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Re-Examining the Historiography of the 1848- 49 Revolutions in German Speaking Europe

An Analysis of Generational Stratification Among
Historians

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Historians writing on the 1848 German Revolutions follow fairly clear generational patterns with each generation adhering to distinctive manners of analysis and presentation. This stratification is the result of both the influence of historical events on scholarship as well as changing trends in academic approaches as applied to history and revolutionary theory alike.

Of all the political movements and upheavals of the Nineteenth Century, the revolutions within German-speaking Europe during 1848 and 1849 sport a rich and detailed historiography. Beginning with an analysis of the movement from Karl Marx and building through the years to include works from several notable historians and researchers, historical dialogue concerning the 1848-49 revolutions has seen immense intellectual development and exploration. In fact, study of the 1848-49 revolutions has reached such a height of detail that many scholars have deemed the field to be exhaustively, and even redundantly, complete. Recent scholars such as Hans Joachim Hahn, in trying to validate their own contributions acknowledge the existence of a slew of works published on the Frankfurt Assembly and the short-lived liberally united German republic.¹ Even authors from as early as the 1930's admitted to their fellows that there was little historical work left to be done concerning the failed revolutions, and in the words of Veit Valentin the revolution's "central core of events" had no room for new insights.² Such a view of a complete historiography of the 1848 revolutions among most scholars was largely accepted, and through the latter half of the 20th Century went largely unchallenged. Only in recent decades, with the slew of publications alluded to by Hahn, have historians become keen once more to tackle historical analysis of the 1848-49 revolutions in German-speaking Europe.

Clear generational divides amongst historians and other scholars writing on the 1848 revolutions may be the result of several factors. For the case of Germany, historical oversights may be due to unfortunate timing of both world and academic events. Prior to the Second World War, history was largely approached in a particular narrative style known as the traditional narrative. This particular narrative highlighted events and the actions of particular individuals or

¹ Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German Speaking Europe*, (London: Pearson Education, 2001) p. viii.

² Veit Valentin, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution 1848-49*, vol. 2, (Berlin: 1931) p. 613. In Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German Speaking Europe*, (London: Pearson Education, 2001) p. viii.

groups as the salient elements of history. History to scholars following the traditional narrative was not open to much conjecture, rather it was a series of reported facts and data to be merely recorded and reported by historians. Not until the latter half of the Twentieth Century did historians begin to take a more analytical approach towards history, framing arguments and even theories around historical data to either challenge or reinforce ideas previously presented as historical fact, eventually leading them to challenge the very idea of historical "fact".

Unfortunately for the historiography of the German Revolutions, the rise of this new form of scholarship occurred too late, and the analysis of German history in relation to the Second World War eclipsed other historical studies. The timing of this transition may contribute to the generational progression of German historical scholarship, however it does not account for more recent scholarship regarding the revolutionary nature of the 1848 movement. The phenomena may also be linked to broader academic approaches to the idea of revolution. In addition to changes in academic norms aligning with pivotal historical events, the generational stratification present among scholars writing on the events of the 1848-49 revolutions in German-speaking Europe are the result of broader scholastic approaches towards the idea of revolution.

These stratifications between three main generations of scholars holding different perspectives reflect two main scholastic views concerning the 1848-49 movement, with a stable, transitional period between them. The first group (first generation), including such authors as Karl Marx and culminating with Veit Valentin, contributed to the previously accepted and established historiography of the movement. Second (middle or second generation) come those authors active during the latter half of the Twentieth Century who largely left the core analysis of the revolutions untouched and unchallenged. Most in this group attribute 1848 to rising sentiments of nationalism in Europe as a whole, but especially in Germany. Contemporary

scholars make up the third group (third generation). These are scholars who in the last few decades have begun once again to examine the German Speaking revolutions in a new light and challenge the claims of a complete and exhaustive historiography put forth by the first generation of 1848 historians.

This is not to say that the work of the first generation of German Revolution scholars was without merit. They were merely tackling different issues and asking different questions than later scholars. Namely, they were the first group tasked with defining the 1848 uprising as revolutionary or not. First generational scholars are bounded temporally on either end of their era by the revolutions themselves and the end-point of 1948, a few years after the end of the Second World War and the centennial anniversary of the revolutions. Such reasoning lies in the fact that after the War, scholars studying Germany began to shift their focus towards the Nazi period, and most mentions of the 1848 Revolutions are in reference to such historical occurrences as Pan-Germanism or anti-Semitism and other precursors to Nazism. Additionally, the 100-year anniversary saw an upswing in publications concerning the revolutions. Earlier scholars, of course, were unaffected by the shock of Hitler's Germany and World War II, and their relative proximity to the revolutions further coloured their studies in a way that differentiates them from their later colleagues.

