploit the ruled through the monopoly of public offices, profits to reward their political loyalty, and prizes to flatter their vanity.

In order to maintain any rule by force, certain external, material goods are required, just as much as in a business enterprise. All forms of state can be divided into two categories. The first is based on the principle that the staff on whose obedience the ruler depends—officials or whatever else they may be—own their *own* means of administration, whether these consist of money, buildings, the materials of war, vehicle pools, horses, or whatever. The alternative is for the administrative staff to be “separated” from the tools of administration in just the same way as the white-collar worker and the proletarian are “separated” from the material means of production in a capitalist enterprise today. The question is, then, whether the ruler has *control* over the administration *himself* and administers matters through personal servants or officials in his employ or personal favorites and confidants, in short, people who are not owners, that is to say, who do not possess in their own right any of the material means of production, but who work under their master’s direction—or whether the opposite is the case. This distinction runs through all administrative organizations of the past.

We shall call a political organization in which the material means of administration are wholly or partly under the autonomous control of a dependent administrative staff an “organization subdivided into estates” [*ständisch gegliedert*]. The vassal in a feudal organization, for example, paid for the administrative and legal costs of the fief entrusted to him out of his own pocket. He also paid for the equipment and provisioning needed for a war; his subvassals did likewise. This naturally had consequences for the lord’s authority,

<sup>5</sup> Weber used the English word.

for that authority was based exclusively on personal fealty and on the fact that the feudal tenure and the vassal’s social status derived their “legitimacy” from the lord.

But everywhere, as far back as the earliest political organizations, we also find the lord exercising direct control himself. He seeks to take control of the administration through personal dependents: slaves, household officials, servants, personal “favorites,” and beneficiaries remunerated in money or in kind from his own storerooms. He seeks to defray his costs from his own pocket, out of the revenues from his patrimonial estates; and he seeks to create an army that depends solely on himself because it has been equipped and provisioned from his own granaries, storerooms, and armories. Thus in a society based on “estates,” the lord governs with the assistance of an autonomous “aristocracy,” that is to say, he shares the rule with them. In this second case he relies either on members of his household or else on plebeians, men from strata of society without either property or honor of their own, men who are dependent upon him entirely for their material well-being, since they have no power at their disposal to compete with his. All forms of patriarchal and patrimonial<sup>6</sup> rule, the despotism of the sultans, and the bureaucratic state are of this type. This applies particularly to the bureaucratic state, that is to say, the type of organization that in its most rational form is specifically characteristic of the modern state.

The modern state begins to develop wherever the monarch sets in train the process of dispossessing the autonomous, “private” agents of administrative power who exist in parallel to him, that is to say, all the independent owners of the materials of war and the administration, financial resources, and politically useful goods of every kind. The entire process provides a perfect analogy to the development of a capitalist enterprise through the gradual expropriation of the independent producers. We end up with a situation in which in the modern state control of the entire political means of production is concentrated in a single culminating point so that not a single official is left who personally owns the money he spends, or the buildings, supplies, tools, and military equipment that are under his control. In

<sup>6</sup> Patriarchal rule, according to Weber, is traditional rule, based originally on the household, in which the patriarch rules without administrative machinery. Such rule is based entirely on personal loyalty. Patrimonialism arises wherever the ruler develops an administration and a military force that, however, are purely the personal instruments of the master. “Sultanism” is seen as an extreme case of patrimonialism. See *Economy and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), chapter 3, section 7a, pp. 231 ff.; and also chapter 12, pp. 1006 ff.



the modern "state"—and this is an essential element of its definition—the "separation" of the administrative staff, that is, of officials and employees, from the material resources of administration, has been completed. It is at this point that the very latest development emerges, for we now see before our very eyes the attempt to bring about the expropriation of this expropriator of the resources of politics and hence of political power.<sup>7</sup> The revolution has accomplished this at least to the extent that the legally established authorities have been supplanted by leaders who, through usurpation or election, have obtained political power over the personnel and the administrative machinery, and who derive their legitimacy—whether rightly or wrongly is immaterial—from the will of the governed. It is quite another question whether on the basis of this at least ostensible success they have the right to hope for one further achievement. That achievement would be to proceed with the expropriation of businesses within the capitalist economy whose management is organized at its core in accordance with quite different laws from the political administration, despite far-reaching similarities. This is not an issue on which I shall comment today. I shall confine myself to the purely *conceptual* point that the modern state is an institutional form of rule that has successfully fought to create a monopoly of legitimate physical force as a means of government within a particular territory. For this purpose it has concentrated all the material resources of organization in the hands of its leaders. The modern state has expropriated all the autonomous officials of the "estates" who previously controlled such things as of right and has put itself in the shape of its highest representative in their place.

This process of political expropriation has been enacted with varying success in every country of the world. In it there arose, initially in the service of the monarch, the first categories of "professional politicians" in a *second* sense. This consisted of people who, unlike the charismatic leaders, did not wish to become masters themselves, but to enter *into the service* of political masters. In these conflicts they put themselves at the disposal of the monarch and treated the implementation of his policies as a way of earning their own material living, on the one hand, and of acquiring a life's

<sup>7</sup> Weber here takes up a phrase from Karl Marx's prediction of the end of capitalist society as a consequence of its own contradictory development. "The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. . . . The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated." *Capital* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), vol. 1, p. 763.

ideal on the other. Once again, it is *only* in the Western world that we discover professional politicians of *this* stamp in the service of powers other than just the monarchs. In the past they were their most important instruments of power and of their acts of political expropriation.

Before we take a closer look at this question, let us make the meaning of the existence of such "professional politicians" perfectly clear in all its implications. It is possible to engage in "politics," that is to say, to seek to influence the distribution of power between and within political structures, both as an "occasional" politician and as a part-time or full-time politician, in the same way as with economic activity. We are all "occasional" politicians when we cast our votes or in any similar expression of our will, such as applauding or protesting during a "political" meeting, making a "political" speech, and so on. And for many people this is the extent of their connection with politics. Today, for example, part-time politicians include all the local agents and committee members of political party associations who, as a rule, pursue such activities only as occasion demands and who do not make it the *primary* "task of their lives," either materially or as an ideal. The same thing can be said of the members of councils of state and similar advisory bodies who spring into action only on request. This applies also to broad swathes of our parliamentarians who are only politically active while Parliament is in session. In the past such groups of people were to be found above all among the "estates."

By the "estates" we understand the owners in their own right of the material possessions vital for military or administrative functions, or the exercise of personal seigneurial authority. A major portion of them were far from willing to pass their lives wholly or chiefly, or even more than occasionally, in the service of politics. Instead, they used their seigneurial power to maximize their own rents or profits and became politically active in the service of their political associations only when their overlord or their peers expressly called for it. The same thing may be said of a proportion of the assistants whom the monarch recruited in his struggle to create an independent political organization that would be responsible to himself alone. The household advisers<sup>8</sup> and, going back even

<sup>8</sup> The *Räte vom Hause aus* (literally, counselors [based out of] their own homes) was a term used to describe advisers in a number of German territories who did not normally live at court. Instead, they provided their services only when the king's council was convened in their region.



further, a considerable proportion of the monarch's counselors in the "*curia*"<sup>9</sup> and other advisory bodies were of this type.

But, of course, the monarch could not make do with assistants who functioned only part-time or occasionally. He had to try to assemble a staff of assistants consisting of people who were entirely and exclusively devoted to serving him as their *principal* profession. The structure of the emerging dynastic political system depended very crucially on where he found them, as did the entire character of the relevant culture. And the same necessity was enjoined even more powerfully on the political entities that had completely eliminated or strictly confined the royal power and thus constituted themselves politically as (so-called) "free" polities. These polities were "free" not in the sense of freedom from the rule of force, but in the sense of the absence of monarchical power legitimated by tradition (and for the most part sanctified by religion), as the exclusive source of all authority. Historically, such polities had their home in the West, and their nucleus was the city as a political entity. It was in this form that it first appeared in the Mediterranean cultures.

What did the "*full-time*" politicians look like in all these cases?

There are two ways of engaging in politics as a vocation. You can either live "for" politics or "from" politics. These alternatives are not by any means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as a rule people do both, mentally at least, but for the most part materially, as well. Whoever lives "for" politics makes "this his life" in an *inward* sense. Either he enjoys the naked exercise of the power he possesses or he feeds his inner equilibrium and his self-esteem with the consciousness that by serving a "cause" he gives his own life a meaning. In this inner sense, probably every serious person who lives for a cause also lives from it. The distinction, then, refers to a far weightier aspect of the matter: its economic dimension. The people who live "from" politics as a profession are those who seek to make it their permanent source of *income*; those who live "for" politics are those for whom this is not the case.

In a society based on private property, for anyone to be able to live "for" politics in this economic sense, a number of apparently trivial preconditions must be satisfied. Such a person must be economically independent, in normal circumstances, of the income that politics may bring him. This means quite simply that he must be affluent or have a position in private life that affords him an adequate income. This at least is the normal situation. Admittedly, the

<sup>9</sup> The *curia regis* or king's court was convened wherever the king was in residence.

followers of a warlord are as incurious about normal economic conditions as are the followers of a revolutionary hero of the street. Both live from booty, robbery, confiscations, levies, the imposition of worthless currencies whose use is obligatory—all of which amount essentially to the same thing. But these are necessarily phenomena that go beyond the everyday world; in the workaday economy only independent means can perform this service. But more than this is required; in addition, a would-be politician must be economically in a position to make himself "available." This means that his sources of income must not require him constantly to devote all or most of his thoughts and energy personally to the task of earning his living. The person who is most readily available in this sense is the *rentier*, that is, a person whose income does not depend on doing any work at all. This applies to the lords of the manor of the past, and large landowners and persons of high rank of the present who derive their income from ground rents—in antiquity and the Middle Ages, there were also rents for slaves or bondsmen. In modern times, it applies also to people who obtain a living from securities or other modern sources of investment income. Neither the worker *nor*—and this is particularly noteworthy—the employer, and especially the large-scale modern employer, is able to absent himself from his work in this way. The employer in particular is tied to his business and *cannot* easily take time off. This is true especially of the industrial businessman, far more than of the big agricultural employer, in view of the seasonal nature of farming. It is mostly very difficult for the businessman to find a substitute, even on a temporary basis. The same thing applies, for example, to doctors, and the more eminent and the busier they are, the harder it is for them to take leave of absence from work. It is easier for the lawyer if only for purely technical reasons arising from the nature of his work, and this explains why lawyers have often played an incomparably greater and even dominant role as professional politicians. We have no need to pursue this line of argument further, but should make clear some of its implications.

Where a state or a party is governed by people who (in the economic sense of the word) live exclusively for politics and not from politics, this necessarily implies that the leading political strata must be recruited on the basis of a "plutocratic" policy. This is not of course to assert the opposite, namely, that the existence of a plutocratic leadership *exempts* the politically dominant class from also striving to live "from" politics, that is to say, to exploit its political dominance for the sake of its own private economic interests. There

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can be no question of that. There has never been a social stratum that has failed to exploit its position in one way or another. It means only that professional politicians are not directly compelled to seek remuneration *for* their political services as everyone without means is forced to do. But by the same token, this is not to suggest that politicians with no independent means entered politics solely or even principally with an eye to providing for their own material welfare, or that their concern for their "cause" was not uppermost in their minds, or even present at all. Nothing could be more mistaken. Experience tells us that consciously or unconsciously, the concern of the well-to-do man for the economic "security" of his own existence is a cardinal issue for the entire conduct of his life. A ruthless and unconditioned political idealism is to be found, if not exclusively, then at least for preference, in the strata that own nothing, and who because of that fact stand outside the circle of those who have an interest in maintaining the economic order of a given society. This applies with particular force to exceptional, in other words, revolutionary, epochs. Instead, it means only that to recruit politically interested people, both leaders and their followers, *non-plutocratically*, is based on the self-evident assumption that these interested parties can extract a regular and reliable income from the practice of politics.

Politics can either be conducted on an "honorary" basis and thus by what are normally called "independent," that is, well-to-do people, above all, people with unearned income. Alternatively, the leadership can be opened up to those who own nothing and who must then be recompensed. The professional politician who lives *from* politics can be a pure "beneficiary" [*Pfründner*] or a salaried "official." He either derives an income from fees and perquisites for specific services—tips and bribes are merely an irregular and formally illegal variant of this income category—or else he receives fixed benefits in kind or a salary in cash form, or a combination of the two. He may assume the character of an "entrepreneur," like the *condottiere* or the owner of a leased or purchased office in the past, or like the American boss<sup>10</sup> who regards his expenses as a capital investment from which he obtains a return by exploiting his influence. Alternatively, he can draw a fixed wage, like an editor or a party secretary or a modern minister or party official. In the past, fiefs, gifts of land, benefices of every kind, and particularly, with the growth of the money economy, perquisites formed the typical remuneration bestowed on their followers by rulers, victorious conquerors, or successful party

<sup>10</sup> Weber used the English word, here and elsewhere in this essay.

chiefs. Today, the rewards that are handed out by the party leaders in return for loyal services consist of offices of every kind in parties, newspapers, cooperatives, health insurance companies, municipalities, and states. All party struggles are conflicts not just for concrete goals, but also and above all for the patronage of office. All conflicts between particularist and centralist aspirations in Germany also revolve above all around the question of which authority will have offices in its gift, whether it be the authorities in Berlin or Munich, Karlsruhe or Dresden. Any loss of influence in the distribution of offices is more keenly felt by the parties than setbacks on matters concerning their political goals.

In France a politically influenced change in prefect<sup>11</sup> was always regarded as a greater upheaval, and it caused more uproar than a modification in the government's program since this had for the most part no more than a verbal significance.

Many parties, above all in America, have ceased to be concerned with the old quarrels about the interpretation of the Constitution and have become purely parties of careerists that readily adapt their substantive programs to improve their chances of catching votes.

In Spain until recently "elections" were fixed from above on the basis of an agreement between the two major parties to take turns governing in order to provide their respective followers with posts. In both the so-called "elections" and the so-called "revolutions" in the Spanish colonies, what was really at stake was the state gravy train in which the victors hoped to be fed.

In Switzerland the parties amicably share the posts on the basis of proportionality, and here in Germany, some of our "revolutionary" draft constitutions, such as the one recently proposed for Baden, even envisaged extending this system to include ministerial posts. They thus treat the state and its offices purely as an agency for distributing bounty.

The Center Party in particular was enthusiastic about this idea and in Baden it even proposed including in its program the proportional distribution of offices according to religious affiliation, without regard to merit. With the growing number of offices resulting from the general process of bureaucratization, they are increasingly in demand as a

<sup>11</sup> In the administrative reforms introduced in the wake of the French Revolution, France was divided into *départements* headed by prefects who were appointed for their political reliability. Their duties included the maintenance of order, but also the implementation of government policies locally. They were therefore severely affected by changes of government. In the Third Republic, for example, more than one-third of the prefects were replaced after the elections of 1898.

form of *secure* provision. This trend is strengthening among all the parties and in the eyes of their followers the parties are increasingly regarded as a means to the end of providing such support.

