

III. DISAPPOINTMENT

Across the North Sea

THERE IS A GERMAN side to my story. In October 1970, I arrived at the University of Sussex to begin graduate work in German history. As an undergraduate, I'd spent much of my time on early twentieth-century Germany, so there was some logic to this choice. My best teacher had also been a German historian, Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, who was now moving to a lectureship at Sussex.¹ But my interest in Germany went back much further. Growing up in the 1950s, I couldn't help being impressed by the spectacular qualities of the recent German past, its lurid and violent momentousness. World War II had been all around me as a child: British culture—political and intellectual, popular and polite—was suffused with its effects. My most sustained historical reading before coming to Oxford had been devoted to the war's origins and course.² But there was also a disorderly and accidental element in my decision making, another serendipity. During my final year in Balliol, I toyed with various potential doctorate fields, from nineteenth-century British social history to the Levellers in the English Revolution.³ In the end, I allowed myself to be steered toward Germany by Hartmut Pogge. I had excellent arguments for myself, which were more than rationalizations. Emerging from an undergraduate degree with all the anticareerist angst of a sixty-eightier, I needed good reasons to justify doing a Ph.D. in history. In that respect, German history was easy. Big things had happened there. It was an excellent laboratory.⁴

I arrived in graduate school with the usual set of German history interests for the time, in such topics as the origins of World War II, militarism and the role of the army in German politics, and the

strengths and weaknesses of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). These interests were hard to move beyond, given the limited materials still available to an undergraduate in Britain. Looking back, I'm struck by how innocent my undergraduate essays were of the controversies then raging among German historians about the issue of continuities between the Nazi era and earlier periods of the German past. They also betrayed very little of the social history interests I was excited about more generally.

That quickly changed. The first book I read in German as a graduate student was Hans-Ulrich Wehler's freshly published magnum opus on Bismarck's imperialism.⁵ I was blown away by the scale of its ambition—the extraordinary weight of its erudition, the imposing density of its empirical research (including the mountainous footnotes), the vast plenitude of its bibliography (twenty-four separate archives, sixty-five collections of private papers, some twenty-three hundred titles), and the impressive openness of its theoretical framing. The combined effect of economic theory, concrete analytical detail, density of political narrative, and overarching interpretation was daunting. It contained not only a challenging theoretical framework but also a comprehensive analysis of Germany's commercial and colonial expansion in all parts of the globe in the late nineteenth century and a detailed account of Bismarckian policymaking. Historians in Britain, I remember thinking, simply didn't write this kind of book.

In fact, the author of *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* was in the process of emerging during the 1960s as an inexhaustible campaigner for the modernizing of the West German historical profession, which, in Wehler's mind, meant transforming the discipline into a "historical social science." Strikingly, historians in West Germany couldn't rely on any equivalent of the Marxist historiography or *Annales* tradition that encouraged the earlier rise of social history in Britain or France. Indeed, a handful of pioneers notwithstanding, the conservative disposition of the discipline during the 1950s had combined with the dominant ideological climate to stifle innovation. The economic historian Wolfram Fischer (born 1928) and the historian of popular literacy Rolf Engelsing (born 1930) produced important work without much wider emulation, as did a few others in technically specialized fields—for example, Wilhelm Abel (born 1904), in agrarian history, and the demographer Wolfgang Kollmann (born 1925). In retrospect, both Otto Brunner (1898–1982) and Werner Conze (1910–86) might be

seen to have developed notions of “structural history” cognate to the thinking at *Annales*, but this lacked any greater resonance at the time.⁶ Only in the 1960s did a set of extraneous developments allow a breakthrough toward social history to occur.

But if the West German starting points for social history were badly underdeveloped after 1945 in comparison with Britain or France, the reasons were not hard to find. The catastrophic impoverishment of German intellectual life by the Nazi era left its mark in this way no less than in so many others. The special irony was that in many respects—for example, the pioneering achievements of German sociology in the early twentieth century, the institutional strengths of the labor movement dating from the 1890s, and the intellectual dynamism in Weimar culture—the earlier foundations for doing social history had been much firmer. In Germany, just as across the North Sea, important scholarship had already started to appear. But Nazism severed those potentials. It prevented any slow influencing of university history departments on the British pattern. The difference surely came from the violent political dislocation of the Third Reich, not from some unique and deeply embedded conservatism of the German historical establishment alone (as West German progressives of the 1960s were inclined to claim).