Facing several challenges, these early scholars sought to piece together the actual events of 1848-49 and form them into the initial historical narrative for the time. Certainly these scholars often had political or historical biases concerning the history of 1848, but each still sought to present their views in a traditional narrative form, meaning they were focused on events, figures, and individual intentions. The exception to this trend was Karl Marx, being the father of studies of class struggle and structural social analysis. However where Marx diverges

from the rest of the pack in his manner of scholarship he holds true in general function, that is to establish the initial historiography and to speak some of the first words in the academic discourse concerning 1848.

The historians Veit Valentin and Rudolph Stadelmann closed out this first generation of scholarship, with Valentin being the earlier but more prominent scholar. Instead of facing the challenge of laying the foundations for a new mode of scholarship, scholars like Valentin faced repression from the German State in the form of political censorship on account of the ideological implications of the 1848 revolutions to the German Regime at the time of their writing. Valentin's real task was to unearth the facts and events of a bygone political movement and bring them to light despite established political powers' attempts to muffle any unfavorable historical references.

Considering his writing during and immediately after the 1848 revolutions, Marx was really the first of his generation of historians who tried to critically analyze and define the events of 1848. Perhaps the most critical of the members of his scholarly generation, Marx focused on the socio-economic implications of the 1848 revolutions and how they compared with the previous English (1648) and French (1789) revolutions. In his articles, later published as a collected work under the name *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, Marx held that the Prussian Revolution (as he referred to the movement) was a late-to-the-table phenomena culminating as a "stunted after-effect of a European revolution in a backward country" rather than being truly revolutionary in its own form.³ As the Prussian Revolution sought to establish a constitutional monarchy rather than abolish one, Marx argued that it was behind previous revolutions by more

³ Karl Marx, *The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution*, Second Article, (1848), *SW I, MEW B.* 6. pp. 63-65. In *Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution*, Edited by Z. A. Jordan, pp. 282-285, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971) p. 284.

than the intermittent span of years. Ideologically, it represented a bourgeois class that "had developed so slothfully, cravenly and slowly" that instead of overthrowing the ruling class through manipulation of the proletariat it had found itself facing both the ruling class and the proletariat united behind similar interests.⁴ In contrast, the French and English revolutions, with a special emphasis placed upon the French example, were spear-headed by the bourgeoisie against the ruling elites of the time with the proletariat forming nothing more than a force to be shaped, controlled, and directed by the bourgeoisie.⁵ In this way Marx outlined the 1848 revolutions as not particularly revolutionary. Rather, they represented an anachronism born of the slower spread of liberalism and revolutionary thought to the German territories and a weaker form of feudalism with a retarded development rate compared to the rest of Europe.

Closing out the era of the first generational scholars of the 1848 Revolutions are Veit Valentin and Rudolph Stadelmann, Valentin for his recognized prominence in the field and Stadelmann for his statements published at the very end of this period in academia; just after the end of World War II and during the 100-year anniversary of the revolutions. Like Marx, Valentin was writing in a period during which many saw his studies as politically inflammatory or even dangerous. Valentin was focused on presenting a traditional narrative of the 1848 revolutions, sifting through "vast quantities of source material" to construct what a modern German scholar, Wolfram Siemann (writing in 1985) states "is still regarded as the standard history of the German revolution of 1848-9."⁶ Such studies led to political persecution early in his career, however, as his license to teach in German Universities was revoked in 1917 on account of the political implications of the failed revolutions to the then current regime of

⁴ Marx, *The Bourgeoisie*, pp. 63-65.

⁵ Marx, *The Bourgeoisie*, pp.63-65.

⁶ Wolfram Siemann, *The German Revolution of 1848-49*, Trans. By Christiane Banerji (New York: St. Martin's Press 1998) p. 5.

Germany.⁷ Despite this setback, his culminating work, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution von 1848-49* (History of the German Revolution of 1848-49) published in 1931, became the "standard work" to which Siemann refers.

The gap of time between Valentin and Stadelmann is the result of even further political-academic repression. The Nazi period in Germany resulted in an even tighter control of historical scholarship than that faced by Valentin in 1917, resulting in the emigration of many scholars trying to further Valentin's methods from Germany and thus distancing them from the historical material to which Valentin had access.⁸ This loss of scholarship may be why Valentin holds such a place of prominence for the period and the topic, as any historian trying to continue research using his methods met the hard hand of the Nazi party. The defeat of the Nazis and the renewed focus on the 1848 revolutions with their 100 year anniversary in 1948 opened up another window of opportunity for analytical scholarship however.