However, an opposing trend is to be found in the development of modern bureaucracy into a specialized, highly qualified, intellectual workforce that has undergone a lengthy preparatory period of training. This workforce has a highly developed sense of professional *honor* with an emphasis on probity. Without that sense of honor the risk of terrible corruption and vulgar philistinism would loom over us like fate. This would even threaten to undermine the purely technical activity of the state apparatus whose importance for the economy has constantly grown and will continue to grow, particularly with the increasing trend toward socialization. In the United States, where a professional civil service with tenure for life was once quite unknown, amateurish administration by politicians on the make brought about a situation in which hundreds of thousands of officials, right down to the local postman, had to be changed as a result of the presidential election. This system has long since been undermined by the Civil Service Reform.<sup>12</sup> This change was made inevitable by the irresistible, purely technical needs of administration.

In Europe the professional bureaucracy with its division of labor into specialized fields of expertise gradually came into being over the course of half a millennium. This process began with the Italian cities and *signorie*;<sup>13</sup> and among the monarchies it was the conquering Norman states who took the lead. The decisive step was triggered in the sphere of the rulers' *finances*. We can see from the administrative reforms of Emperor Maximilian<sup>14</sup> how difficult it was for the officials to oust the ruler from this sphere of activity, even under the

<sup>12</sup> The Civil Service Reform to which Weber is referring here was inaugurated by the so-called Pendleton Act of 1883. This began the transition from the spoils system to the merit system. Initially, only about one in ten federal employees were appointed on the basis of examinations.

<sup>13</sup> The *signoria* was a form of government by a lord or despot (*signore*) in the Italian city-states between the middle of the thirteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, replacing earlier republican institutions. The lord who had usually started in a particular office, such as Captain of the People, sought to extend his authority until it was made permanent and hereditary in his family. Notable examples are the Visconti family in Milan, the Estes in Ferrara, and the Della Scala in Verona. In places that escaped the rule of one lord, the term refers to the ruling body of magistrates, as in Florence.

<sup>14</sup> This was Maximilian I (1459–1519), who became Holy Roman Emperor in 1508. His interest in chivalry was intense; he has been given the epithet of "the last knight" and even wrote a lengthy epic poem of knightly deeds.

pressure of extreme necessity and the threat of Turkish domination.<sup>15</sup> This was all the more remarkable, given that finance was the realm that found it hardest to accommodate the dilettantism of a ruler who at the time was bent primarily on being a model of chivalry. Advances in the techniques of warfare produced the expert officer, while the growing sophistication of the legal process resulted in the emergence of the trained lawyer. In all three areas the skilled official finally triumphed in the more developed states during the sixteenth century. And the rise of princely absolutism at the expense of the estates coincided with the gradual surrender of the ruler's autonomous power to the bureaucratic experts to whom he owed his victory over the estates in the first place.

The rise of the trained *bureaucracy* went hand in hand, albeit in a far less obvious process of transition, with the emergence of the "leading *politicians*." Of course, such influential royal advisers have always existed from time immemorial and in every part of the globe. In the Orient the need to relieve the sultan as far as possible of his personal responsibility for the success of government led to the creation of the typical figure of the "Grand Vizier." In the West diplomacy first became a *consciously* cultivated art during the reign of Charles V, the age of Machiavelli.<sup>16</sup> This took place above all under the influence of the Venetian ambassadors, whose reports were studied with passionate zeal in diplomatic circles. The adepts of this diplomacy had mostly received a humanist education and regarded one another as a trained class of initiates. In this respect they resembled the humanist Chinese statesmen of the last phase of the period of the Warring States.<sup>17</sup>

The need for politics as a *whole*, including domestic policy, to be conducted in a formally unified manner by a leading statesman arose

<sup>15</sup> During the reigns of Maximilian and his successor, Charles V, as Holy Roman Emperors, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire to the west reached its high point under the leadership of the Sultan Süleyman I, with the conquest of Hungary and the siege of Vienna in 1529.

<sup>16</sup> Charles V (1500–58) was Holy Roman Emperor from 1530 to 1556. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) was the celebrated Florentine writer and statesman.

<sup>17</sup> The period of the Warring States (475–221 BC) was an age in which China was split up into six or seven feuding kingdoms. It was one of the most fertile and influential of Chinese history. It not only saw the rise of some of the most important Confucian thinkers, but also witnessed the emergence of some of the political structures and cultural patterns that shaped China over the subsequent 2,000 years. It came to an end in 221 BC when the Qin dynasty established the first unified Chinese empire.



in a decisive and compelling way only as the result of constitutional developments. Up to that point there had always been individuals who had acted as the prince's advisers or rather, in reality, leaders. But initially, the organization of the authorities had taken a different path, even in the most advanced states. The supreme administrative authorities that had emerged were *collegiate*<sup>18</sup> in nature. In theory and also in practice, though to a decreasing extent, their meetings were presided over by the monarch in person. It was he who made the decisions. This collegiate system led to the growth of expert opinions, counteropinions, and reasoned votes on the part of majorities and minorities. As a counterweight to these supreme official authorities, the ruler tended to surround himself with purely personal confidants—the cabinet—whom he delegated to convey his decisions in response to the resolutions of the council of state, or whatever name the supreme state authority went by. By such methods the ruler, who increasingly slipped into the role of a dilettante, sought to escape from the inexorable growth of his officials' expertise and to keep hold of the reins of power. This latent conflict between trained officials and autocratic rule was to be found everywhere.

The situation changed only when the prince was faced with parliaments and the desire of their party leaders for power. However, conditions that were pitched very differently led to what was outwardly the same result—admittedly, with certain distinctions. Wherever the dynasties retained genuine power, as was the case especially in Germany, the monarchs' interests were aligned with those of the officials in *opposition* to the parliament and its claims to power. The officials had an interest in ensuring that the leading posts, that is to say, ministerial posts, should be filled from their ranks, and that these posts should become the goals to which civil servants might legitimately hope to be promoted. For his part, the monarch had an interest in being able to nominate ministers from the ranks of the officials beholden to him in accordance with his own judgment. Both sides, however, had an interest in ensuring that the political leadership should face the parliament with a united and coherent front. This meant the replacement of the collegiate system by a single cabinet leader. In addition, the monarch stood in need of a single responsible individual who could cover for him, and who would be

<sup>18</sup> Weber has in mind bodies like the Conseil d'État in France and the Privy Council in England, but also the Councils of Workers and Soldiers of the German revolution after 1918. For Weber's discussion of collegiate bodies, see *Economy and Society*, chapter 3, section 8, pp. 271 ff., and chapter 11, section 12, pp. 994 ff.

both answerable to the parliament and able to confront it, while negotiating with the parties. This was essential if he was to be raised above party conflicts and party attacks.

All these interests came together and exerted pressure in the same direction: the emergence of a single minister to preside over the officials and to provide unified leadership. The trend toward a unified parliamentary power became even stronger where, as in Britain, it gained the upper hand in its struggle with the monarch. In Britain the "cabinet," with a single parliamentary "leader"<sup>19</sup> at its head, became a committee representing the power that was ignored by the official laws, but was in fact the sole decisive political power: the *party* of the day that could command a majority. The official collegiate bodies were as such not the organs of the true ruling power, namely, the party, and could not therefore act as the agents of the real government. If the dominant party was to maintain its power at home and pursue grand policy abroad, it needed an effective organization at its disposal, consisting exclusively of the true leaders of the party and able to deal with business in confidence. In short, it needed a cabinet. At the same time, the party also needed a leader who would be responsible to the public, and above all the parliamentary public, for all decisions, in short, the head of the cabinet. In the shape of parliamentary ministries, this British system was then adopted on the Continent, and only in America and the democracies influenced by it was an entirely different system introduced. In this system the chosen leader of the victorious party was elected directly by the people and placed at the head of an official apparatus nominated by himself; his dependence on the approval of Congress was confined to budgetary and legislative matters.

The growth of politics into an "operation" that required a schooling in the struggle for power and its methods led to a twofold division of public servants as these methods were developed by the modern party system. This division was by no means absolute, but it was clear-cut. There were the professional officials on the one hand and the "political officials" on the other. The "political" officials in the true sense can be recognized outwardly by the ease with which they can be transferred and dismissed at any time or at least temporarily "retired," like the prefects in France and the comparable officials in other countries. This presents a striking contrast to the "independence" of officials in the judiciary. In Britain this class of political officials includes those who, according to long-standing

<sup>19</sup> Weber used the English word.

convention, lose their posts with every change of parliamentary majority and hence of the cabinet. This category includes, in particular, officials concerned with the general "administration of home affairs"; and the "political" element in this is above all the task of maintaining "law and order" in the land, in other words, upholding the existing system of rule.

In Prussia the Puttkamer decree<sup>20</sup> laid down that these officials had the duty of "representing government policy" or else having to face disciplinary measures, and like the prefects in France, they were used as an official apparatus with which to influence elections.

Under the German system and in contrast to other countries, most of the "political" officials were of the same quality as all other civil servants, since appointment to these posts likewise depended on university study, specialist examinations, and a fixed period of preparatory service. This specific feature of the professional modern civil service is waived in Germany only for the heads of the political apparatus, namely, the ministers. Under the old regime, a man could become minister of education in Prussia without ever having studied at an institution of higher education, whereas it was possible to become a senior civil servant [*Vortragender Rat*] only after passing the prescribed examinations. Under Althoff,<sup>21</sup> for example, in the Prussian Ministry of Education, it went without saying that the departmental head [*Dezernent*] and senior civil servant was professionally trained and hence infinitely better informed about the real technical problems of his department than his boss. In Britain it was no different. It follows that in dealing with everyday business the civil servant was also the more powerful figure. That was not necessarily absurd. The minister was in fact the representative of the nexus of *political* power; his task was to represent its political norms

<sup>20</sup> Robert von Puttkamer (1828–1900), a conservative politician who was Minister for Home Affairs (1881–8) under Bismarck. His decree of January 1882 proclaimed that the emperor was responsible for the direction of government and that civil servants were bound by their oath of allegiance to support that policy. His period of office was notable for the rigor with which he enforced the laws proscribing socialism and the thoroughness with which he ensured that officials with liberal views were excluded from state service.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Althoff (1839–1908), was the Prussian Minister of Education from 1897 to 1907 and head of its universities section for fifteen years before that. In this capacity he largely determined the shape of secondary and higher education in Germany in the early twentieth century. While expanding the universities and scientific institutes, he intervened regularly in academic affairs. Weber believed that Althoff had tried to block his appointment to a chair in Freiburg in 1893.

and to apply them to the proposals of his specialized subordinates or else to give his officials the relevant political directives.

It is very similar to the management of a business in the private sector. There the real "sovereign," the shareholders' meeting, has as little influence on the management of the business as does a "nation" ruled by professional officials. And the people of decisive importance for the policy of the business, namely, the "supervisory board" dominated by the banks, only give economic directives and select the administrative personnel, since they do not possess the technical expertise with which to run the business themselves. In this respect the present structure of the revolutionary state does not represent any fundamental innovation. For what one finds there is that complete amateurs have been handed power over the administration simply because they have machine guns in their possession, and they wish for nothing better than to use the trained officials as executive heads and hands.<sup>22</sup> The difficulties of the present system lie elsewhere but need not concern us today.

We shall inquire instead about the typical characteristics of professional politicians, both the "leaders" and their followers. These have undergone changes in the course of time and are very diverse today, as well.

"Professional politicians" developed in the past, as we have seen, in the course of struggles between the rulers and the estates of the nobility, and in these struggles they acted as the servants of the rulers. Let us examine their principal types.

In his struggles with the estates, the ruler sought the assistance of politically exploitable strata who did not form part of the estates. These included, first and foremost, the clergy. This was what happened in India and Indo-China, in Buddhist China and Japan and in Lamaist Mongolia, as well as the Christian lands of the Middle Ages. Technically, this was because the clergy were literate. In all these countries, Brahmans, Buddhist priests, and Lamas were imported, and bishops and priests were employed as political advisers. The aim everywhere was to acquire literate administrators who could be deployed by the emperor or princes or the khan in their struggle with the aristocracy. Members of the clergy, especially if they were celibate, stood outside the hustle and bustle of ordinary

<sup>22</sup> During the brief revolutions in Germany in 1918–19, the Councils of Workers and Soldiers permitted the traditional administrative authorities to continue their work but sent trusted representatives into their meetings to oversee what was done, without directly intervening, however.

political and economic interests and, unlike the ruler's vassals, were not exposed to the temptation to compete with him for political power of their own to pass on to their heirs. The cleric was "separated" from the machinery of the ruler's administration by the characteristics of his own status group.

A second stratum of this kind consisted of men of letters with a humanist education. There was a time when men learned to make speeches in Latin and write verses in Greek in order to qualify as political advisers and above all to compose political memoranda on behalf of a ruler. That was the age of the first flowering of the humanist schools and the establishment by the crown of professorial chairs of "poetics." In Germany this phase soon passed without leaving deeper traces politically, although it had a lasting impact on our education system. Matters were different in Eastern Asia. The Chinese mandarin is, or rather, was originally, the approximate equivalent of our Renaissance humanist: a humanist man of letters who was educated and who passed examinations in the literary monuments of the distant past. If you read the diaries of Li Hung-chang,<sup>23</sup> you will find that what he took most pride in was the fact that he wrote poetry and was a good calligrapher. This social stratum, with its conventions derived from Chinese antiquity, has determined the entire fate of China. Our own fate might have been similar if there had been the slightest opportunity for the humanists to impose their influence with equal success.

The third social stratum was the court nobility. Once the rulers had succeeded in depriving the aristocracy of its political power as an estate, they attracted the nobility to the court and enrolled them in their political and diplomatic service. One of the factors in the transformation of our education system in the seventeenth century was that the place of the humanist men of letters in the service of the monarchs was taken by professional politicians drawn from the nobility.

The fourth category was a specifically British phenomenon: this was a patrician class comprising the minor nobility and the urban inhabitants of independent means, known technically as the "gentry."<sup>24</sup> This was a stratum that the monarch had originally attracted

<sup>23</sup> Li Hung-chang (1823–1901), a distinguished Chinese statesman who sought to open up China to technology from the West. After the Boxer uprising of 1896–8 against Western influence, he was instrumental in mediating between the imperial court and the Western powers, leading to the treaty that ended the uprising.

<sup>24</sup> Weber used the English word.

in his conflict with the barons and that he put in charge of the offices of "self-government,"<sup>25</sup> only to become increasingly dependent upon them subsequently. This stratum remained in possession of all the offices of local government that it took over gratis in the interests of its own social power. The gentry saved Britain from bureaucratization, the fate of all continental states.