In both Germany and Britain, the way for social history was prepared mainly beyond the central bastions of the discipline of history per se. In chapter 2, I traced social history’s British genealogies between the 1930s and the 1960s, through the influence of the Marxist historians and a range of allied tendencies and individuals. But the British story actually began somewhat earlier, at the start of the century, with a variety of pioneers, including the Fabian social investigators Beatrice (1858–1943) and Sidney Webb (1859–1947), the early modern economic historian R. H. Tawney (1880–1962), the radical journalists John (1872–1949) and Barbara Hammond (1873–1961), and the Oxford-based socialist academic G. D. H. Cole (1889–1959). The Webbs’s multivolume histories of local government, trade unionism, and workplace relations already adumbrated the main themes social historians came to pursue after 1945, while the Hammonds’s epic account of the human costs of the Industrial Revolution sustained much of the inspiration behind Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class*. Among Cole’s many works on the history of labor and socialism, *The Common People, 1746–1938*, jointly authored with Raymond

Postgate, remained the best general account of British social history “from below” until after the 1960s.⁷

These people were institution builders: the London School of Economics (LSE), founded by the Webbs in 1895, became an early crucible for progressively inclined social and political science in Britain, while Tawney (also at the LSE) helped launch the Economic History Society and its journal in 1926–27.⁸ More to the point, these precursors were all politically active on the left. Their particular bent varied: Tawney was a Christian Socialist, a Labour Party parliamentary candidate, a supporter of the Workers Educational Association, and a leading public intellectual who practiced ethical commitment no less in his scholarly than in his political work;⁹ the Webbs were driven by a reforming belief in the “inevitability of gradualness” and by a high-minded administrative ideal of rational taxation, social provision, and public goods, which they eventually hitched to the electoral rise of the Labour Party. But they all inhabited the broadly progressivist political culture of the 1920s and 1930s in Britain, which was coalescing more firmly around the Labour Party and settled properly into place during World War II. In their approach to history, they shared a moral and political critique of the social consequences of industrialization.

My point here is that social history’s origins in the early twentieth century presumed a set of left-wing political supports.¹⁰ From a vantage point in the 1920s, those supports were arguably more favorable in Germany than in Britain. Before 1914, the SPD had already accumulated its own historiographical tradition, and the liberalized polity of the Weimar Republic created a climate in which forms of social history could further thrive, not least through the growing imbrication of the labor movement’s cultural institutions with the activities of the new state. A good example was the Engels biographer Gustav Mayer (1871–1949), some of whose classic essays on labor’s early relations with liberalism were already published before 1914, but whose university career in Berlin remained blocked by conservatives. In the changed conditions after 1918–19, the surrounding institutional constellation shifted; in 1922, Mayer was appointed to a new position in the History of Democracy, Socialism, and Political Parties. German empirical sociology flourished in a similar way. Typical in this respect was Hans Speier (born 1905), whose pioneering research on white-collar workers began during the later years of the Weimar Republic but went unpublished until 1977: after studying in Heidelberg with

Emil Lederer (1882–1939), whose own studies of white-collar workers dated back to 1912, Speier worked as an editor for a Berlin publishing house, was connected to the SPD's Labor Education Department and the city's social services, and was married to a municipal pediatrician.¹¹

Until 1933, in other words, German and British historiographies were moving roughly in parallel. In neither country were university history departments open to social history, with its double connotations of popularization and political dissent. As I've already argued, German conditions were even somewhat better in this regard, given the extra supports offered for Marxist thinking and other kinds of progressivism in the national labor movement. The flowering of German sociology added a further positive factor.¹² But the disaster of Nazism during 1933–45 scattered these progressive potentials into a mainly Anglo-American diaspora. Moreover, while the British foundations for social history were being assembled, the historical profession was restored on mainly conservative lines in West Germany after 1945, and social history was able to make few inroads there before the 1970s. In contrast to the early twentieth century, consequently, a gap in the two countries' receptiveness to innovative historiography started to open. In Britain, the democratic patriotisms of World War II had moved some historians out of the narrower state-focused forms of political and diplomatic history dominating their profession; in West Germany, that older dominance endured. The effect of West German emigration over the longer term was to exacerbate the national divergence: the scholarship of the émigrés enriched the historiographies of the host countries and further widened the gap.¹³