Where most scholars were still recovering from the backlash against views which challenged long-standing German political ideals concerning the 1848 revolutions, Rudolph Stadelmann was singular among the 1948-era writers in that he focused once again on factors of economic and political change which culminated in the revolutions.⁹ While far less critical than Marx concerning the actual implications and degree of revolution the German states actually faced in 1948, Stadelmann concluded that the revolutions represented the movement of the political middle-ground in Germany: they did not embody the liberal views of earlier German

⁷ Siemann, *The German Revolution*, p. 5.

⁸ Siemann, *The German Revolutions*, p. 5.

⁹ Siemann, *The German Revolutions*, p. 5.

reformers, nor did they fall in line with the authoritarianism of Bismarck.¹⁰ Stadelmann and Valentin together perhaps form the most complete narrative of the 1848 revolutions, and though they contest to some degree both the methods and conclusions of Marx, all three together form the academic groundwork to which all later scholars refer. It should also be noted that the scholars on this period entertained an active discourse concerning the revolutionary status of 1848, as evidenced by Marx's extremely critical approach and Stadelmann's claims of a movement of moderation, yet still reflective of liberal values.

Such discourse became dormant during much of the latter half of the Twentieth Century. Not only did discussions concerning the revolutionary implications of 1848 cease, but most scholarship began to address the 1848 movement as a reference point in history; a factor which led to later, seemingly more important, events in German history. Such a perspective, however, does not capture fully the novelty of the 1848 movement and additionally renders German history as a predetermined set of factors culminating ultimately in the Germany of Hitler and the Nazi party. Examining history thus; as a concatenation of unavoidable or natural events leading inescapably to a visceral and well-defined conclusion inevitably leads to a misrepresentation of facts and a non-organic framing of events which may have other implications beyond their stated conclusions. Namely, in this case, the formation of the Third Reich and the state-sponsored racism that purportedly spawned as a direct result of 1848. The shift began very soon after Stadelmann's writings were published, and likely was partially the result of the pomp of the centenary having blown over. Such a shift is perhaps best outlined by Theodore S. Hamerow, who in a 1954 publication concerning the historiography of the 1848 revolutions lamented that:

¹⁰ Rudolph Stadelmann, *Social and Political History of the German 1848 Revolution*, Trans. By James G. Chasteen, [German Edition] (Munich: F Bruckman KG, 1948.) [English Translation] (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1975). P. 191.

There has been too much awareness of the fact that 1848 was a turning point. The study of the Revolution has suffered from the curse of contemporaneity, from the tendency to interpret it in the light of developments subsequent to it and very frequently irrelevant to it.¹¹

Hamerow, himself, published other works on the topic of the 1848 revolution, however he followed the trend of so many other scholars of his time and deigned to let lie any further discussion over the revolutionary implications of the movement. Rather he turned to the study of topics related to or taking place in tangent to the 1848 revolution such as the democratic nature of the Frankfurt parliament which he outlined in an article published in 1961.

In some of his later work, Hamerow does seek to directly challenge statements made by first generation historians. His article, "The Elections to the Frankfurt Parliament," is framed around examining the claim made by Valentin that the Frankfurt Parliament was the "one Parliament worthy of the name" in pre-World War II German history.¹² His challenge reaches only so far as the nature of the Frankfurt parliament, which was only a part of the broader revolutionary movement. Absent are the examinations of the revolutionary reach and motives of 1848 as a whole. Present, however, is an attempt to construct the events of 1848 in a more modern narrative; forming an historical narrative around structure, societal forces, and trends rather than actors or events. Different from Stadelmann and Valentin of the first generation, this sort of historical method focuses far less on the sequencing of dates and events or the memoirs of actors deemed integral to their occurrence and, more akin to Marx's views, attributes changes and events to broader structural patterns. This movement towards a modern narrative is perhaps

¹¹ Theodore S. Hamerow, "History and the German Revolution of 1848," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Oct., 1954), pp. 27-44. p. 28.

¹² Theodore S. Hamerow, "The Elections to the Frankfurt Parliament," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Mar., 1961), pp. 15-32. p. 15.

even better illustrated by the writings of Edward Shorter in his article, "Middle-Class Anxiety in the German Revolution of 1848," published in 1969.

Shorter explores "links between fundamental social changes occurring during the *Vormärz* [the period before the revolution, 'before March'], and the radical discontent which surfaced in Germany in 1848," citing structural changes within the economy and changing socio-economic roles and classes as the fomenting agents of the movement.¹³ Such examination certainly differs from that of Stadelmann who ultimately summed up 1848 by comparing the views of two outspoken and quite active Prussian politicians, hearkening more the analytical devices of Marx, though far less politically critical. Shorter's introduction more than suggests that other scholars took to a similar mode of analysis, as he claims that:

a recent trend in historical scholarship has been to emphasize the social aspects of the German revolution...we [have] become increasingly convinced that the agitation of 1848 was more the result of concern about social and economic dislocation than of eagerness to see Germany unified under a liberal parliamentary regime.¹⁴

All of the main elements of analysis Shorter outlined fall in line more with the construction of a modern narrative style, rather than the perpetuation of traditional historical narrative methods. Such focus upon elements of the modern narrative mark one of the two main points of departure between the second generation of scholars and the first, as while Marx may have been one of the earliest scholars to frame history in a modern narrative, the authors most responsible for the establishment of the historiography of the 1848 revolutions (Valentin and Stadelmann) were

¹³ Edward Shorter, "Middle-Class Anxiety in the German Revolution of 1848," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Spring, 1969), pp. 189-215, p. 190. Translation added.