A fifth stratum was peculiar to the West, particularly on the Continent, and it was of crucial importance for its entire political structure. This was the class of university-trained lawyers. Once Roman law had been transformed under the late Roman bureaucratic state, it continued to exert a powerful influence over a long period of time. Nowhere was this more evident than in the circumstance that, in its advance toward the rational state, the revolution of the machinery of politics was undertaken everywhere by trained lawyers. This applied even in Britain, although there the great national guilds of lawyers hampered the introduction of Roman law. Nowhere on earth can we find anything analogous to this. Neither the approaches to rational legal thinking in the Indian Mimamsa<sup>26</sup> school nor the further development in Islam of the legal thinking of antiquity was able to prevent rational legal thought from being stifled by theological ways of thinking. Above all, there was a failure completely to rationalize trial procedure. Three factors were blended together to achieve this rationalization: first, the success with which Italian jurists took over ancient Roman jurisprudence, the product of an entirely unique political system that rose from a city-state to world dominance; second, the *usus modernus*, the modern practice, of the late medieval pandect jurists<sup>27</sup> and canon lawyers; and third, the theories of natural law that had sprung from legal and Christian thought and were subsequently secularized. This legal rationalism had its greatest representatives in the Italian

<sup>25</sup> Weber used the English word.

<sup>26</sup> Mimamsa ("reflection," "study") is the name given to the earliest of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. It dates back to c. fourth century BC and involves a rational examination of the sacred Vedic texts but was also applied to the analysis of legal texts. It was a powerful intellectual force and is traditionally credited with the defeat of Buddhism in India.

<sup>27</sup> The *Pandects* or *Digests* were a compendium of fifty books of Roman civil law made by the order of Emperor Justinian and published in AD 533. Roman law came to Germany in the Middle Ages but did not develop until early in the seventeenth century when lawyers, including specialists in canon law, began to interpret the law more freely and to adapt it to modern needs. It was this development that was referred to as the "*usus modernus pandecticum*."



*podestà*,<sup>28</sup> in the royal French jurists who created the formal instruments that enabled the royal power to undermine seigniorial rule, in the canon lawyers and the theologians of the conciliar tradition<sup>29</sup> with their theories of natural law, in the court jurists and learned judges of the continental rulers, in the teachers of natural law in the Netherlands and in the monarchomachs,<sup>30</sup> in the lawyers of the English crown and Parliament, in the *noblesse de robe* of the French *parlements*,<sup>31</sup> and finally, in the lawyers of the period of the [French] Revolution. Without this legal rationalism the emergence of the absolute state is as inconceivable as the Revolution. If you look through the remonstrances of the French *parlements* or the *cahiers*<sup>32</sup> of the French Estates General<sup>33</sup> from the sixteenth century until 1789, you will see everywhere the legal mind at work. And if you look into the professions of the members of the French Convention,<sup>34</sup> you will find there—even though they were elected on the basis of equal suffrage—no more than a single proletarian, a very few bourgeois businessmen,

<sup>28</sup> The *podestà* (sometimes translated as “mayor”) was an elected official in a commune, normally from the nobility of another locality, and invested with supreme legal authority for a fixed salary and for a set period of time. Weber attached great importance to this institution and its role in the development of Italian law in the Middle Ages. His account of it can be found in *Economy and Society*, chapter 16, section 3, pp. 1273 ff.

<sup>29</sup> The conciliar tradition arose as a response to a crisis in the papacy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It means that as well as the pope, the councils representing the church as a whole have the authority to establish binding norms for church doctrine.

<sup>30</sup> The term “monarchomach,” meaning “fighter against the king” or “king-killer,” was introduced by the royalist William Barclay (1543–1608) to describe a group of political thinkers in France who had argued for the restriction of the monarch’s powers and the right to resist him. See William Barclay’s *De Regno et regali potestate* (Paris, 1600).

<sup>31</sup> The *noblesse de robe* was a hereditary nobility conferred on holders of high judicial or legal office in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The *parlement* was not a parliament in the English sense but a judicial assembly, descended from the *curia regis*, or king’s court, from the thirteenth century on.

<sup>32</sup> That is, the *cahiers de doléances* or memoranda of grievances that were drawn up at the time of elections to the Estates General. They were collected up and presented to the king estate by estate.

<sup>33</sup> The Estates General was the legislative body in France until the Revolution of 1789. It provided representation for the three estates of the realm, that is, the nobility, the clergy, and the commons (in practice, the burghers of the towns).

<sup>34</sup> The chief of the revolutionary assemblies that governed France after 1789. It followed the Legislative Assembly in 1792 and culminated in the Reign of Terror, after which it was succeeded in 1795 by the Directory.

but, in contrast, a whole mass of lawyers of every kind without whose participation the specific spirit that animated these radical intellectuals and their proposals would be quite inconceivable. The modern advocate and modern democracy have always been inseparable ever since, while advocates in our sense, as an independent status group, have existed in their turn only in the West. They emerged there under the influence of the gradual rationalization of trial procedure since the Middle Ages, as a development from the spokesman [*Fürsprecher*] of the formalistic Germanic legal process.

There is nothing accidental about the importance of lawyers in Western politics since the rise of political parties. Party politics just means politics as engaged in by interested parties; we shall soon see what that means. And to conduct a case effectively on behalf of interested parties is the business of the trained lawyer. In this respect he is the superior of any “official,” a lesson we have learned from the superiority of enemy propaganda.<sup>35</sup> Admittedly, a lawyer can emerge victorious in a “bad” case, in other words, a case that only has logically feeble arguments on its side; he triumphs by conducting the case “ably,” technically speaking. But it is also true that only a lawyer has the skill to plead a cause that has intrinsically “powerful” arguments in its favor and thus to handle a “good” case “ably.” An official acting as a politician all too often turns a “good” case into a “bad” one through his technically “incompetent” pleading. This is something we have learned from painful experience. For politics nowadays is conducted preeminently in public and through the medium of the spoken or written word. Weighing the effect of words lies at the heart of the activity of the lawyer but is remote from the skills of the professional civil servant, who neither is nor should be a demagogue, and if he nevertheless undertakes to assume the role of a demagogue he normally turns out to do it very badly.

Given the nature of his true vocation, the genuine official—and this is crucial for our assessment of our former regime here in Germany—should not be politically active but, above all else, should “administer,” *impartially*. This applies also to so-called “political” civil servants, officially at least, as long as there is no threat to “*raison d’état*,” that is, the vital interests of the dominant order. *Sine ira et studio*, “without anger or partiality”<sup>36</sup>—that should be the

<sup>35</sup> Weber is referring to the propaganda campaign waged during World War I. The allegation that by invading Belgium the Germans had violated international law and the principle of national self-determination proved particularly damaging.

<sup>36</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, book 1, chapter 1.

official's motto in the performance of his duties. He should therefore abstain from doing what politicians, the leaders as well as followers, must always necessarily do, namely, to *fight*. For taking sides, struggle, passion—*ira et studium*—are the politician's element, especially the political leader's. His activity is subject to an entirely different principle of *responsibility*, in fact, the very opposite principle to that of the official. When an official receives an order, his honor lies in his ability to carry it out, on his superior's *responsibility*, conscientiously and exactly as if it corresponded to his own convictions. This remains the case even if the order seems wrong to him and if, despite his protests, his superior insists on his compliance. Without this discipline and self-denial, which is ethical in the highest degree, the entire apparatus would collapse. In contrast, the point of honor of the political leader, that is, the leading statesman, is that he acts exclusively on his *own* responsibility, a responsibility that he may not and cannot refuse or shuffle off onto someone else. It is precisely civil servants of high moral stature who make bad politicians, in other words, who act irresponsibly from a political standpoint. We must judge them, therefore, to be ethically inferior politicians of the kind we in Germany have unfortunately had time and again in leading positions. That is what we call "government by civil servants" [*Beamtenherrschaft*]. I must make it clear that it is not my intention to cast a slur on the honor of our civil service by exposing what are political defects of this system, if we judge it by its success. But let us return once more to the typology of political figures.

Since the founding of the constitutional state, and even more markedly since the establishment of democracy, the demagogue has been the typical political leader in the West. The unpleasant connotations of this word should not obscure the fact that it was not Cleon, but Pericles,<sup>37</sup> who was the first to bear this name. Without office, or rather as the incumbent of the only elective office of military commander<sup>38</sup> (in contrast to the other offices in ancient democracy, which were filled by casting lots), he presided over the

<sup>37</sup> Cleon, an Athenian politician of the fifth century BC, who succeeded Pericles as "leader of the people" in 427. He had mixed success as a general in the wars against Sparta but is known for the brutal treatment of his enemies once he had defeated them. His long-term reputation is that of a conventional vulgar demagogue. Pericles (495–427 BC) was one of the outstanding figures of Athenian democracy.

<sup>38</sup> Weber uses *Oberstrategen*—"high strategist"—and clearly means what the Greeks call *strategos*.

sovereign assembly [*ekklesia*] of the people [*demos*] of Athens. Modern demagogues, too, make use of speech, and they do so to a formidable degree, when you consider the election speeches that a modern candidate has to make. But they use the printed word even more. The political publicist, and above all, the *journalist* is the most important representative of the species today.

To provide even an outline of the sociology of modern political journalism would go well beyond the framework of this lecture, since that would be a separate topic in its own right. But a few points must be made. The journalist shares with all demagogues and lawyers (as well as artists) the fate of being denied a fixed place in the social structure. This is true on the Continent, at least, and it contrasts with conditions in Britain and, incidentally, with the situation that formerly obtained in Prussia. He belongs to a kind of pariah caste that in the eyes of "society" is always judged socially by its lowest representatives from the point of view of morality. Hence, the strangest ideas are prevalent about journalists and their work. Not everyone realizes that to write a really *good* piece of journalism is at least as demanding intellectually as the achievement of any scholar. This is particularly true when we recollect that it has to be written on the spot, to order, and that it must create an immediate *effect*, even though it is produced under completely different conditions from that of scholarly research. It is generally overlooked that a journalist's actual responsibility is far greater than a scholar's, and that on average every reputable journalist's *sense* of responsibility is by no means inferior, as indeed we saw during the war. It is overlooked because in the nature of the case it is the *irresponsible* pieces of journalism that tend to remain in the memory because of their often terrible effects. And no one believes it possible for competent journalists to be more discreet on average than other people. And yet it is so. The incomparably greater temptations to which this profession is exposed, together with the other conditions of working as a journalist at the present time, have conditioned the public to regard the press with a mixture of disdain and abject cowardice. It is not possible to discuss today how this might be remedied. What interests us here is the *political* destiny that journalists can aspire to, the opportunities they have to gain positions of leadership in politics. Hitherto, openings occurred only in the Social Democratic Party. However, within the party editorial posts resembled civil service posts for the most part but have not proved to be a springboard to a position in the *leadership*.

In the bourgeois parties the prospects of gaining political power by this route have, if anything, deteriorated on the whole, when

compared to the previous generation. Needless to say, every politician of importance has stood in need of press influence and hence also connections with the press. But contrary to what might have been expected, for party *leaders* to emerge from the ranks of the press was very much the exception. The reason for this lies in the journalist's greatly reduced ability to obtain time off from his work. This applies above all to the journalist with no private means since he is necessarily tied to his professional duties. A journalist's duties, moreover, have become much more intensive, as has the importance of being up to date. The need to earn a living by writing articles on a daily or weekly basis is a millstone around the neck of politicians, and I know of some who are leaders by nature but whose rise to power has been outwardly and, even more importantly, inwardly paralyzed by this burden. The fact that under the old regime relations between the press and the ruling powers in the state and in the parties had a dire effect on the quality of journalism is a story in its own right. These relations were different in the countries of our enemies. But even there, and indeed in all modern states, it appears that the political influence of the ordinary working journalist is constantly being eroded, while the influence of the capitalist press magnate, such as "Lord" Northcliffe,<sup>39</sup> grows apace.

Admittedly, in Germany hitherto the great capitalist newspaper concerns have mainly taken over the newspapers with the "small ads," that is, the various "General Advertisers," and as a general rule they have promoted political apathy. For no profits were to be made from an independent line in politics, and such independence was even less likely to earn the commercially helpful goodwill of the ruling political powers. During the war the revenues brought in by advertising could be targeted as a way of exerting political influence on the press, and this practice looks set to continue. Even if the major newspapers can be expected to resist this pressure, the position of the smaller ones is far more precarious. In any case, in Germany at present a journalistic career is not a normal career route for aspiring political leaders. Whether we should add "any longer" or "not yet," we shall perhaps have to wait to see. This is not to discount its other attractions or to deny its opportunities for influencing and changing politics and, above all, the degree of political responsibility it may entail.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred, Lord Northcliffe (1865–1922), was a British press lord. He founded papers like the *Daily Mail* (1903) and *Daily Mirror* (1904), rescued the *Observer* (1908), and bought up *The Times*. He worked closely with his younger brother, who became Viscount Rothermere.

Whether the position would change at all if the principle of anonymity were to be abandoned, as some but not all journalists propose, is hard to say. During the war some newspapers in Germany were edited by talented writers who had been specially hired for the purpose and who made a point of writing under their own names. Unfortunately, what we found in a number of the better-known cases was that this approach does *not* necessarily foster the enhanced sense of responsibility that we might have expected. It was in part the most notorious elements of the popular press who, regardless of party allegiance, used this tactic to strive for higher sales—and who did in fact achieve them. This practice undoubtedly increased the wealth of the gentlemen concerned, the publishers as well as the sensation-seeking journalists—but not their *honor*. This does not amount to an argument against the principle; the question is highly complex, and we should not generalize from this one experience.

*Hitherto*, however, journalism has not proved to be the road to genuine leadership or to the *responsible* conduct of political life. How matters will develop further, only time will tell. Whatever happens, however, a career in journalism will remain one of the most important paths to professional political activity. Not a path for just anybody, however, least of all for people of weak character, especially for people who can maintain their inner equilibrium only where their social and professional status is secure. A young scholar's life involves something of a gamble, but he is at least surrounded by the stable conventions of social status that help to prevent him from going off the rails. A journalist's life, however, is in every sense a gamble pure and simple. Moreover, he works under conditions that subject his inner sense of security to a sterner test than almost any other situation. His often bitter professional disappointments may not even be the worst aspect of this.

Indeed, it is above all the successful journalists who find themselves having to face particularly onerous inner challenges. It is no small thing to consort with the powerful people of this earth in their drawing rooms, apparently on a basis of equality, to be flattered because you are feared, while all the time knowing that no sooner has the door closed behind you than your host may have to defend himself to his guests for having invited the "scoundrels from the press." In the same way, it is no small thing to deliver prompt and yet convincing judgments on anything and everything that the "market" happens to call for, on every conceivable problem of life, without succumbing to absolute superficiality, or what is even worse, to the humiliation of self-exposure with its inexorable consequences.