West German *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*: Modernizing the Discipline

When things changed in the course of the 1960s, they did so for the usual complicated reasons, including the longer gestating influence of certain individuals, the favorable mix of circumstances at particular institutions, and the purer happenstance of a charismatic personality, an exciting seminar, or an especially resonant publication.¹⁴ But the dramatic political events of the sixties once again were the key. The West German ingredients of this political conjuncture ranged from the slow dissolution of the political conformities of the Adenauer era

and the Cold War to the fallout from the great expansion of higher education. As the cohesion of the so-called CDU-state (a shorthand for the single-party dominance of the Christian Democratic Union in the Federal Republic) unraveled during the mid-1960s, the universities also came undone, with student numbers expanding, academic orthodoxies loosening, and the radicalism of 1968 waiting in the wings. Of course, historians were directly involved in many of the resulting conflicts, both through embittering confrontations with their own students and in response to the New Left's demand that the unresolved legacies of the Third Reich finally be faced. Amid all these other fights, a particular controversy that had been raging among West German historians since the start of the decade did much to open the way for social history's early gains.

The celebrated "Fischer controversy" surrounded the work of the Hamburg historian Fritz Fischer (1908–99) on Germany's war aims during World War I.¹⁵ This is not the place for a detailed commentary on this affair's ins and outs. For my purposes here, I need only note how dramatically it brought the problem of continuity in modern German history into intensive debate. By exposing the similarities between German expansionism during 1914–18 and the later imperialism of the Nazis, Fischer's work located Nazism squarely within the deeper German past. Against the overwhelming weight of existing West German interpretation, which treated the events of 1933 as a kind of *Betriebsunfall*, or "accident in the works," Fischer drew attention toward the longer-term patterns of development through which Nazism could arise.

Interest quickly focused on the sociopolitical system of the German Empire, or *Kaiserreich*, between 1871 and 1918. Fischer and his allies sought to ground an argument about persisting structures of authoritarianism—and forms of opposition against democracy or liberalism—in a heavily materialist analysis of ruling socioeconomic interests. The argument ran that among the advanced industrial nations, Germany alone produced a fascist outcome to the world economic crisis after 1929, a susceptibility spelling deeper weaknesses of the political culture, which could only be explained in social terms. Germany's peculiar "backwardness" in that sense became attributed to the political continuity of a ruling cluster of interests—the "alliance of iron and rye," or the political bloc of heavy industry and big agriculture, which had originally come together under Bismarck's guidance

during the 1870s. That coalition impeded the growth of liberal democratic institutions before 1914, while surviving the 1918 revolution to fight another day. It destabilized the Weimar Republic and hoisted the Nazis into power.

The debates surrounding this interpretation gave impetus to an exciting transformation of West German historical studies. The Fischer controversy's impact went far beyond Fischer's own, rather straightforward type of political history and helped clear the way for a wide-ranging root-and-branch self-examination within German historiography as a whole. Linking the continuity in Germany's twentieth-century foreign expansionism to a more basic continuity of ruling interests inside German society at home stimulated an intensive period of conceptual innovation. The main outcome was a powerful logic of social explanation. This logic's distinctive understanding of the political process—as being primarily constituted from the interaction of organized interests—remained the enduring legacy of the Fischer controversy and shaped prevailing approaches to the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic. It was accompanied by polemical advocacy of the “primacy of domestic policy,” a formula originally advanced to counter an older geopolitical determinism that explained German policy by the vulnerabilities of the country's central European location. All in all, by fixing attention on the interrelations among economy, politics, and social structure, these debates around the continuity question gave decisive momentum to the emerging interest in social history.