¹⁴ Shorter, "Middle Class Anxiety," p. 189.

clearly operating within a traditional narrative. The second point of departure is, as mentioned before, the unwillingness of the second generation to analyze just how 'revolutionary' the German Revolutions were. In large degree the second generation of scholars seemed content to leave such analysis to their forebears, preferring instead to accept the revolutionary status of the movement as it was already postulated and focus instead on tangential studies concerning 1848. Some exceptions may exist, of course.

Donald J. Matheisen, for instance, is one scholar of the middle period who tried to approach the 1848 revolutions from an argumentative approach, but largely to little avail. His 1973 article "1848: Theory and Practice of the German 'Juste Milieu'" takes an argumentative stance against the commonly held belief amongst the historical and political science communities that a successful Frankfurt Assembly and the adoption of a republican constitution in 1849 would have led to a more liberal-democratic Germany as opposed to the somewhat authoritarian state formed under Bismarck in 1871. Rather, Matheisen argues that the moderate liberals who headed the Frankfurt Assembly proposed a governmental system which was about as authoritarian as "the Bismarckian regime."¹⁵ To support this claim, Matheisen cites the structure of the proposed government outlined within the Frankfurt constitution, itself, including the veto powers attributed the emperor, the ability of the legislative body (the Reichstag) to affect foreign policy only by means of having to ratify treaties of "a commercial nature," and an emergency provision allowing the emperor to deploy troops in the interest of preserving order.¹⁶ Compared to other scholars who purportedly laud the 1848 movement for its liberalism and revolutionary

¹⁵ Donald J. Matheisen, "1848: Theory and Practice of the German 'Juste Milieu,'" *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Apr., 1973) pp. 180-192, p. 181.

¹⁶ Matheisen, "1848: Theory and Practice," pp. 182-183.

core, Matheisen's stance would certainly be unique and argumentative and additionally would have cast the entire revolutionary nature of 1848 into doubt.

Simple uniqueness is not enough, however, upon which to build an explorative and analytic historiography, and while Matheisen's foray into a political analysis of 1848 certainly strives to break the mold of previous scholarship, it falls quite short of providing any real or vigorous intellectual debate. Partially this is due to several aspects of the political environment and power implications which Matheisen simply ignores. For instance the ability for the elected legislators to ratify or reject treaties which would affect commercial affairs is nowhere near as weak a power as Matheisen tries to pass off. One would be hard pressed, especially in the 19th Century, to find a treaty between nations that did not interfere in some way with the economy and likely the politicians drafting this constitution were very aware of the implications and loopholes such a stipulation offered. In regards to the emperor's ability to use troops in order to preserve order, the framers of the constitution likely saw such a condition as necessity. Europe was by no means a peaceful place at that time, and the German states had been wracked by the Napoleonic Wars not too many decades before the Frankfurt Assembly. In fact 1848 saw not only the beginning of the German Revolutions but also the start of the first Schleswig War when Denmark forcibly annexed the territory of Schleswig from the state of Schleswig-Holstein.¹⁷ In light of these events, those charged with drafting a constitution for the new German state likely saw the granting direct martial control to the emperor in the case of an emergency as a necessary sacrifice in order to preserve their newly-forged republic from foreign invasion.

While many other points made by Matheisen can be likewise refuted, to do so would serve little to no purpose as Matheisen's stance is entirely based upon a counterfactual. All the

¹⁷ Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions*, p. 47.

arguments in the world could be made concerning the possible outcomes of a liberal victory and successful formation of a unified Germany in 1848, but they would all come to naught.

Frederick William IV of Prussia *did not* accept the imperial crown offered to him by the Frankfurt Assembly, the constitution drafted by the moderate liberals in 1848 *was not* adopted, and the German states *did not* unite under any sort of regime in 1849.