We should not find it astonishing that so many journalists have gone off the rails or have otherwise lost their value as human beings. What is surprising is that, despite everything, this stratum of society contains a much greater number of valuable and absolutely genuine human beings than outsiders tend to suppose.

As a type of professional politician, the journalist can look back on what is a considerable past. The figure of the *party official*, in contrast, is a phenomenon of recent decades or, in some cases, just the last few years. We must turn our attention to an examination of the party system and party organization if we are to gain an understanding of the historical significance of this figure.

In all political entities of any size where the rulers are elected periodically, that is to say, in all entities that exceed the scope and authority of small, rural cantons, the organization of politics is necessarily an *organization of interested parties*. This means that a relatively small number of people with a primary interest in political activity, that is, in sharing in political power, create a following through open recruitment, offer themselves or their protégés as candidates for election, raise funds, and sally forth in search of votes. It is not possible to imagine how in large organizations elections could take place effectively in the absence of these activities. In practice, it means the division of all enfranchised citizens into politically active and politically passive segments. Since this distinction is voluntary, it cannot be eliminated by such measures as compulsory voting, representation according to membership of a "professional group," or other proposals designed explicitly or in fact to combat this state of affairs and thus do away with the dominance of the professional politicians. Leaders and followers are the indispensable vital components of every party: the leadership so as actively to recruit the followers, while the followers enlist the support of the passive electorate for the election of the leader.

Differences arise, however, in party structure. The "parties" in medieval city-states, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, for example, had purely personal followings. Consider the *Statuto della parte Guelfa*,<sup>40</sup> with its call for the confiscation of the property of the *nobili* (this term referred originally to all families who lived like knights,

<sup>40</sup> The Guelphs and the Ghibellines were the two great factions in Italian politics during the Middle Ages. In the protracted conflicts between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperors, the Guelphs supported the former and the Ghibellines the latter. After the end of the thirteenth century, these party names came to be used to designate different social classes, especially in the northern and central Italian states. The *Statuto della parte Guelfa* was published in 1335.

that is to say, were entitled to hold a fief), their exclusion from office and the franchise, the party committees linking different localities, the strictly military organizations, and the bonuses paid for denunciations. If we consider these things, we find ourselves strongly reminded of Bolshevism with its Soviets, its strictly screened organization of military personnel, and—above all, in Russia—its armies of informers, its confiscations, and the disarming and political disenfranchisement of its "bourgeois," in other words, its entrepreneurs, tradesmen, *rentiers*, clerics, descendants of the royal dynasty, and police agents.

The analogy is even more striking on closer inspection. On the one hand, you find that the military organization of the Guelph party consisted of a purely knightly army, drawn up on the basis of registered feudal estates, and that almost all its leading positions were filled by the nobility. On the other, the Soviets retained, or rather reintroduced, highly paid entrepreneurs, the piecework system of wages, Taylorism, and discipline in both the armed forces and the workplace, all the while on the lookout for foreign capital. In a word, then, simply in order to keep the state and the economy functioning, they were forced to accept once again absolutely *all* the things they had combated as bourgeois class institutions, and they were forced even to take over, as a principal instrument of their state power, the agents of the old Okhrana.<sup>41</sup> However, we are not dealing here with organizations concerned with force but with professional politicians who strive to gain power through sober, "peaceful" party campaigning in the electoral marketplace.

In the same way, these parties in our ordinary understanding of the word started life, in Britain, for example, as pure followers of the aristocracy. Every time a peer changed sides, for whatever reason, everyone who depended on him changed sides with him. Until the Reform Bill [of 1832] the great aristocratic families, and not least the king himself, controlled the patronage of a vast number of constituencies. Closely associated with these aristocratic parties are the parties of notables of the kind that emerged everywhere with the growth of the power of the bourgeoisie. Under the leadership of the typical strata of intellectuals of the West, the property-owning and educated classes divided into parties, which they led and which were based partly on class interests, partly on family tradition, and partly on pure ideology. Clergymen, teachers, professors, lawyers, doctors,

<sup>41</sup> The Okhrana was the secret police department in tsarist Russia. It was replaced in 1917, after the October Revolution, by the Cheka (the Extraordinary Commission [for Combating Counterrevolution, Sabotage, and Speculation]).

pharmacists, wealthy farmers, factory owners—in Britain, an entire stratum whose members called themselves gentlemen—initially formed associations as opportunity offered and at the most established political clubs at the local level. In unsettled times the petty bourgeoisie would speak up, and on occasion even the proletariat found its voice, when it obtained leaders, although these leaders did not, generally speaking, arise from their ranks.

In the country, regionally organized parties on a permanent basis did not yet exist at this stage. It was simply the members of Parliament themselves who kept the parties together. The selection of candidates lay crucially in the hands of the local notables. Party programs came into being partly through the candidates' campaign appeals, partly on the basis of congresses of notables or decisions of the parliamentary party. The clubs were run on a part-time or honorary basis, as occasional work. Where there were no clubs (as was mostly the case), one found nothing but the entirely informal political activity of the few people with a lasting interest in politics in normal times. The journalist alone was a paid professional politician, and only the newspapers were able to act as a continuous form of political organization. Aside from that, there was only Parliament in session. Of course, parliamentarians and parliamentary leaders knew perfectly well which local notables to approach when a specific political course of action was desired. But only large towns had party associations that could count on modest members' contributions, periodic conferences, and public meetings at which the local member of Parliament could report on his activities. Politics came to life only at election time.

The driving force behind the progressive tightening of party organization was the interest that members of Parliament had in the possibility of electoral compromises between localities and the impact of unified programs recognized by broad sections of the public throughout the country, as well as of unified electioneering platforms. But the party apparatus remains that of an association of notables, and no change in principle is involved even when the entire country is covered by a network of local party branches, including medium-sized towns, as well as a set of "party agents" with whom a member of Parliament in charge of the central party bureau is in constant correspondence. There are as yet no paid officials outside the central party headquarters. The affairs of the local branches are still conducted by "reputable" people who take on this task because of the esteem they otherwise enjoy. They are the nonparliamentary "notables" who exert influence alongside the political notables who actually have seats in Parliament. Increasingly, however, the intellectual

nourishment of both the press and the local branches is provided by the party correspondence published by the party. Regular members' contributions become indispensable; a fraction of the money received is used to defray the costs of party headquarters. This was the position of the majority of party organizations in Germany until fairly recently.

Even more strikingly, in France the first stage still prevailed in part. By this is meant the whole unstable system of parliamentary alliances, the small number of local notables in the country beyond, programs drafted by the candidates or by their sponsors on their behalf, in some instances at the moment of recruiting them, although with a more or less local interpretation of directives and programs issued by the parliamentarians. This system was only gradually superseded. The number of full-time politicians remained small and consisted chiefly of elected deputies, the few officials in party headquarters, the journalists, and—in France—the careerists who happened to fill a "political post" or were on the lookout for one. Formally, politics was predominantly a part-time profession. Likewise, the number of deputies eligible for ministerial posts was very restricted, and since places were confined to notables, the number of candidates for election was limited, too. However, the number of people with an indirect interest in the conduct of politics, particularly a material interest, was very great. For all measures taken by a ministry, above all everything to do with questions of personnel, could be dealt with only by taking into consideration their influence on the chances of being elected. Thus everyone tried to channel their wishes of any and every kind through the local deputy, and, whether he liked it or not, the minister was forced to listen to him if he belonged to his majority, which was therefore the goal to which everyone aspired. The individual deputy had all offices in his gift, as well as every other kind of patronage within his constituency, and, for his part, he cultivated his own contacts to the local notables so as to ensure his own reelection.

The most modern forms of party organization stand in stark contrast to this idyllic state of affairs dominated by notables and, above all, by the members of Parliament. They are the offspring of democracy, the mass suffrage, the need to woo the masses and for mass organization, the development of the greatest degree of unity in the leadership and the strictest possible discipline. The rule by notables and the control exercised by members of Parliament dies out. "Full-time" politicians *outside* Parliament take the operations of politics into their own hands, either as "entrepreneurs," which is what the

American "boss"<sup>42</sup> and the English "election agent" essentially were, or else as officials on a fixed salary.

In formal terms, a far-reaching process of democratization takes place. It is no longer the parliamentary party that creates the authoritative programs, nor the local notables who still exercise control over the nomination of candidates. Instead, the organized party members meet to choose the candidates and delegate members to attend assemblies at a higher level, of which there may be several, right up to the general "party congress." In the nature of the case, however, power lies in the hands of those who do the *continuous* day-to-day work within the organization or of those on whom the party apparatus depends for either money or personnel, whether as patrons or as the leaders of powerful clubs representing vested interests (such as Tammany Hall). What is crucial is that this entire human apparatus—the party "machine," as it is significantly called in the Anglo-Saxon nations—or rather, the people in charge of it, holds the members of Parliament in check and is well placed to impose its will on them. This has particular importance for the selection of the party *leadership*. You become a leader only if you are supported by the machine, even over the heads of the members of Parliament. The creation of such machines, in other words, signifies the emergence of a *plebiscitary* democracy.

Needless to say, the party followers, particularly the party officials and bosses, look to the victory of their leader for personal reward in the form of offices or other benefits. The crucial point is that they expect to obtain these things from him and not, or not only, from the individual members of Parliament. They expect above all that the demagogic effect of the leader's *personality* in the election campaign will bring the party both votes and seats, and hence power, and that this will improve as far as possible its supporters' chances of obtaining the hoped-for rewards. At the level of ideals, there is the satisfaction of working for a person to whom you are personally devoted and in whom you have faith, instead of merely for the abstract program of a party composed of mediocrities. This is the *charismatic* element in all leadership and one of its mainsprings.

This form ultimately prevailed, though its triumph was uneven and it involved a latent conflict with the local notables and members of Parliament eager to retain their influence. The process could be seen among the bourgeois parties, first of all in the United States, and then in the Social Democratic Party, especially in Germany. There are

<sup>42</sup> "Boss" and "election agent" are used in the original.

constant setbacks whenever a universally acknowledged leader fails to appear, and even when there is one, all sorts of concessions have to be made to the vanity and self-interest of the party notables. Above all, however, even the party machine can succumb to the dominance of the party *officials* who control the day-to-day business. Many members of the Social Democratic Party believe that their party has been unable to resist this process of "bureaucratization." However, the fact is that "officials" tend to submit fairly readily to a demagogic leader with a powerful personality. Their ideal and material interests are intimately bound up with what they hope the party will achieve thanks to him, while working for a leader is psychologically more satisfying. It is much more difficult for leaders to emerge where, as in the majority of bourgeois parties, the "notables" exert an influence on party affairs alongside the officials. For in their *minds*, the little posts the notables occupy on the board or the committees come to "constitute their life." Their actions are determined by resentment toward the demagogue as a *homo novus*, an upstart, by their firm belief in the superiority of the "experience" of party politics (which is in fact of considerable importance) and by ideological anxieties that the old party traditions may be at risk. In the party they have all the traditionalist elements on their side. The rural voters, above all, but also voters from the petty bourgeoisie look up to the name of the notable with whom they have long been familiar and mistrust the new man whom they do not know. Nevertheless, *if* the latter proves successful, these voters switch their loyalty and support him all the more steadfastly. Let us consider a few of the chief examples of this conflict between competing political structures and, in particular, the rise of the plebiscitary form as Ostrogorski describes it.<sup>43</sup>

Let us start with Britain: there until 1868 party organization consisted almost entirely of notables.<sup>44</sup> In rural districts, the Tories

<sup>43</sup> M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (London: Macmillan, 1902). Moisei Ostrogorski (1854–1919) was a Russian political scientist and politician. After lengthy periods of study in Britain and the United States in the 1880s and 1890s, he published pioneering works on the history of the political parties. After the revolution of 1905, he returned to Russia and was elected to the First Duma as a liberal. Following the dissolution of the Duma, he withdrew from politics and settled in the United States.

<sup>44</sup> Weber alludes here to Disraeli's Reform Bill of 1867. This more or less doubled the electorate in the towns by reducing the property qualification, enabling some working men to take part in the electoral process for the first time. At the same time it greatly increased the number of constituencies, particularly in the countryside. These measures forced the British parties to adopt tighter forms of organization.



relied on such people as the Anglican vicar, schoolmasters, for the most part, and above all the large landowners of the county. The Whigs looked for their support to such people as nonconformist preachers (where they were to be found), the postmaster, the blacksmith, the tailor, the rope maker, in short, skilled artisans who could exert political influence because it was easy to chat with them. In the towns the parties were divided partly along economic lines, partly on religious ones, or even simply by the political opinions that were handed down through the family. But in all cases the notables were the active agents in the political organizations. Above them, there was Parliament and the parties with the cabinet and the "leader"<sup>45</sup> who either presided over the cabinet or led the opposition. This leader had at his side the most important professional figure in the party organization, namely, the "whip."<sup>46</sup> It was he who had the desirable offices in his gift; it was to him, therefore, that the careerists had to apply. His practice was to come to an understanding with the individual constituency members about such matters. In the constituencies a stratum of professional politicians gradually began to emerge. Local agents were recruited who initially were unpaid and were roughly comparable to our "party agents" [*Vertrauensmänner*] in Germany. Alongside them, however, there developed in the constituencies a form of capitalist entrepreneur known as the "election agent."<sup>47</sup> In modern British legislation, with its emphasis on fairness in the conduct of elections, the appearance of the election agent was unavoidable. This legislation sought to control the costs of elections and to stem the power of money, since it obliged candidates to declare their electoral expenses. For in Britain, to a far greater extent than was the case here in Germany, the candidate had the pleasure of loosening his purse strings, in addition to straining his voice. He had to pay the election agent a lump sum to cover all his expenses and from which the latter normally made a good profit. In Britain, in the distribution of power between the "leader" and the party notables, both in Parliament and in the country, it had always been the leader who had the more significant position. There were compelling reasons for this in the need to make large-scale policy making possible in a consistent manner. Notwithstanding this, the influence of members of Parliament and party notables remained considerable.

<sup>45</sup> Weber used the English word.

<sup>46</sup> Weber used the English word.

<sup>47</sup> Weber used the English term.