Hans-Ulrich Wehler's drive to modernize the discipline took shape in this context. In the absence of some indigenous equivalent of the lineages I've described for the emergence of social history in Britain and France—some counterpart, that is, to the sedimenting of research and discussion represented by the British Marxist historians and the *Annales* school—Wehler set about inventing one. He did so by two routes.

One route Wehler used was to go back and systematically retrieve the work of dissenting or marginalized precursors from the early twentieth century, whose scholarship had either been ignored or suppressed due to the prevailing conservatism of the German profession (known to its critics as the *Zunft*, or “guild”), before being banned by the Nazis altogether. The key names included Eckart Kehr (1902–33), George W. F. Hallgarten (1901–74), Alfred Vagts (1892–1986), and Hans Rosenberg (1904–88), all of whom adhered to a liberal outlook

of varying radicalism and an interest-based model of social causality, composing a loose intellectual network and finding their way to the United States during the 1930s. To them were added the Marxist Arthur Rosenberg (1889–1943), the left-wing liberal Veit Valentin (1885–1947), and Gustav Mayer (mentioned earlier in this chapter). Having left Germany upon the Nazi seizure of power, most decided not to return after 1945. They continued to receive little recognition inside the *Zunft* until Wehler’s generation rediscovered them: Wehler published various editions of their work between the mid-1960s and early 1970s; he also edited a multivolume series of paperbacks (the German Historians series) that integrated these former dissidents into the general pantheon of recognized or recovered voices.¹⁶

Much as the British Marxists had striven for an oppositional counternarrative capable of challenging the authorized version of national history, Wehler set out to invent a liberal–cum–social democratic countertradition using earlier generations of outsiders. For a while, between roughly the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, this tradition retained a broader political edge—notable during the years of the Brandt-Scheel government (1969–74), when the so-called *Ostpolitik* (eastern policy) for normalizing West Germany’s relations with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Eastern Europe focused the public engagement of left-of-center intellectuals. During this period, within the universities, the demands of the student Left for relevance and democratization also became briefly connected to the disciplinary discontents of progressive historians. Among Wehler’s generation, there was much talk of “emancipation,” a “critical science of history,” and the discipline of intellectual relevance. This encouraged a wide-ranging eclecticism of theoretical reference, an opening of new subjects (notably toward social history), and a general mood of experiment. Above all, this period was driven by an unbending commitment to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), so that Nazism’s deeper rootedness in the German past could be laid bare. The new “critical history” was perhaps characterized most of all by this strong sense of pedagogical political purpose, a principled determination that uncomfortable realities of the German past should properly be faced.

The German historiography of the 1970s—including my own entry into the field—was formed in this highly politicized moment. That historiography featured the fleeting convergence of very different

intellectual tendencies on the same ground of the “continuity question”: advocates of social science history (such as Wehler) worked alongside many scholars who were moving into other kinds of social history closer to historical anthropology and “Anglo-Marxism” (as they called it), and during the later 1960s, broader currents of the West German New Left unfolded an intensive discussion on the subject of fascism. Ultimately, the idea of a “historical social science” made the deepest inroads, and this “Western” orientation eased an affinity with British and U.S. German historians of a similar age and background. Wehler said of his own cohort (namely, “the advanced students and doctoral candidates, assistants, and lecturers who were active in [West German] history departments around 1960”), “An interested and approving opening to the West European and American world was for them as self-evident as was a liberal-democratic point of view.”¹⁷

This was the second route Wehler traveled in equipping his new ideal of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (societal history) with a pedigree. At the core of the new openness to theory were more precise affiliations, aligning West German social historians with the mainstream of U.S. social science. The program Wehler (born 1931) and his younger ally Jürgen Kocka (born 1941) laid out was to be based on the explicit use of theory; it required competence in quantitative methods and all the other proficiencies of empirical-analytical social science and was always to be comparative. The underlying master concept of “modernity” implied a classically “whiggish” and progress-oriented reading of the epoch since the late eighteenth-century democratic revolutions, whose meanings were vital both to the values avowedly guiding the intellectual or “scientific” project—its *erkenntnisleitende Interessen*, or “knowledge-constitutive interests” (in the talismanic phrase of the time)—and to the associated larger interpretation of German history it sought to develop. The case Wehler and Kocka made for social history always reflected this duality of epistemological and substantive ambition. The Enlightenment’s foundational values (universalism, rationalism, civility, individual emancipation) provided not only an idealized description of the good society that theories of modernization entailed but also a yardstick for measuring the disastrous “misedevelopment” Germany had actually experienced between Bismarck and the Nazi seizure of power.