These facts alone largely render Matheisen's argument as pointless conjecture, allowing for no real proof or argument either way, the failure of the revolution does further drive additional nails into the coffin. The reason why the 1848 constitution, whether authoritarian or liberal in nature, was not implemented was largely due to Frederick IV's refusal of the imperial crown. Why should such a monarch refuse such an offer, especially considering the aims and actions of the Prussian monarchs to gain control of a broader German nation for decades?¹⁸ In this case the simple answer would be that Frederick William IV of Prussia did not want to be under the bonds of a Parliament in any way, and saw the Frankfurt Constitution as *too liberal*. With this in mind, any analysis of the Frankfurt Constitution framed a constitutional *monarchy*, and the Frankfurt Assembly were looking for a monarch willing to fill that post and therefore could not openly publish the limitations they intended to place on said monarch.

Matheisen's logical flaws aside, his work does not represent as much of a departure from the established historiography as he would have his readers believe. Many other scholars, well before Matheisen, questioned the liberal nature of the revolutionary movements, especially as they got to the stage of government framing and formation. Rudolph Stadelmann, writing in 1948, stated that by October of 1848 "it was no longer German Liberalism which was fighting in Vienna" and events even earlier in the year "divided liberalism" and turned the movement over

¹⁸ Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions*, pp. 5-8.

to "extreme groups...that had little to do with the constitutionalization of Germany."¹⁹

Matheisen's entire argument hinges upon the purported misperception of the historical community concerning the liberal intentions of the Frankfurt Assembly. However, as illustrated by Stadelmann's commentary, other scholars writing long before Matheisen had already put the entire movement's liberal impetus in doubt. When examined, both the apparently flawed reasoning of his arguments and the absence of any new (factual) claims suggest that does not challenge the previously established historiography concerning the 1848 Revolutions contrary to the article's stated purpose, and as such still represents to a certain degree the middle generation of the German historiography.

With Matheison's effort aside, the second generation is defined by two main differences from the first generation. First, the majority of scholarship presented at this time adopted the modern narrative as a mode of analysis. This trend shifted the scholastic focus of 1848 away from the actors of the time, such as Stein and Bismarck, and more towards economic and social factors which characterized mid-Nineteenth century Germany. Second, arguments over the revolutionary values of 1848 ceased. Discussion turned instead towards other topics either tangential to the revolutions or only loosely related. While some claims of earlier scholars were still being challenged, as evidenced by Hamerow's discussion of Valentin's claims regarding the composition of the Frankfurt Assembly, the discourse around the revolutionary effects on the German states was as a whole largely dead.

True re-examination of the 1848 movement's status as a "revolution" rose soon after Matheisen's attempt, and became one of the identifying factors of the third generation of 1848 scholarship. Following the 1985 publication of Wolfram Sieman's *The German Revolution of*

¹⁹ Stadelmann, *Social and Political History of the German 1848 Revolution*, pp. 147, 149.

1848-49, the "flood of publications" concerning the German revolutions alluded to by Dieter Langewische began.²⁰ With mounting works by Jonathon Sperber, Langewische, and others, the 1848 revolutions regained their popularity among scholars of German history that they had not had since the centennial anniversary of the movement. Within this flood the champions of the third generation began forming a modern narrative back around the "central core of events" of the revolutions, analyzing them in terms of the social and structural flows which guided them, and once again examining their revolutionary nature as had not been done since Stadelmann's publication. While none were perhaps so critical as Marx in their dissection of the central ideals behind the movements, these third generational authors approached and discussed ideas of 'revolution' and 'revolutionary thought' in ways that set them distinctly apart from the generation preceding them.

Wolfram Siemann was one of the first to broach the revolutionary stock of 1848 in contemporary times. Coincidentally available in English for the first time to mark the 150th anniversary of 1848, Siemann's *The German Revolution of 1848-49* (published in German in 1985) provides not only an analysis of the previous historiography of the German revolutions but also an examination of the revolutionary trends between the 1848 movement, as well. Hailing the traditional German historians, such as Valentin and Stadelmann, Siemann also sought to place them within their proper historical contexts, discussing the effects of the 1918 rise of the Weimar Republic and the strict censorship of the Nazi regime on their respective works.²¹ In light of the established scholarly base before him, Siemann seeks to reconcile the nature of the 'failed' German revolution with the clear changes that pervaded German society as a result,

²⁰ Dieter Langewische, "Die deutsche Revolution von 1848/49 und die vorrevolutionäre Gesellschaft: Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektive, Teil 2," *Archiv für Sozial-geschichte*, 31 (1991), p. 331. In Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German Speaking Europe*, (London: Pearson Education, 2001) p. viii.

²¹ Siemann, *The German Revolution*, pp. 3-9.

citing the reach of these changes as the main subject of his analysis.²² In this regard Siemann's analysis concerning the 1848 revolution matches closely with modern approaches to revolution as a whole. While contemporary definitions of 'revolution' are far from monolithic and cohesive, many site "the purpose of radically transforming society" as an integral part of a revolutionary movement.²³ In this sense, his goal of examining the degree to which the 1848 revolutions affected change within German society is really Siemann's effort to define 1848 as revolutionary or not. Siemann's conclusions concerning the degree of change catalyzed by 1848 reveal his position on the revolutionary nature of the 1848 Revolution, despite its historically accepted failure.