This, then, is what the old party organization looked like: half a club for notables, half already a business complete with employees and entrepreneurs. From 1868 on, however, we can see the development of the "caucus system,"<sup>48</sup> first for local elections in Birmingham, and then throughout the country. This system was brought into being by a nonconformist parson together with Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>49</sup> What caused it was the democratization of the franchise. In order to win the support of the masses, it was necessary to summon into existence a vast apparatus of organizations that were democratic in appearance. The aim was to create an electoral association in every district of each town, to keep the organization in operation at all times, and to run it strictly on bureaucratic lines. This involved the recruitment of growing numbers of paid officials, while the formal representatives of party policy were leading negotiators with the right to co-opt, who had been elected by the local electoral committees in which as many as 10 percent of the voters were soon to be organized. The driving force consisted of local people with a particular interest in municipal politics, which were everywhere the source of the juiciest profits. It was they who were primarily responsible for raising the necessary funds. This newly emerging machine, which was no longer led by parliamentarians, soon found itself embroiled in conflicts with the previous power brokers and especially with the whip. Nevertheless, supported by interested local parties, the machine triumphed so convincingly that the whip was forced to accept the situation and come to terms with it. The upshot was the centralization of power in the hands of a few people, and ultimately just one person, who stood at the head of the party. For in the Liberal Party, the entire system had come into being in connection with Gladstone's rise to power. What led to such a swift victory over the notables was the fascination exerted by

<sup>48</sup> Weber used the English term.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) was a leading radical politician based in Birmingham. He subsequently made a career in national politics and rose to the position of president of the Board of Trade in Gladstone's second ministry. However, having broken with the Liberals over Gladstone's policy of Home Rule for Ireland, his views gradually became increasingly imperialistic. Under the Tories he served as secretary of state for the colonies.

The notes to Weber's lecture make it clear that the parson in question is Chamberlain's long-standing collaborator, Francis Schnadhorst, who was in actual fact not a parson but a cloth merchant of nonconformist background. He became the secretary to the Birmingham Liberal Association in 1873. Later on, he was responsible for the reorganization of the party branches in other towns on the model of the Birmingham caucus.

Gladstone's "grand demagogic" skills and the masses' firm belief in the moral nature of his policies and, above all, in his personal moral qualities. A Caesarist, plebiscitary element now made its entrance on the political stage. It was the dictator of the electoral battlefield, and it quickly made itself felt. In 1877 the caucus became active for the first time in a general election, with stunning success. The result was Disraeli's fall from power in the midst of his great triumphs. By 1886 the machine had become completely identified through the power of charisma with the personality of the leader. This reached its climax at the start of the Home Rule debate,<sup>50</sup> when the entire apparatus from top to bottom did not ask, "Do we agree with Gladstone's policy on this question?" but simply swung behind him at his command, taking the view that "Whatever he does, we shall follow him." In so doing, the caucus simply abandoned Chamberlain, its own creator, leaving him stranded.

This machinery calls for a considerable body of people to work for it. There are probably as many as two thousand people in Britain who live directly from party politics. Far more numerous, of course, are those who are involved in politics in search of some office or other, or to serve a specific interest, especially in local government politics. For the useful caucus politician there are opportunities to gratify his vanity, in addition to the prospects for improving his economic position. In the nature of the case, to become a JP or an MP<sup>51</sup> is the height of (normal) ambition, and people who have had a good upbringing, and are "gentlemen," are rewarded by these titles. And in the light of the fact that perhaps as much as 50 percent of the parties' finances came in the form of gifts from anonymous donors, the greatest prize of all, particularly for wealthy benefactors, was a peerage.

What, then, has been the effect of the entire system? It is that today, with the exception of a few members of the cabinet (and a number of independently minded eccentrics), British members of Parliament have become nothing more than well-disciplined voting fodder. In Germany deputies have at least taken the trouble to deal with their private correspondence while sitting at their desks in the Reichstag and thus to act as if they were working for the good of the nation. No such gesture is required in Britain. There the member of

<sup>50</sup> Gladstone was converted to the cause of Irish Home Rule in 1885. His attempts to gain parliamentary approval for it were rejected in 1886 and again in 1893.

<sup>51</sup> Weber used the English initials JP and MP, as well as the term "gentlemen," here and subsequently.

Parliament has only to vote and to avoid betraying his party. He must appear when summoned by the whips and do whatever is required by the cabinet or the leader of the opposition. And as for the caucus machine outside in the country, if the leader is strong, it is almost entirely unprincipled and wholly under his control. Above Parliament, then, stands a man who is in all essentials an elected dictator who makes use of the party "machine" in order to bring the masses to heel behind him, and who regards the parliamentarians merely as political beneficiaries of the spoils system to be numbered among his followers.

Now, how does the process of selecting these leaders work? To start with: For what accomplishments are they chosen? What is crucial here, apart from the qualities of will that are decisive all over the world, is, of course, the power of demagogic speech making. The style of rhetoric has changed from what it was in Cobden's day, when it addressed itself to reason.<sup>52</sup> It then moved on to Gladstone, who was an expert in the seemingly sober art of "letting the facts speak for themselves," and from there it came down to the present day, when speakers frequently make use of purely emotive language of the kind also employed by the Salvation Army in order to set the masses in motion. The existing situation can properly be described as a "dictatorship based on the exploitation of the emotional nature of the masses." But the very advanced system of committee work in the British Parliament makes it possible to *take part* and also forces every politician who contemplates joining the leadership to do so. All ministers worthy of note in recent decades have undergone this very real and effective training, while the practice of reporting and criticizing the work of these committees publicly ensures that this school produces a true selection process and that it is able to eliminate the mere demagogue.

That, then, is the position in Britain. The caucus system there, however, was very diluted compared with the party organization in America, where the plebiscitary principle emerged especially early and in an especially pure form. Washington's America was supposed to be a polity administered according to his idea of a "gentleman."<sup>53</sup> A gentleman over there at that time was a landowner or a

<sup>52</sup> Richard Cobden (1804–65), a British politician, was one of the leading spokesmen of the free-trade movement in Britain. From 1838 he led the Anti-Corn Law League in its successful campaign to repeal the Corn Laws in 1846. The Corn Laws had sought to protect the price of grain.

<sup>53</sup> Weber used the English word.

man with a college education. That was indeed how America was governed initially. When parties began to form, the members of the House of Representatives at first claimed a leadership role, as in Britain at the time of the rule of the notables. Party organization was quite loose. This lasted until 1824. Even before the 1820s the party machine had started to develop in a number of local municipalities, which here, too, were the starting point of modern developments. But it was only with the election of Andrew Jackson as president, the candidate of farmers in the West, that the old traditions were jettisoned. Soon after 1840 the role of congressmen in leading the parties formally came to an end when the great parliamentarians, like Calhoun and Webster,<sup>54</sup> bowed out of political life because Congress had lost almost all its power to the party machine in the country. The fact that the plebiscitary "machine" developed so early in America can be ascribed to the circumstance that there, and there alone, the head of the executive branch and hence the man in charge of official patronage—which is what counted—was a president elected by the popular will and that because of the "separation of powers" he was almost entirely independent of Congress in the conduct of his office. This meant that above all, in the case of the election of the president, genuine booty beckoned as the reward of victory and took the shape of the fruits of office. The consequence of this was the "spoils system,"<sup>55</sup> which Andrew Jackson systematically elevated into a principle.

What is the meaning for the parties nowadays of the "spoils system," that is, the allocation of all federal offices to the followers of the victorious candidate? It means that the contending parties have no principles at all; they are purely careerist organizations that change their programs for each election in accordance with what they see as their best chances of catching votes. And notwithstanding all other similarities, these programs change at a rate not to be matched elsewhere. The parties are shaped with an eye to the election campaign that is of supreme importance for the patronage of offices: the election of the president of the Union and the governorships of

<sup>54</sup> John Calhoun (1782–1850) was a leading politician who served as a congressman, secretary of war, vice president (1825–32), and secretary of state. He was known as a champion of states' rights and became a symbol of the Old South. Daniel Webster (1782–1852) was an orator and politician. As a young lawyer, he practiced before the Supreme Court. He subsequently became a congressman, senator, and secretary of state, where he made a name for himself as a defender of the Union against states' rights.

<sup>55</sup> Weber used the English term.

the individual states. Programs and candidates are finalized in the parties' "national conventions"<sup>56</sup> without the intervention of the parliamentarians. These "conventions" are party congresses that, formally, consist of representatives who have been chosen in a highly democratic manner by assemblies of delegates who, for their part, owe their own mandates to the party "primaries,"<sup>57</sup> the fundamental voting assemblies of the party. Even in the primaries, the delegates are selected in the name of the candidates for the supreme office of state. *Within* the individual parties bitter struggles rage for the privilege of "nomination." The fact is that between three and four hundred thousand official nominations are in the president's hands, and the task of filling them is one he undertakes himself, assisted only by the advice he receives from the senators representing the individual states. Thus the senators are powerful politicians. The House of Representatives, in contrast, is relatively impotent politically, because it lacks the authority to bestow patronage and because the ministers who are purely assistants to the president, whose rights have been legitimated by the people against everyone, including Congress, can administer their office independently of whether they enjoy its confidence or not. This, too, is a consequence of the "separation of powers."

Underpinned in this way, the spoils system was technically *possible* in America because only a youthful civilization could sustain such a purely amateurish approach to the conduct of its affairs. For it is self-evident that the existence of three to four hundred thousand party supporters who had nothing to show by way of their qualifications for office but the fact that they had served their party well—such a state of affairs could not survive without major abuses: corruption and the squandering of resources on a vast scale such as could only be borne by a nation with as yet unlimited economic prospects.

The figure who now makes his appearance together with this system of the plebiscitary party machine is the "boss." What is the boss? A political capitalist entrepreneur who procures votes at his own expense and his own risk. He may have acquired his first contacts as a lawyer or a saloon keeper or as the owner of a similar business, or perhaps as a lender. From there he casts his net still wider until he is able to "control" a certain number of votes. Once he has reached this stage, he establishes links with the neighboring bosses.

<sup>56</sup> In English in the original.

<sup>57</sup> Weber used the English word.



Through his energy, astuteness, and, above all, discretion, he attracts the attention of men already further advanced in their careers, and he begins to rise. The boss is indispensable to the organization of the party. It is centralized in his hands. By and large, it is he who procures the necessary funds. How does he achieve this? Well, partly through members' dues; above all, by levying a tax on the wages of the officials who have acquired their office through him and his party. And then through bribes and gratuities. Whoever wishes to circumvent one of the many laws with impunity stands in need of the boss's connivance and must pay for it. Otherwise, he has to reckon with unpleasant consequences. But even all this is not enough to provide the necessary operating capital. The boss is indispensable as the direct recipient of the donations of the great finance magnates. These magnates would not entrust sums of money for electoral purposes to any paid party official or to any person who has to make his accounts available in public. The boss with his shrewd discretion in money matters is the natural person for the capitalist circles who fund elections. The typical boss is a man of absolute sobriety. He does not strive for social standing; the "professional"<sup>58</sup> is looked down on in "high society." He seeks nothing but power, power as the source of money but also for its own sake. He works in the shadows; that is where he differs from the British "leader." You will not hear him speak in public; he suggests to speakers what they would be best advised to say, but he himself remains silent. He normally accepts no office for himself, except that of senator in the second chamber. For, since the constitution empowers senators to take part in the patronage of offices, the leading bosses often take up seats there in person. Offices are allocated primarily for services rendered to the party. But the allocation of posts in return for money donations is very common, and some offices have particular rates attached to them. This is a system for selling offices that would have been very familiar from the monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, inclusive of the papal states.

The boss has no firm political "principles"; he is completely without convictions and is interested only in how to attract votes. Not infrequently, he is a fairly uneducated man. In private, however, his life is normally correct and beyond reproach. Only in his political ethics does he inevitably adjust to the average standards of morality in political action that happen to be the norm, just as many of us Germans are likely to have done in the realm of the

<sup>58</sup> Weber used the English word.

economy when goods were in short supply and hoarding was rife.<sup>59</sup> The fact that as a "professional," as a professional politician, he is looked down on socially leaves him cold. The fact that he neither fills the great offices of the Union himself nor desires to do so has the advantage that where the bosses think it will attract votes, it is not uncommon for intelligent people outside the party to be adopted as candidates, well-known figures of repute and not just the old party notables, as is the case in Germany. Thus the very structure of these unprincipled parties with their socially despised power brokers has propelled able men into the presidency who would never have managed to achieve high office in Germany. Needless to say, the bosses will resist any outsider who represents a threat to their own sources of money and power. But in the competition for the goodwill of the voters, it is not unusual for them to have found themselves obliged to stoop to endorse candidates who are thought to be the enemies of corruption.

In America, then, we have party machines built on strikingly capitalist lines. They are tightly organized from top to bottom and are underpinned by stable political clubs of the type of Tammany Hall. These clubs are organized almost like religious orders and strive exclusively to maximize profits by achieving political control of town halls, above all, since these are the most desirable objects of exploitation. What made this structure of party life possible was the high degree of democratization of the United States because it was "a young country." This connection between youth and democracy means that now, however, the system is in slow decline. America cannot continue to be ruled by amateurs. Fifteen years ago, when one asked American workers why they let themselves be governed by politicians whom they professed to despise, they would answer: "We would rather our officials were people we spit on, than be like you and be ruled by a caste of officials who spit on us." That was the old attitude of American "democracy." Yet even at that time the socialists took a completely different view, and this situation is no longer tolerated. Government by amateurs no longer suffices, and the Civil Service Reform<sup>60</sup> is now creating lifelong pensionable posts in constantly growing numbers. In consequence, posts are now being filled by university-educated officials who are just as incorruptible and

<sup>59</sup> When food was in short supply during the war, as a consequence of the Allied blockade of Germany, it became customary to make excursions to the countryside, where the farmers still had food supplies that they were willing to sell.

<sup>60</sup> This phrase is in English.

competent as in Germany. Around one hundred thousand offices are no longer objects for booty after each election but are pensionable and dependent upon a candidate's qualifications. This will gradually push the spoils system into the background, and the face of the party leadership will probably change then, as well. The only thing is that we do not yet know in what way.

In *Germany*, the crucial factors influencing the operation of politics have been essentially as follows. First, the impotence of the parliaments. The consequence was that no one with leadership qualities wished to stay in Parliament for the longer term. Suppose anyone did wish to enter Parliament—what could he achieve there? If a post fell vacant in a chancellor's office he could say to the departmental head concerned: "I have a very competent man in my constituency. He would be a suitable candidate. Why don't you take him?" And this was readily agreed. But that was more or less all that a German member of Parliament could do to satisfy his instincts for power—if he had any. In addition, and this second factor was what underlay the first, there was the enormous importance of the trained, professional civil service in Germany. In this respect we in Germany led the world. The professional civil service was so important that it was able to assert its claims not just to civil service posts but also to ministerial office. Only last year someone remarked during the debate on "parliamentarization" in the Bavarian Provincial Diet that talented people would refuse to become officials if ministerial posts were given to members of Parliament. Officialdom proved able to evade systematically the kind of control exerted in Britain by debates in committee. In this way the German parliaments were prevented (with very few exceptions) from producing really competent administrative heads from among their numbers.

The third factor was that Germany, in contrast to America, had parties based on political conviction that claimed, at least ostensibly in good faith, that their members represented particular "world-views." However, the two most important of these parties, the Center Party and the Social Democratic Party, were born minority parties, and this was in accordance with their declared intentions.<sup>61</sup> The leading circles of the Center Party never disguised the fact that they were opposed to parliamentary rule, because they feared that this would condemn them to be in the minority and that this in turn

<sup>61</sup> The Center Party was destined to remain a minority party because it essentially represented Roman Catholics in Germany; the same thing is true of Social Democracy, which set out to represent only the working class.

would make it harder than before to find posts for their careerists, as they had done previously, by exerting pressure on the government. Social Democracy was a minority party on principle and an obstacle to the introduction of parliamentary government because it did not wish to become contaminated by contact with the existing bourgeois political order. The fact that both parties excluded themselves from the parliamentary system made that system unworkable.