Wehler and Kocka made their case for a “historical social science” in

a stream of programmatic writings, as well as in their respective historical works, calling into service the copious resources of empirical social science relevant to problems of social inequality, industrialization, economic fluctuations, and so forth, while drawing on theoretical traditions descending from both Weber and Marx.¹⁸ They heavily prioritized—as the defining ground of social history—structural analysis of patterns, trends, and large-scale collective forces. Kocka demonstrated the value of Weberian ideal types in his major books on white-collar workers at the Siemens company during nineteenth-century industrialization and on the significance of class conflict during World War I: for the purposes of one, he deployed Weber's typology of bureaucracy; for the other, a model based on Marxist class analysis adjusted for the autonomy of the state. By analyzing the sociopolitical attitudes of U.S. white-collar workers between 1890 and 1940 in a third major study, Kocka then used the comparative method to specify the distinctiveness of white-collar consciousness in Germany. In each of Kocka's studies, the vaunted superiority of social science methods was simultaneously harnessed to showing Germany's peculiarities of historical development, the so-called special path, or *Sonderweg*, that explained how and why German history had culminated in Nazism.¹⁹

Following the trail of the Fischer controversy, a great deal of the work inspired by the new call for social history focused on the German Empire of 1871–1918. Instead of the older fixation on Bismarck's achievements in unifying the national state, the new authors foregrounded the “authoritarian and anti-democratic structures in state and society” that they argued became locked into place during German unification before descending in disastrous continuity down to 1933.²⁰ An impressive battery of books appeared during the late sixties and early seventies to secure this interpretation. All of them focused on the success of the imperial system's ruling elites in blocking the pressure for modernizing reform, and all incorporated the interest-based model of social explanation alluded to earlier. Furthermore, the authors concerned strongly associated themselves with Wehler's program for modernizing the discipline. Both drives were intimately linked together—on the one hand, for making history into a critical social science (indeed, for promoting “societal history” as the discipline's new integrative paradigm); on the other hand, for locating the origins of Nazism in a set of nineteenth-century political develop-

ments as part of a new overarching interpretation of the German past.

Building on much older lines of comparative understanding among sociologists and political scientists (extending as far back as Weber and Marx), the new West German historians insisted on the uniqueness of Germany's historical development. They viewed German history as an instance of failed, blocked, or distorted modernization. As such, it fundamentally diverged from the history of "the West." Indeed, Nazism could only happen because Germany's earlier history lacked the healthy pattern of development that sustained stronger and more resilient democratic traditions elsewhere. The new historians argued that in contrast to successful instances of political modernization further to the West (in Britain and France), the defining feature of German history under the empire was an extreme discrepancy between the dynamism of its economic growth and the obdurate backwardness of its political institutions. In recurring to such an argument about Germany's so-called *Sonderweg*, the new scholarship was always guided by the larger questions framed around the Third Reich. If the pre-1914 authoritarianism was a primary explanation for German society's later availability for Nazism, Germany's failure to replicate a British or French pattern of liberal democratic evolution during the nineteenth century turned out to have terrible costs from a standpoint in 1933.

How might this West German story of social history's emergence in the late sixties and early seventies be summarized? Where did it converge with the British and French versions described in chapter 2? Where did it differ?

First, it contained the same synthetic ambition. Wehler and Kocka sought both to integrate the different areas of the discipline within a common project—extending from social histories in the more technical subdisciplinary sense, through economic and business history, to labor history, political history, history of ideas, and the rest—and to do so by organized cross-disciplinary collaboration. The goal was synthetic in the further sense of producing an integrated account of the German past. For Wehler, "the unity of history" was at issue.