In the face of said failure, Siemann chooses instead to analyze what did change as a result of 1848 rather than what didn't, stating that accepting the 1848 revolution wholly as a failure would be to "imply a monodimensional objective on the part of the revolution, which our observations on its dynamics have thrown into doubt."²⁴ He observed that "despite the divisions exposed within it, [German] society underwent a fundamental politicization during the year of the revolution; for the first time politics in its widest sense was brought to the lower orders, to 'popular culture' and 'everyday life', to the 'provinces' and to 'the man and woman on the street'" suggesting monumental change in the light of the 'failed' revolution.²⁵ In this sense, regardless of the disparate views of various elites leading the revolution and the inconsistent participation of the peasantry, the revolution was both successful *and* firmly revolutionary. In fact, Siemann goes on to muse that the failure of the 1848 revolutions to result in a regime

²² Siemann, *The German Revolution*, p. 9.

²³ Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 6. In Robert S. Snyder, "The End of Revoution?," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter, 1999), pp. 5-28, p. 7.

²⁴ Siemann, *The German Revolution*, p. 218.

²⁵ Siemann, *The German Revolution*, p. 220.

change was more due to the lack of consistent organization amongst the peasants, the persistence of the ruling elite of the time, and general fears among various levels of society regarding radical change.²⁶ These are all factors found in any social or political revolution and in the case of the German states they merely proved to be insurmountable at the time. Siemann's synopsis, taken this way, presents 1848 as a revolution which achieved social change but failed to establish a new ruling regime through organizational and circumstantial failures rather than on account of ideological shortcomings.

Other contemporary scholars besides Siemann highlight the societal and political changes catalyzed by the 1848 revolution. Jonathan Sperber for instance, writing in 1991, commented on how "Germany's first experiment with democracy did not just take place among a few hundred parliamentarians, but involved millions of participants in elections, mass meetings, and the sessions of political clubs."²⁷ In this sense not only did political change occur as a result of the revolutions, but (as also noted by Siemann) the resulting change manifested as broader political participation, meaning that even though the ruling elites were not really replaced (nor did the regimes) the government changed in a measurable way. While certainly not representative of the complete ouster which most scholars look to as a marker of revolution, the addition of previously excluded socio-economic groups to political discourse constituted a major political change for the German states, the backlash of which appeared in the form of the Bismarckian regime of 1871. In acknowledging this monumental change in German politics, Sperber also acknowledged the revolutionary nature of 1848 as it is applied to German governance.

²⁶ Siemann, *The German Revolution*, pp. 218-221.

²⁷ Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-49*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 3.

Sperber's revolutionary analysis does not stop at changes in political participation, however. Much of Sperber's work aims to place the revolutions of 1848 within their proper historical context, and he does this largely by analyzing both societal and economic structures present within the German states prior to the revolution as well as stressing factors which challenged said structures. More than any other change, Sperber highlights the transformation of much of the European economy during the mid nineteenth century from an essentially subsistence-based agrarian economy to a more productive market-agricultural economy with an infant industrial sector.²⁸ More specifically in Germany this manifested as a contest over the survival of certain pre-capitalist market factors (such as a guild system and a feudal structure).²⁹ In Germany and other parts of Europe where these structures still existed, populations experienced a declining standard of living spanning over the two decades prior to the revolutions.³⁰ As such, the economic lag in these parts of Europe represented structural weaknesses within their respective societies. These weaknesses were further stressed in the few years immediately before the revolutions by mass harvest failures in 1845 and 1846 and an economic recession which struck in 1847.³¹ Sperber argues that this structural weakness, highlighted and further compromised by a handful of negative events, helped in large part to set the stage for the political movements of 1848.³²

In focusing on the structural factors within German society and highlighting weaknesses illuminated by stressors like the harvest failures and economic downturns of the 1840's, Sperber ties his own analysis in with that of many other structural social theorists. Certainly Marx

²⁸ Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-51*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 2005) p. 258.

²⁹ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, p. 467.

³⁰ Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, p. 258.

³¹ Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, p. 258.

³² Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, p. 258.

focused on structural patterns and occurrences in his scholarship, but Sperber's specific address of societal weakness through economic factors falls more in line with modern structural analysts such as Jack A. Goldstone. Goldstone, active throughout the 1990's and into the present day, developed a theory of societal stability which he tied in closely with revolutionary occurrences. Goldstone describes a society as either a ball resting within a depression or on the top of a hill. If some amount of force is applied to the ball (if the ball represents a society, then such a force could be an economic downturn, some form of political unrest, or an international war), then the ball resting in the depression may roll in one direction or another for a bit, but will ultimately return to its original position. A ball resting on top of a hill, however, may require only a small nudge for it to go careening down. In this model a society in stable equilibrium (the ball in the depression) will not be greatly affected by a small disturbance, whereas an unstable society (the ball on top of the hill) may see drastic, often catastrophic, change as a result of a fairly small occurrence.³³

Sperber, whether intentionally or not, borrowed this mode of thinking in his linking of the socio-economic weaknesses of German society prior to 1848 and the revolutions, themselves. The initial instability of the German states (the 'hill') is outlined by his discussion of the declining standard of living during the decades leading up to 1848. Troubling developments to be sure, especially for those living within the German states at the time, but not enough on their own to incite revolution. Such is the definition of a society in unstable equilibrium; inherent problems within the society exist and threaten overall stability, but nothing has as of yet pushed society (the 'ball') over the edge towards a rapid and potentially violent change. Relatively uncontrollable elements, represented in this case by poor harvests and economic recession,

³³ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014) pp. 13-14.

caused the ball to wobble, and as it neared the slope of the hill the broader structural weaknesses of the social, economic, and political structures became inescapably clear. Sperber's combination of both structural weakness *and* negatively inciting events in his analysis of the causes or reasons for the 1848 revolution echoes Goldstone's and other modern structural theorists' views on revolution very closely, and in his mind there is no doubt that the ingredients necessary for a revolution were present within the German States of 1848.

While models like Goldstone's work well for simplifying otherwise complex social and economic climates which breed revolutionary events, each of the modern scholars recognize the inherently tangled and intricate socio-economic factors present in any revolution. Such complication was especially prevalent within the German States in 1848. Dieter Langewische, writing in 1998, outlined the particular socio-economic stratification present within the revolution of 1848, as well as other extenuating circumstances. In Langewische's assessment the revolution was actually broken into two main revolutionary groups, each with its own myriad fractures and divisions; the rural peasantry taking part in the "primal revolution," and the more bourgeois national revolution.³⁴ While largely independent in their motives and designs, the two main branches of the revolution were still somewhat united in that they were both pitted more-or-less against the established ruling elites, namely the aristocracy and various German monarchs.³⁵

On the surface this may seem an odd way of analyzing a revolutionary movement, however it is well rooted within revolutionary scholarship. Karl Marx, as cited earlier, analyzed the French revolution in much the same way; the bourgeois and the peasantry working in very

³⁴ Dieter Langewische, "Revolution in Germany: Constitutional State—Nation State—Social Reform," in *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, eds. Dieter Dowe, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Dieter Langewische, and Jonathon Sperber, trans. David Higgins (New York: Berhahn Books, 2000) pp. 135-138.

³⁵ Langewische, "Revolution in Germany," pp. 135-138.

different and not particularly unified ways against the common enemy of the aristocracy.³⁶ The only difference, really, is that Marx saw the bourgeoisie as subtly controlling and directing the lower classes, using them as a crude weapon to achieve their own ends. Other, more recent, scholars often analyze revolutions by splitting various socio-economic groups or factors as well. Taras Kuzio, for instance, in his analysis of several post-communist revolutions identifies both a mobilized civil society as well as a charismatic political leader able to take advantage of a factionalized government as integral factors to the success of a revolution.³⁷ In doing so, Kuzio also divides revolutionary movements into two parts each with potentially different but related goals; civil society and factions in government. This dissection of revolutionary groups serves to highlight the main changes each group sought within the context of the revolution, and in retrospect serve as a marker to measure the actual change implemented.

Each of the third, contemporary generation of scholars shares several common themes among their work. All of them write mostly in a modern narrative style, using the social and economic changes of the times to analyze the events of 1848. Each also seeks to define the 1848 movement within theoretical revolutionary framework, both in relatively new and well established scholarship. Unlike the authors of the second generation, the central focus of each author clearly rests upon the revolutionary nature of 1848 as a whole, and not merely on related occurrences or organizational bodies. In this way the second and third generations are clearly divided in spite of their common narrative styles. While related in their critical approach and discussion of the core events and meanings of 1848, it is the same narrative style that separates

³⁶ Marx, *The Bourgeoisie*, pp.63-65.

³⁷ Taras Kuzio, "Democratic Breakthroughs and Revolutions in Five Postcommunist Countries: Comparative Perspectives on the Fourth Wave," (Heldref Publications, 2008) p. 97.

the third and first generations, though the writings of Marx and their departure from the traditional narrative provide an additional thread of continuity.