What, then, was the fate of professional politicians in Germany? They had no power or responsibility and could only play a somewhat inferior role as notables. The consequence was that they were animated once again by the typical instincts to be found in "guilds" everywhere. In the circle of these notables who made their living from whatever little positions they held, it was impossible for men not cast in the same mold to rise to prominence. I could list a large number of names from every party, and, of course, that includes Social Democracy, of people whose political careers ended in tragedy because they involved men who had leadership qualities but who were not tolerated by the notables for that very reason. All our parties have experienced this development into a guild of notables. Bebel,<sup>62</sup> for example, was still a leader by virtue of his temperament and integrity, however modest his intellectual accomplishments were. The fact that he was a martyr, that he never abused the trust of the masses (in their eyes, at least), meant that they stood behind him to a man, and there was no power in the party that could have provided him with a serious challenge. After his death this situation came to an end, and the rule of the officials began. Trade union officials, party secretaries, and journalists all came to the fore; bureaucratic instincts dominated the party, a highly principled bureaucracy—of rare integrity, we may say, when we consider conditions in other countries, particularly the frequently corrupt union officials in America—but the consequences of bureaucracy already alluded to also made their appearance in the party.

From the 1880s onward, the bourgeois parties became guilds of notables pure and simple. It is true that occasionally the parties attracted able minds from outside the party for publicity purposes and so that they could say, "we have this or that famous person in our ranks." As far as possible, however, they made sure that these

<sup>62</sup> August Bebel (1840–1913) was one of the cofounders of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. He was elected to the Reichstag in 1875 and led the party until his death. Weber refers to him as a martyr because under Bismarck's anti-Socialist legislation, Bebel was repeatedly imprisoned for his convictions.

people did not stand for election, and only where it was unavoidable and one or other of them insisted did it occur.

The same spirit prevails in Parliament. Our parliamentary parties were guilds and still are. Every speech that is made in the plenary sessions of the Reichstag is previously subjected to a thoroughgoing censorship in the party. This explains why they are so unutterably boring. The only members who can speak are those who have been summoned. A more glaring contrast with the British practice, or indeed the French system (though for entirely opposite reasons), is scarcely imaginable.

At present, following the gigantic upheaval that people customarily refer to as a revolution, a change may now be in progress. Perhaps, but it is not certain. The change began when we started to observe new kinds of party organization. These were amateur organizations in the first instance. They were staffed frequently by students from the different universities who would say to a man to whom they ascribed leadership qualities, "We shall do what has to be done for you, if you tell us what it is." Second, there were commercial organizations. People would come to men to whom they ascribed leadership qualities and offer to take over the business of canvassing for votes in exchange for a fixed payment for each vote. If you were to ask me which of the two methods I would regard as the more reliable from a technical and political point of view, I would, I believe, prefer the second. But both were bubbles that quickly appeared and vanished again just as quickly. The existing apparatuses reorganized themselves but kept on functioning. Such phenomena were merely symptomatic of the belief that new apparatuses would automatically appear if only there were leaders. But the technical characteristics of proportional representation were sufficient to preclude their emergence in advance. Only a few dictators of the street made their appearance, and they then disappeared once more.<sup>63</sup> And only the dictatorship of the street has a following that is subject to an order of strict discipline. It is this that explains the power of these tiny minorities.

If we assume that this were to change, we need to be clear, after what we have already said, that to put plebiscitary leaders in charge of parties means that their followers suffer from a "loss of soul," what we might call their spiritual proletarianization. To be of use as

<sup>63</sup> Weber's marginal note makes it clear that he was thinking of the establishment of the German Communist Party by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in December 1918. They were murdered by right-wing extremists on January 15, 1919.

an apparatus for their leader they must obey blindly, they must become a machine in the American sense, undisturbed by the vanity of notables or by any pretensions to opinions of their own. Lincoln's election was made possible only by an organization of this type, and as we have pointed out, the caucus had the same function in Gladstone's case. That is the price that has to be paid for having leaders. But there is only this stark choice: either a democracy with a leader together with a "machine" or a leaderless democracy, in other words, the rule of the "professional politicians" who have no vocation and who lack the inner, charismatic qualities that turn a man into a leader. And that leads to what the rebels in any given party usually call rule by a "clique." For the time being we have only the latter in Germany. And for the future, this situation will be guaranteed, for the Reich at least, first, by the likelihood that the Upper House [*Bundesrat*] will be revived, which will necessarily restrict the power of the Reichstag and with that its importance as a place from which leaders are selected. It will be guaranteed, second, by the system of proportional representation as it exists at present. This is a typical feature of a leaderless democracy, not only because it favors horse-trading among the notables for positions but also because it opens the doors for pressure groups to force the inclusion of their officials in the lists, thus creating an unpolitical parliament in which there is no room for genuine leaders.

The only safety valve for the desire for leadership could be provided by the office of president of the Reich if the president were to be directly elected, instead of indirectly, by Parliament. Leaders could emerge and be selected on the basis of proven ability if, in the large municipalities, directly elected town dictators were to make their appearance on the scene with the right to provide their own administrative personnel. This is what happened in the United States, wherever a serious attempt was made to combat corruption. But this could come about only if a party organization existed that was tailored to the needs of such elections. But because all petty bourgeois parties are hostile to leaders, including and above all Social Democracy, we cannot say anything about the future shape the parties will take and what prospects there are of such ideas becoming a reality.

It is not possible to see today, therefore, how the business of politics can take the outward shape of a "profession," and even less what prospects of a worthwhile political challenge might open up for people who are politically talented. The man who is compelled by his financial situation to live "from" politics will always find that



the typical direct paths will involve choosing between journalism or a post as party official. Or else he could consider a post with one of the representative bodies: trade union, chamber of commerce, farmers' association, craft workers' chamber, industrial chamber, employers' associations, and so on, or the appropriate positions in local government. Nothing further can be said about the outward shape of the profession except that the party official shares with the journalist the odium of being "*déclassé*." He will, unfortunately, always have the actual or unspoken rebuke of "hired hack" ringing in his ears, in the case of the journalist, or "hired speaker," in the case of the official. Anyone who lacks inner defenses against accusations of this kind and is unable to find the proper retort to them should avoid such a career, because in addition to the risk of exposing himself to grave temptations, he may find that it turns out to be full of disappointments.

We may inquire what inner pleasures may be expected from a political career and what are the personal qualifications called for in those who choose it?

Well, to start with, it provides a sense of power. Even in what may be quite a modest post formally, the professional politician may feel he has been raised above the commonplace by his discovery that he has influence on people, that he has his share of power over them, but above all that he holds in his hands a strand of some important historical process. But the question now confronting such a politician is: What qualities does he need to do justice to this power (however narrowly circumscribed it may be) and hence to the responsibility that it imposes on him? This takes us onto the terrain of ethical questions. For to ask what kind of a human being one must be to have the right to grasp the spokes of the wheel of history is to ask an ethical question.

We can say that three qualities, above all, are of decisive importance for a politician: passion, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of proportion. Passion in the sense of a *commitment to the matter in hand* [*Sachlichkeit*], that is, the passionate dedication to a "cause" [*Sache*], to the God or demon that presides over it. Not in the sense of that inner state of mind that my late friend Georg Simmel was in the habit of describing as "sterile excitement." That state of mind is characteristic of a certain type of intellectual, Russian intellectuals above all (though by no means all of them!), and now plays such a great part among our intellectuals, too, in this carnival that is being flattered with the proud name of "revolution." For this excitement is no more than an aimless and unfocused "romanticism

of the intellectually interesting," devoid of a sense of responsibility for any cause whatever. For mere passion, however sincerely felt, is not enough in itself. It cannot make a politician of anyone, unless service to a "cause" also means that a sense of *responsibility* toward that cause is made the decisive guiding light of action. And for that (and this is the crucial psychological characteristic of the politician) a *sense of proportion* is required, the ability to allow realities to impinge on you while maintaining an inner calm and composure. What is needed, in short, is a *distance* from people and things. The "absence of distance," pure and simple, is one of the deadly sins of every politician and one of those qualities which, if instilled into our intellectuals, will condemn them to political impotence. For the heart of the problem is how to forge a unity between hot passion and a cool sense of proportion in one and the same person. Politics is made with the mind, not with other parts of the body or the soul. And yet if politics is to be an authentic human activity and not just a frivolous intellectual game, commitment to it must be born of passion and be nourished by it. Even so, the ability to keep the soul in check is what characterizes the passionate politician and distinguishes his attitude from the "sterile excitement" of the amateur. This can be achieved only by acquiring the habit of distance, in every sense of the word. The "strength" of a political "personality" means, primarily, the possession of these qualities.

Thus the politician is faced daily and hourly with the task of overcoming in himself a very trivial, all-too-human enemy: common or garden *vanity*, the deadly enemy of all dedication to a cause and of all distance, in this case, the distance from oneself.

Vanity is a very widespread quality, and perhaps no one is entirely free of it. And in academic and scholarly circles it is a kind of occupational disease. But in the case of the scholar, repugnant though it may be, it is relatively innocuous in the sense that as a rule it does not disrupt the business of scholarship. It is quite otherwise with politicians. For politicians, the striving for *power* is an unavoidable tool [*Mittel*] of their trade. Thus the "power instinct," as it is often called, belongs among their normal attributes. However, the sin against the Holy Spirit of their profession begins where this striving for power is *separated from the matter in hand* and becomes an object purely of self-intoxication instead of something that enters exclusively into the service of their "cause." For ultimately there are only two kinds of mortal sin in the field of politics: the lack of commitment to a cause and the lack of a sense of responsibility that is often, but not always, identical with it. Vanity, the

need to thrust oneself center stage, is what is most likely to lead the politician into the temptation of committing either or both of these sins. All the more, as the demagogue is forced to play for "effect." Because he is concerned only with the "impression" he is making, he always runs the risk both of turning into an actor and of taking too lightly his responsibility for his own actions. His lack of objectivity leads him to strive for the glittering facade of power, instead of its reality, while his lack of a sense of responsibility seduces him into enjoying power for its own sake, rather than for its substantive purpose. For although, or rather *because*, power is an unavoidable tool of all politics, and the striving for power, therefore, is one of its driving forces, there is no more destructive distortion of political energy than when the parvenu swaggers around, boasting of his power, conceitedly reveling in its reflected glory—or indeed any worship of power for its own sake. An energetically fostered cult that has grown up in Germany, as elsewhere, has sought to idealize the mere "power politician." Such figures may make a strong impression, but in actual fact their activity is empty and meaningless. The critics of "power politics" are completely right about this. There have been a number of instances when the typical representatives of this cast of mind have suddenly suffered an inner collapse, exposing the internal weakness and impotence lurking behind this showy but entirely vacuous pose. This pose is the product of an exceedingly impoverished and superficial indifference toward the *meaning* of human activity, a blasé attitude that remains completely blind to the tragedy in which all action is ensnared, political action above all.

It is entirely true and a fundamental fact of all history (though one we cannot explore further here) that the ultimate product of political activity frequently, indeed, as a matter of course, fails utterly to do justice to its original purpose and may even be a travesty of it. Nevertheless, this purpose, this service on behalf of a *cause*, cannot be dispensed with if action is to have any internal support. The *nature* of the cause in whose service the politician strives for power and makes use of power is a matter of belief. He may serve national or universally human goals, social and ethical goals, or goals that are cultural, worldly, or religious. He may be motivated by a powerful faith in "progress" (however this is defined), or he may coolly reject faith of this kind; he can claim to be acting in the service of an "idea," or he may wish to reject such claims on principle and choose instead to promote external goals of ordinary life. But some belief or other must always be *present*. Otherwise, even what seem outwardly to be the most glorious political successes

will be cursed—and rightly so—because they will have no more meaning and purpose than events in the animal kingdom.

What we have said up to now has brought us to a discussion of the final problem that preoccupies us this evening: the *ethos* of politics as a "cause." Quite apart from its specific goals, what vocation can politics have within the overall moral economy of our conduct of life? Where is what we might term the ethical location in which politics is at home? At this point we find ourselves caught up in a conflict of ultimate worldviews, and it falls to us to *choose* between them. Let us then make a resolute attempt to tackle this problem, which has recently been addressed from what is in my view a completely wrong angle.

Let us begin by liberating it from a quite trivial distortion. Ethics can sometimes make its appearance in what is morally a highly unfortunate role. Let us consider some examples. Take the case of a man whose affections have turned away from one woman to another. He will be an unusual man if he does not experience the need to justify this to himself by saying, "She was not worthy of my love" or "She has disappointed me" or by coming up with other "reasons" of a similar sort. This is a highly unchivalrous reaction to the blunt reality that he no longer loves her and that she must put up with that. Even more unchivalrously, he goes on to invent a "legitimacy" that enables him to put himself in the right and add to her misfortune by trying to put her in the wrong. The successful rival for a woman's affections behaves in like manner: his predecessor must be the more worthless of the two, for he would not otherwise have emerged the loser. And obviously, it is no different after a victorious war when the victor asserts with a wholly discreditable self-righteousness, "I won because I was in the right." Or, take the case of a man who collapses mentally under the strain of the horrors of war. Instead simply of saying, "It was all too much," he may feel the need to justify his own war weariness to himself by replacing it with the feeling that he could not put up with any more because he had been forced to fight for an immoral cause. And the same thing holds true for those on the losing side. There is no point in complaining like old women who start looking for the "guilty party" once the war is over, when in reality the war was the product of the structures of society. Instead, every uncomplaining, manly person will say to the enemy: "We lost the war—you have won it. That's over and done with. So let us now talk about what conclusions we must draw with regard to the *objective* [*sachlichen*] interests that were at stake, and—this is the main thing—in the light of our responsibility for the

future, which must weigh most heavily on the victor." Everything else is unworthy and will exact its own retribution. A nation can forgive damage to its interests, but not an assault on its honor, least of all in the spirit of sanctimonious self-righteousness. Every new document that comes to light after decades have passed will revive undignified quarrels and stir up all the hatred and anger once more, whereas our task should be to make sure that *morally* the war is laid to rest once it is over. This can be achieved only through a combination of matter-of-factness and chivalry and, above all, by respecting other people's *dignity*. It can never be brought about by an "ethic" that amounts in reality to undignified behavior on both sides. Instead of focusing on those issues that concern the politician, namely, the future and our responsibility for the future, such an ethic becomes immersed in questions of past guilt, which are politically sterile because they can never be resolved. To become so *immersed* is political guilt if anything is. In the process, moreover, the participants can easily overlook the inevitable distortion of the entire problem by very material interests: the interest of the victor in securing the greatest possible gains, both moral and material, the hopes of the defeated that they will obtain various concessions in exchange for confessions of guilt.<sup>64</sup> If anything is truly *mean and base*, this is it, and it is the consequence of using "ethics" to "prove" one is "in the right."

If that is so, what is the true relation between ethics and politics? Have they absolutely nothing in common, as has occasionally been maintained? Or is the opposite the case: that the ethic that applies to political action is "the same ethic" that holds true for any other activity? It has sometimes been claimed that these two assertions are mutually exclusive. Either one or the other must be right. But is it then true that there is any system of ethics in the world in which substantially the *same* commandments can be proposed for all relationships, whether erotic, business, family and official relations, relations to one's wife, the greengrocer's assistant, one's son, competitors, friends, and the accused in the dock? Can the ethical demands made

<sup>64</sup> Weber alludes here to the policy adopted by Kurt Eisner, who was briefly prime minister in Bavaria. Eisner, together with large parts of his own party, the Independent Socialists (USPD), was convinced that Germany's position in the peace negotiations would be improved by the unreserved confession of Germany's guilt for the outbreak of World War I. Accordingly, he published documents showing that the German government had encouraged Austria-Hungary to take a hard line toward Serbia and had consciously accepted the risk of widening the conflict to embrace the whole of Europe. See the Introduction.

on politics really be quite indifferent to the fact that politics operates with a highly specific means, namely, power, behind which *violence* lies concealed? Is it not obvious that the Bolshevik and Spartacist<sup>65</sup> ideologues are achieving exactly the *same* results as any militarist dictator precisely because they use this tool of politics? How, then, other than by the identity of the rulers and their amateurish ways, are we to distinguish the rule of the Councils of Workers and Soldiers<sup>66</sup> from that of any potentate under the old regime? How are we to distinguish between the polemics leveled by the majority of the representatives of the supposedly new ethics at the opponents they criticize and the polemics of any other demagogues? By their noble intentions, we shall be told! Well and good. But it is the methods they use that we are talking about here, and the nobility of their ultimate intentions is also claimed by the people they oppose and with a sincerity that is just as genuine. "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword,"<sup>67</sup> and conflict is everywhere the same. So, what about the ethics of the *Sermon on the Mount*? The Sermon on the Mount (and by this is meant the absolute ethics of the Gospel) is a far more serious business than is imagined by those who like to quote its commandments nowadays. In truth, it is no laughing matter. We may say of it what has been said about causality in science: it is no hansom cab that can be stopped anywhere, to jump into or out of at will.<sup>68</sup> Rather, the sermon is a matter of all *or* nothing; *that* is the point of it

<sup>65</sup> The Spartakus League (named in memory of a slave who had led a rebellion in ancient Rome) was a left-wing socialist group that was established in 1916 in opposition to World War I. In December 1918 it re-formed itself into the German Communist Party (KPD).

<sup>66</sup> These revolutionary councils (= "soviets") were established in Russia after the February Revolution of 1917. Nominally, they were the chief organ of revolutionary authority, but in practice their powers were undermined by the growing ascendancy of the centralizing Communist Party. In Germany, similar councils were set up in November 1918, and they forced the kaiser and the other German princes into abdication and exile. After attempts to seize power regionally (e.g., in Bavaria) and nationally, they were defeated in the spring of 1919 and put down brutally by an alliance of troops belonging to the central government and the so-called *Freikorps*, militias made up of extreme right-wing volunteers who had been demobilized from the regular army after the defeat of Germany.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew 26:52.

<sup>68</sup> The metaphor is derived from Arthur Schopenhauer, who asserted that the "Law of causality is not so obliging as to let itself be used like a cab, to be dismissed when we have reached our destination." See "The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason," in Julius Frauenstädt, ed., *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1898), p. 38.



if it is to amount to anything more than a set of platitudes. For example, consider the rich young man who "went away sorrowful: for he was one that had great possessions."<sup>69</sup> The Gospel's commandment is unconditional and unambiguous: give up everything that thou hast—absolutely *everything*. The politician will say that socially this is a senseless demand as long as it does not apply to *everyone*. That means taxation, redistribution, confiscation—in a word, coercion and order applied to *everyone*. The ethical commandment, however, ignores such matters *entirely*; that is its nature. Or again, consider the commandment to "turn the other cheek." Unconditionally, without asking why the other person has lashed out at you. An ethic of ignominy [*Würdelosigkeit*]<sup>70</sup>—except for a saint. That is the crux of the matter: you must be a saint in *all* respects or at least want to be one; you must live like Jesus, the apostles, St. Francis, and their like, and *then* this ethic will make sense and be the expression of true dignity. But *not otherwise*. For if, following this unworldly ethic of love, you ought to "resist not him that is evil with violence"<sup>70</sup>—the politician must abide by the opposite commandment: "You *shall* use force to resist evil, for otherwise you will be *responsible* for its running amok." Anyone who wishes to act in accordance with the ethic of the Gospel should abstain from going on strike—for strikes are a form of coercion. Instead, he should join the company unions. Above all, such a person should not speak of "revolution." For surely this ethic does not intend to teach that of all wars civil war is the only legitimate one. The pacifist who acts in accordance with the Gospel will refuse to take up arms or will throw them away, as was recommended in Germany, so that we might perform our moral duty to put an end to the war and thus to all war. The politician will say that the only certain way to discredit war for the *foreseeable* future would have been a peace on the basis of the *status quo*. For in that event the nations would have asked themselves why the war had been fought. It would have been fought for nothing at all, an absurdity. But that is now not possible. For the war will have turned out to be politically profitable for the victors, or at least for some of them. And what is responsible for that result is the very behavior that made it impossible for us to resist in the first place. Now, once the period of exhaustion is over, *it is peace that will be discredited, not war*. And this will be the consequence of an absolutist ethic.

<sup>69</sup> Matthew 19:21.

<sup>70</sup> "But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39).

Finally, there is the duty to tell the truth. For an absolutist ethic this duty is paramount. Some people have inferred from this, therefore, that what was needed was the publication of all documents, especially those that incriminated our own nation. And what followed from this unilateral publication was a confession of guilt, itself one-sided, unconditional and heedless of its consequences. The politician will find that the cause of truth is not advanced by the misuse of these documents and the renewed unleashing of passions but rather is certain to be obscured by it. He will discover that only an all-around systematic inquiry by nonpartisan witnesses could be fruitful, while every other approach may well lead to consequences for the nation that cannot be made good for decades. But an absolutist ethic simply refuses to *inquire* about "consequences."

*This* is the crucial point. We need to be clear that all ethically oriented action can be guided by either of two fundamentally different, irredeemably incompatible maxims: it can be guided by an "ethics of conviction" or an "ethics of responsibility." This does not mean that an ethics of conviction is identical with irresponsibility or an ethics of responsibility with a lack of conviction. Needless to say, there can be no question of that. But there is a profound abyss between acting in accordance with the maxim governing an ethics of conviction and acting in tune with an ethics of responsibility. In the former case this means, to put it in religious terms: "A Christian does what is right and leaves the outcome to God,"<sup>71</sup> while in the latter you must answer for the (foreseeable) *consequences* of your actions. You may be able to prove to a syndicalist<sup>72</sup> who is a convinced adherent of an ethics of conviction that in all likelihood the consequences of his actions will be to improve the prospects of the reactionaries, to increase the oppression of his own class and to hamper its rise. But however convincing your proofs may be, you

<sup>71</sup> According to the editors of the *Gesamtausgabe* of Max Weber's writings, this quotation may be traced back to a remark made by Luther in his lecture on the book of Genesis, "Fac tuum officium, et eventum Deo permitte," *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 44 (Weimar: Böhlhaus-Nachfolger, 1915), p. 78.

<sup>72</sup> Syndicalism wished to bring about the emancipation of the working class by means of "direct action" against the immediate class enemy—that is, the employers. Direct action included general strikes as demonstrations but not parliamentary methods as traditional trade-union tactics. Although such action was not expected to lead immediately to the overthrow of capitalism, it was hoped that in time the foundations of capitalism would be shaken. Syndicalism's ultimate goal was a decentralized society based on self-managing production units, not the all-embracing bureaucratic system aspired to by Socialist parties.

will make no impression on him at all. Such a man believes that if an action performed out of pure conviction has evil consequences, then the responsibility must lie not with the agent but with the world, the stupidity of men—or the will of God who created them thus. With the ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, a man reckons with exactly those average human failings. As Fichte has justly pointed out, he has absolutely no right to assume humankind's goodness and perfection.<sup>73</sup> He does not feel that he is in a position to shift the consequences of his actions, where they are foreseeable, onto others. He will say, "These consequences are to be ascribed to my actions." With an ethics of conviction, one feels "responsible" only for ensuring that the flame of pure conviction, for example, the flame of protest against the injustice of the social order, should never be extinguished. To keep on reigniting it is the purpose of his actions. These actions, when judged from the standpoint of their possible success, are entirely irrational; they can and should have merely exemplary value.

But even this does not exhaust the problem. No ethic in the world can ignore the fact that in many cases the achievement of "good" ends is inseparable from the use of morally dubious or at least dangerous means and that we cannot escape the possibility or even probability of evil side effects. And no ethic in the world can say when, and to what extent, the ethically good end can "justify" the ethically dangerous means and its side effects.

In politics, the decisive means is the use of force. The extent of the moral tension between means and ends can be gauged from the case of the revolutionary Socialists (of the Zimmerwald tendency).<sup>74</sup> As is

<sup>73</sup> Fichte cites a passage from Machiavelli's *The Discourses* in which the latter advises every statesman to act on the assumption that humankind's evil nature is a basic fact of life, and that people instantly display this evil nature whenever the opportunity arises. Fichte adds that this fundamental principle of Machiavelli's political doctrine is self-evidently true and has lost none of its validity. *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. 3 (Bonn: A. Marcus, 1835), p. 420.

<sup>74</sup> The Zimmerwald tendency refers to a conference of Socialists held in Zimmerwald in Switzerland in September 1915 to work out an "internationalist" response to the war and counter the national loyalties to which Socialists of the belligerent nations had fallen prey. It was attended most notably by Lenin, although his radical point of view did not prevail. He had called for an appeal to soldiers and workers to lay down their arms and go on strike against the war. However, French Socialists pointed out that Lenin would be quite safe in Switzerland, while any soldiers and workers following his advice would be liable to the death penalty for treason. The compromise manifesto adopted called for "peace without indemnities and without annexations" on the basis of the "self-determination of peoples."

generally known, even during the war these Socialists adopted the principle that we might succinctly formulate as follows: "If we face the choice of either another few years' war, after which there will be revolution, or else peace now but no revolution, our choice must be: another few years' war!" And to the further question: "What can this revolution achieve?" every scientifically schooled Socialist would have answered that there could be no question of a transition to an economy that could be called Socialist in *his* sense of the word. Instead, yet another bourgeois economy would emerge, but with the difference that its feudal elements and the vestiges of dynastic rule would have been stripped away. So they would approve of "another few years' war"—for this modest gain! We shall surely be permitted to say that however firm our Socialist convictions might be, we might legitimately reject the end that called for such means. But this is precisely the situation with Bolshevism and Spartacism and indeed with revolutionary socialism of every kind. It is, of course, ludicrous to see the Socialists *morally* denouncing the "politicians of violence" of the old regime for making use of exactly the same means as they are willing to use themselves—however justified they may be in rejecting their *ends*.

Here, with this problem of justifying the means by the ends, we see the inevitable failure of an ethics of conviction in general. And in fact, it logically has only one possibility. That is to *repudiate every* action that makes use of morally suspect means, logically. In the world of realities, of course, we see again and again how the representatives of an ethics of conviction suddenly become transformed into chiliastic<sup>75</sup> prophets. For example, people who have just preached "love against force" are found calling for the use of force the very next moment. It is always the very *last* use of force that will then bring about a situation in which *all* violence will have been destroyed—just as our military leaders tell the soldiers that every offensive will be the last. This one will bring victory and then peace. The man who embraces an ethics of conviction is unable to tolerate the ethical irrationality of the world. He is a cosmic, ethical "rationalist." All of you who know your Dostoyevsky will remember the scene with the Grand Inquisitor,<sup>76</sup> where the problem is

<sup>75</sup> That is, prophets who believe in a future thousand-year age of blessedness, the Second Coming of Christ or a Golden Age.

<sup>76</sup> From Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, book 5, chapter 5. In that scene Christ reappears in Seville at the time of the Inquisition, only to be re-arrested and sentenced to death by the Grand Inquisitor because his presence interferes with the power of the church, which alone understands how to distribute bread among humankind and to save them from the curse of freedom.

cogently set out. It is not possible to reconcile an ethics of conviction with an ethics of responsibility or to decree which end can justify *which* means, if indeed you wish to make any concessions to this principle at all.

My colleague F. W. Foerster,<sup>77</sup> whom I esteem very highly personally because of the undoubted integrity of his convictions, while rejecting him unconditionally as a politician, expresses the belief in his book that we can get around the difficulty with the aid of the simple thesis that nothing but good can come from good and nothing but evil from evil. Needless to say, if that were true, the entire problem would cease to exist. But it is astonishing for such an assertion to see the light of day 2,500 years after the first appearance of the Upanishads. Not only the entire course of world history but also every dispassionate scrutiny of our everyday experience tells us the opposite. The history of every religion on earth is based on the conviction that the reverse is true. After all, the age-old problem of theodicy asks the question: How could a power that is said to be both omnipotent and good create such an irrational world of unmerited suffering, unpunished injustice, and incorrigible stupidity? Either that power is not omnipotent or it is not good, or else—a third possibility—life is governed by completely different principles of compensation and retribution, principles that we can interpret metaphysically or that are destined always to elude our attempts at interpretation. This problem, the experience of the irrationality of the universe, has always been the driving force of the entire history of religion. The Indian doctrine of *karma*, Persian dualism, original sin, predestination, and the *deus absconditus*<sup>78</sup> have all grown out of this experience. The early Christians, too, were well aware that the world was governed by demons and that whoever becomes involved with politics, that is to say, with power and violence as a means, has made a pact with satanic powers. It follows that as far as a person's actions are concerned, it is *not* true that nothing but good comes from good and nothing but evil from evil, but rather quite frequently the opposite is the case. Anyone who does not realize this is in fact a mere child in political matters.

<sup>77</sup> See note 19 in "Science as a Vocation." The book referred to here is his *Staatsbürgerliche Erziehung* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1914), p. 202.

<sup>78</sup> The idea that God is hidden, that is, that revelation cannot be fully communicated in books and sermons, is found in many religions, including Hasidic Judaism and the Hinduism of the Upanishads. A strain of Christian theology has argued that God is best known through a "negative" theology that makes no positive statements about God. This idea was taken up by, among others, Martin Luther, who maintained that the revealed God remained the *hidden God*.