The first and third generations share another common link, as well. Both delineations were or are driven by historical events and milestones. Where the Second World War and the centennial anniversary of 1848 both affected the first generation, the third generation saw the influence of the collapse of communist Europe in 1989 as well as the sesquicentennial in 1998. Jonathan Sperber, in an introduction for an anthology published during the sesquicentennial year, discussed how both "the events of 1989 in eastern and central Europe" as well as the special significance of 1998 greatly affected the scholarship of the 1848 revolution.³⁸ Sperber also remarks with some surprise over the degree to which the 150th year since the revolution sparked so much interest and revival on the topic.³⁹

Where such historic events and milestones are shared relatively in common with the first and third generations, the degree to which each affected the scholarship differs greatly. The first generation experienced blatant political censorship and repression as a result of the pivotal historical events of its time, resulting in a very real and direct effect on the scholarship. Subsequently, the revival of interest during the centennial of 1848 stood as a re-awakening of earlier scholastic approaches after their harsh treatment during the Nazi period. Conversely the fall of communist Europe and the sesquicentennial occurring during the third generation served only to perhaps generate more interest in the topic. These markers did not directly affect the scholarship of 1848, at least not in the same scope as the Nazi repression experienced by the first generation, nor do they explain the sudden re-focus of historical scholarship on the revolutionary

³⁸ Jonathon Sperber, introduction to *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, Eds. Dieter Dowe, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Dieter Langewische, and Jonathan Sperber, Trans. David Higgins (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000) pp. xi-xii.

³⁹ Sperber, introduction, p. xii.

values of 1848. Had these events alone influenced the resurgence of publications on 1848, the result likely would have been similar to the majority of publications which cropped up back in 1948: largely commemorative works with little to no new analysis. Sperber addresses this discrepancy and provides a third factor, in addition to the sesquicentennial and the reunification of Germany, which explains the new academic approach to the history of 1848.

In spite of other historical markers, Sperber identifies the largest contributing factor to the recent imminence of 1848 scholarship as a result of "a greater interest in grasping how things were understood, experienced, and articulated as they were happening" held by historians in recent decades.⁴⁰ Additionally, in his explanation of the effect of the fall of European communism and the reunification of Germany, Sperber interjects that such an event influenced the study of 1848 because it "problematized the criteria of 'success' for a revolution" and hence spurred a scholarly rush to redefine 'revolution.'⁴¹ In other words, broader scholastic changes in history and historical events pertaining to revolutions affected and spurred a closer study of revolutions as a whole, which eventually affected the study of the 1848 German revolutions. Additionally, these historical events had a greater effect upon broader revolutionary scholarship than on the historiography of the 1848 revolutions, specifically. Such a trend, however, had already begun prior to the reunification of Germany, as evidenced by Siemann's publication in 1985. In that case, the political events occurring in 1989-91 in Europe alone cannot adequately explain the shift between the second and third generations of 1848 scholarship and another explanation is necessary.

⁴⁰ Sperber, introduction, p. xii.

⁴¹ Sperber, introduction, p. xi.

That explanation resides in Sperber's allusion to changing academic modes "already underway for some decades by the 1990's."⁴² Scholarly approaches to revolution, while certainly affected by German reunification, were already changing. The publication of *States and Social Revolutions* by Theda Skocpol in 1979 heralded the beginning of this change. As one of the first modern scholarly works to really challenge previously held ideas of revolution, Skocpol's publication kicked off a fresh and spirited debate on the topic. After Skocpol came a slew of other modern revolutionary scholars: Forrest Colburn, Robert Snyder, Jack Goldstone, and Stephen Sanderson to name a few. After this renewed debate regarding revolution as a broad topic got rolling, it was only natural for the discussion of specific revolutions to follow suit, so it is no coincidence that six years after Skocpol's first major publication on revolution Siemann published his major work pertaining to the 1848 revolution.

The generational stratification of scholarship concerning the 1848 German revolutions to some extent arises from and echoes historical events and modes of scholarship. The semi-break in the first generation between Valentin and Stadelmann very directly resulted from political repression of the study of political liberal ideals. Likewise, the trend within the historical community to analyze history in terms of the traditional narrative during the first half of the 20th Century and the shift to the modern narrative during the latter half fits with the break between the first and second scholastic generations. However, historical events and changes of historical methods alone cannot adequately explain the relatively recent rise in publication on the topic of the 1848 revolutions that embody the third generation, nor can they account for tendency of recent scholars to re-analyze the degree to which the 1848 movements were revolutionary. Rather, this scholastic movement fits in more closely with a broader academic re-focus on

⁴² Sperber, introduction, pp. xi-xii.

revolutionary thought and practice, with the ultimate aim of understanding the salient features of a revolution. Epitomized by the writings of Skocpol, Sanderson, and Goldstone, the debate over the nature and definition of revolution has reawakened since the period of the classical revolutions, and the historiography of the 1848 German revolutions is but a case study representing how such scholarly thought has affected the study of individual revolutionary movements.

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