Religious ethics has made various accommodations with the fact that we find ourselves placed in different cultures [*Lebensordnungen*], each of which is subject to different laws. Hellenistic polytheism sacrificed to Aphrodite as well as to Hera, to Dionysos as well as to Apollo, knowing full well that these divinities were often at loggerheads with one another. The Hindu culture made each of the different professions into the object of a particular ethical law, a *dharma*. It then placed them in castes, separating them from one another forever in a fixed hierarchy from which there was no escape for those born into a particular caste, other than through their reincarnation in the next life. In this way the different occupations were positioned at varying distances from the highest spiritual goods. This made it possible for Hinduism to elaborate the *dharma* of each individual caste in accordance with the intrinsic laws governing each profession, from the ascetics and the Brahmans down to the villains and whores. These included war and politics. One can see how war was inserted into the general culture in the *Bhagavad Gita*, in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. "Do what is necessary," in other words, do whatever "work" is prescribed by the *dharma* of the warrior caste and its rules as a duty necessary for the conduct of war. According to this faith, to do this "work" does not detract from religious salvation but contributes to it.<sup>79</sup> Acceptance into Indra's heaven<sup>80</sup> was as certain a reward for the Indian warrior who had died a hero's death as was Valhalla for the Germanic warrior. But the Indian warrior would have scorned nirvana just as his Germanic equivalent would have despised the Christian paradise with its angelic choirs. This specialized approach to ethics made it possible for Indian philosophy to develop an internally consistent treatment of the royal art of politics, focusing entirely on its own particular laws and indeed intensifying them radically. A genuinely radical "Machiavellianism," in the popular sense of the word,

<sup>79</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita*, or "Song of God," which was written in the first or second century AD, is regarded as one of the greatest of the Hindu scriptures. It consists of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and his friend and charioteer Krishna, who is also an earthly incarnation of the god Vishnu. The discussion takes place on the eve of battle, when Arjuna sees many of his kinsmen and friends lined up on the opposing side. He considers whether it would not be better to throw down his arms and allow himself to be slain than to engage in a just but cruel war. Krishna recalls him to his sense of duty as a warrior by pointing out to him that the higher way is the dispassionate discharge of his duty, performed with faith in God and without selfish concern for personal triumph or gain.

<sup>80</sup> Indra was the warrior king of the heavens, the god of war and storm.



received its classic formulation in Indian literature as early as Kautilya's *Arthashastra*<sup>81</sup> (long before the Christian era, allegedly from the time of Chandragupta). Machiavelli's *The Prince* is harmless in comparison. It is well known that in Catholic ethics, which Foerster generally finds congenial, the *consilia evangelica*<sup>82</sup> constitute a special ethics intended for those endowed with the charisma of the holy life. In it we find the monk who may not shed blood or earn his living, and next to him the pious knight and the burgher, of whom the one may do the first and the other the second. The hierarchy of ethical goods and its integration in an organic doctrine of salvation is less logical than in India, as was only to be expected, given the premises of the Christian faith. The corruption of the world through original sin should have made it relatively simple to integrate violence into ethics as a way of punishing sin and the heretics who placed human souls in jeopardy.

However, the unworldly imperatives of the Sermon on the Mount, which are in complete harmony with an ethics of conviction, and the absolute demands made by the religious natural law based on it retained their revolutionary power. In almost every age of social upheaval they appeared on the scene with elemental force. In particular they created the radical, pacifist sects, one of which, in Pennsylvania, tried the experiment of a polity that refused to use force in its relations with the outside world. This proved tragic in the event since, when the War of Independence broke out, the Quakers were unable to take up arms in defense of their ideals, even though it was those ideals that were being defended in the war.

Normal Protestantism, in contrast, legitimated the state, in other words, the use of force, absolutely, as a divine institution, and in particular it endorsed the legitimate authoritarian state. Luther absolved the individual from the ethical responsibility for war and shifted that burden onto the shoulders of the authorities. To obey them in matters not affecting faith, it was held, could never be wrong. In the same way Calvinism accepted the use of force in principle as a means of defending the faith, religious war, in short. This had been Islam's natural element from the very outset. It is evident

<sup>81</sup> Kautilya was an Indian statesman and philosopher who was said to have been the chief minister and adviser to King Chandragupta (c. 300 BC), the founder of the Maurya dynasty. His work, the *Arthashastra* (The Handbook of [the King's] Profit) was regarded as a foundational text on the state. It appeared originally in 321–296 BC. The third English edition appeared in 1929.

<sup>82</sup> The *consilia evangelica* are a body of instructions for living a Christian life; they emphasize celibacy, poverty, and obedience.

that the problem of political ethics is *not* simply the product of the modern rejection of faith that springs from the cult of the hero during the Renaissance. All religions have wrestled with it, with widely differing success; and what we have said makes it clear that things could not be otherwise. The specific use of *legitimate force* purely as such in the hands of human organizations is what determines the particular nature of all ethical problems in politics.

Whoever makes a pact with the use of force, for whatever ends (and every politician does so), is at the mercy of its particular consequences. The man who fights for his faith, whether religious or revolutionary, is particularly exposed to this risk. We need not look beyond the present to find examples. Anyone who desires to use *force* to establish absolute justice on earth needs followers, a human "apparatus." He must be able to hold out the prospect of the necessary internal and external prizes (heavenly and earthly rewards), or else this apparatus will not function. Given the conditions of modern class conflict, what is meant by internal reward is the gratification of hatred and the desire for vengeance, and especially of resentment and the need for a pseudoethical feeling of self-righteousness, in other words, the felt need to slander your opponents and denounce them as heretics. By external prizes we mean adventure, victory, booty, power, and the rewards of office. The leader is entirely dependent for his success on the functioning of this apparatus. He is dependent, therefore, on *its* motives, not on his own. He is therefore dependent on being able to keep providing the followers he relies on—the Red Guard,<sup>83</sup> the informers, the agitators—with these rewards *in perpetuity*. Since his activities must be carried out under these conditions, it is evident that what he in fact achieves is not in his own hands but is laid down for him by the predominantly base motives governing the actions of his followers. For they can only be kept under control as long as at least some of them, though probably never a majority, are inspired by a genuine belief in him personally and his cause. But this belief, even when it is subjectively sincere, is in very many cases really no more than the ethical "legitimation" of the desire for revenge, power, booty, and the rewards of office. And we must not let ourselves be persuaded otherwise about this, since the materialist interpretation of history is not a hansom cab to be picked up on an impulse, and it makes no exceptions for the agents

<sup>83</sup> The Red Guard was an armed militia recruited from the working class. They appeared first in Petrograd in the February Revolution in 1917, and their task was to guarantee public safety and defend the revolution.

of revolutions! But after the emotional excitement of revolution comes the return to the traditional *daily grind*, the hero of faith disappears, and, above all, faith itself evaporates or—and this is even more effective—becomes part of the conventional phrasemongering of political philistines and technicians. This process unfolds with particular rapidity in religious wars because they tend to be led or inspired by genuine *leaders*, prophets of revolution. For, as with every machinery of leadership, so here, too, one of the preconditions of success is that the followers undergo a process of spiritual impoverishment and routinization [*Versachlichung*], of a spiritual proletarianization in the interests of “discipline.” Thus, when the followers of a man who fights for his faith come to power, they are particularly prone to degenerate into a very ordinary class of fortune hunters.

Anyone who wishes to engage in politics at all, and particularly anyone who wishes to practice it as a profession, must become conscious of these ethical paradoxes and of his own responsibility for what may become of *him* under the pressure they exert. For, I repeat, he is entering into relations with the satanic powers that lurk in every act of violence. The great virtuosos of unworldly goodness and the love of humankind, whether from Nazareth or Assisi or the royal palaces of India, have never operated with the methods of politics, that is, the use of force. Their kingdom was “not of this world,” and yet they were and are at work in this world, and the figures of Platon Karatayev and Dostoyevsky’s saints still remain their nearest successors.<sup>84</sup> Anyone who seeks the salvation of his soul and that of others does not seek it through politics, since politics faces quite different tasks, tasks that can only be accomplished with the use of force. The genius, or the demon, of politics lives in an inner tension with the God of love as well as with the Christian God as institutionalized in the Christian churches, and it is a tension that can erupt at any time into an insoluble conflict. People knew this even in the days of church rule. An interdict in those days represented a far more oppressive use of power over people and the salvation of their souls than what Fichte termed the “cold approval” of Kantian moral judgment.<sup>85</sup> Time and again the city of Florence was

<sup>84</sup> Platon Karatayev is the saintly plebeian in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* whose simple faith helps to restore the belief of the hero, Pierre Bezukhov, in his native land. The saintly characters Weber has in mind in Dostoyevsky must include Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* and Alyosha Karamazov and Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

<sup>85</sup> According to Fichte, the moral life is based on the individual’s consciousness of his duty. However, it can only be effective if this consciousness is backed up by a feeling that he refers to as “cold approval,” in contrast to the “aesthetic feelings” of

placed under such an interdict, and yet its citizens continued to fight against the papacy. And in a reference to such situations in a beautiful passage from his *History of Florence*, if my memory serves me right, Machiavelli makes one of his heroes praise those citizens who esteemed the greatness of their native city more than the salvation of their souls.<sup>86</sup>

If you replace “native city” or “fatherland,” terms that may not be utterly straightforward to everyone at the present time, with “the future of socialism” or “international peace,” then you will be able to see the problem as it affects us today. For when men strive to attain such ideal goals by *political* action, they act in the name of an ethics of responsibility and make use of violent methods. In so doing they jeopardize the “salvation of their souls.” But to seek such salvation through religious wars that are fought from the standpoint of a pure ethics of conviction is to risk damaging and discrediting their idols for generations to come, because the participants take no responsibility for the *consequences* of their actions. In such cases the political actors remain ignorant of the satanic powers that are at work. These powers are inexorable and create consequences for their actions and also subjectively for themselves, against which they are helpless if they fail to perceive them. “The Devil is old.” And this does not refer to his age in years, to his time of life. “To understand him, best grow older.”<sup>87</sup> I have never let myself be trumped in an argument by someone simply because he has claimed the privilege of greater age. But by the same token, the mere fact that someone is twenty and I am over fifty does not in itself convince me that his achievement should make me faint with admiration. Age is not the decisive factor here. What matters is the trained ability to scrutinize the realities of life ruthlessly, to withstand them and to measure up to them inwardly.

In truth, politics is an activity of the head but by no means *only* of the head. In this respect the adherents of an ethics of conviction are in the right. But whether we *should* act in accordance with an ethics of conviction or an ethics of responsibility, and when we

pleasure. *Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*, in *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Veit, 1845), p. 167.

<sup>86</sup> The passage occurs in a letter from Machiavelli to his friend Vettori. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, translated by Allan Gilbert (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), vol. 3, p. 1150.

<sup>87</sup> This is a quotation from J. W. von Goethe, *Faust*, part 2, trans. by Philip Wayne (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), p. 99, lines 6817–8.

should choose one rather than the other, is not a matter on which we can lay down the law to anyone else. We can only say one thing. We live in an age of excitement, which you may think is *not* of a “sterile” kind, though excitement is one thing, and it is not by any means always the same as authentic passion. Now in such an age, conviction politicians may well spring up in large numbers *all of a sudden* and run riot, declaring, “The world is stupid and nasty, not I. The responsibility for the consequences cannot be laid at my door but must rest with those who employ me and whose stupidity or nastiness I shall do away with.” And if this happens, I shall say openly that I would begin by asking how much *inner gravity* lies behind this ethics of conviction, and I suspect I should come to the conclusion that in nine cases out of ten I was dealing with windbags who do not genuinely feel what they are taking on themselves but who are making themselves drunk on romantic sensations. Humanly, this is of little interest, and it fails utterly to shake my own convictions. By the same token, I find it immeasurably moving when a *mature* human being—whether young or old in actual years is immaterial—who feels the responsibility he bears for the consequences of his own actions with his entire soul and who acts in harmony with an ethics of responsibility reaches the point where he says, “Here I stand, I can do no other.”<sup>88</sup> That is authentically human and cannot fail to move us. For this is a situation that *may* befall *any* of us at some point, if we are not inwardly dead. In this sense an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility are not absolute antitheses but are mutually complementary, and only when taken together do they constitute the authentic human being who *is capable* of having a “vocation for politics.”

And now, ladies and gentlemen, let us return to these questions *in ten years' time*. I fear, as unfortunately I must, that for a whole variety of reasons, an Age of Reaction will have long since broken in on us, and little will have been accomplished of what many of you, and I openly confess, I, too, have wanted and hoped for. Perhaps not exactly nothing at all, but at least, to all appearances, very little. This is highly probable. This will not disillusion me entirely, but, of course, it is an inner burden to have to live with this knowledge. If this proves indeed to be the case, then I would like to see what will have “become,” in the inner sense of the word, of those of you who now feel yourselves to be “conviction politicians” and who share in

<sup>88</sup> Words historically attributed to Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521, explaining his refusal to recant his criticisms of the papacy.

the intoxication that this revolution involves. It would be wonderful if the situation then could resemble the one described in Shakespeare's sonnet 102:

Our love was new, and then but in the spring,  
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;  
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,  
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days.

But this is not the situation. What lies before us is not the “summer's front” but, initially at least, a polar night of icy darkness and harshness, whichever group may outwardly turn out the victor. For where there is nothing, not only will the kaiser have lost his rights but the proletarian will lose his rights, too. When this night slowly begins to recede, how many will still be alive of all those for whom the spring had seemed to bloom so gloriously? And what will have become of you all inwardly? Will everyone have become embittered or philistine, will they settle for a simple, dull acceptance of the world and their profession, or, and this is the third and not the most unlikely possibility: will they attempt a mystical escape from the world if they have the talent for it or—as happens frequently and damagingly—will they take to it against their better judgment because it is fashionable? In every such case, I shall conclude that they were *not* equal to the task they had chosen, *not* equal to the challenge of the world as it really is or to their everyday existence. They did not really, truly, and objectively have the vocation for politics in its innermost meaning that they had imagined themselves to have. They would have done better to cultivate neighborly contacts with other people, individually, in a simple and straightforward way, and apart from that, to go about their daily work without any fuss.

Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards, with a mixture of passion and a sense of proportion. It is absolutely true, and our entire historical experience confirms it, that what is possible could never have been achieved unless people had tried again and again to achieve the impossible in this world. But the man who can do this must be a leader, and not only that, he must also be a hero—in a very literal sense. And even those who are neither a leader or a hero must arm themselves with that staunchness of heart that refuses to be daunted by the collapse of all their hopes, for otherwise they will not even be capable of achieving what is possible today. The only man who has a “vocation” for politics is one who is



certain that his spirit will not be broken if the world, when looked at from his point of view, proves too stupid or base to accept what he wishes to offer it, and who, when faced with all that obduracy, can still say "Nevertheless!" despite everything.

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