Societal history in this sense aspires to an analysis of society in its entirety, which is constituted by three equally important dimensions: economics, power, and culture. Its synthetic capacity is to

be proven in terms of its ability to accommodate the complexity and connection of diverse dimensions of reality more adequately than do older concepts of integration.²¹

This was the West German version of the totalizing wish. Wehler's "societal history" had obvious affinities with Hobsbawm's "history of society"—if less so, perhaps, with Braudel's *histoire totale*. Compared with Hobsbawm's conception, though, this societal history was heavily social-scientific in orientation, and in the coming years, the Weberianism implied by Wehler's trinity of "economics, power, and culture" became ever more pronounced. But at all events, all three national variants converged on the most decisive common commitment—namely, the search for an overall account of social change, managed by the primacy of social explanation, directed toward "society as a whole," conceptualized on the ground of material life.

Of course, Kocka and Wehler spoke for a wider network of scholars interested in promoting social history, not all of whom shared all aspects of their program. During the 1970s, there was much debate over whether a definite "school" existed and about the degree of its influence over the West German historical scene.²² Other individuals were highly active behind the drive for more "empirical-analytical" social science history, for example, while being far less involved in debates about the political history of the *Kaiserreich* and its relationship to the events of 1933.²³ While endorsing the general desirability of more social history, another key figure, Wolfgang Mommsen (1930–2004), didn't regard *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* as a necessary paradigm shift in the same way as Wehler and took a more skeptical stance on the issue of the *Sonderweg*.²⁴ Moreover, large areas of scholarship, including work on the Third Reich or labor history and social histories of the working class, had a more oblique or partial relationship to the full program evinced by Wehler and Kocka: while the thinking of people in those fields may have been broadly congruent on the topic of the *Sonderweg*, the nature and degree of their commitment to the new social history was more uneven and diverse.

Second, by the mid-1970s, Wehler had nonetheless carried off a remarkable feat of institutionalization. Much of this was accomplished from his base at the new University of Bielefeld, where he arrived in 1971, being joined there two years later by Kocka. His systematic campaign of retrieval, which fashioned the works of precursors into a

convincing historiographical countertradition, has already been mentioned. He proceeded just as methodically in establishing the groundwork for history's collaboration with the social sciences, anthologizing a succession of bilateral encounters—between history and psychoanalysis, history and sociology, and history and economics—and making Bielefeld into a major center for interdisciplinary research.²⁵ In 1972, he also started a book series at the Göttingen academic press Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht; the Critical Studies in Historical Social Science series quickly became the leading showcase for the new history. As well as publishing the fresh scholarship of Wehler's and Kocka's students and colleagues, that series became the vehicle for republishing older works and for collecting the essays of others whose mantle Wehler wanted to claim.²⁶

During the 1970s, Wehler maintained a prodigious level of organizational, editorial, and publishing activity. Together with Kocka and other close allies—for example, Hans-Jürgen Puhle (born 1940), Reinhard Rürup (born 1934), and Heinrich August Winkler (born 1938)—he occupied center stage among West German historians, not least at the biennial meetings of the national *Historikertag* or historians' association.²⁷ His publication of a new general history of the *Kaiserreich* in 1973, in effect a practical manifesto for the new social science history, provoked an apoplectic response from conservative political and diplomatic historians and successfully rallied West German historians into opposing camps.²⁸ In 1974, he edited a massive volume entitled *Social History Today*, honoring Hans Rosenberg; its thirty-three contributors composed a veritable who's who of German social history's leading practitioners.²⁹ In 1976, he launched a series of bibliographies, the first two volumes (*Modern German Social History* and *Modern German Economic History*) under his own name.³⁰ Most important of all, the new journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (History and Society) began publishing in 1975, with Wehler very much at the core of its editorial group. Subtitled *Journal for Historical Social Science* and intended as a flagship for the new societal history, it aspired to do for the discipline in West Germany what *Annales* and *Past and Present* had done, in their own time, for France and Britain.

Third, if societal history was far more beholden to U.S. social science than was social history in either Britain or France, its distancing from Marxism also became extremely pronounced. After a brief period of intellectual pluralism during the later 1960s, a discouraging

decline of tolerance for Marxist ideas set in. By the mid-1970s, Wehler and his friends were equating Marxism per se so crudely with the self-evidently dogmatic and unappealing orthodoxies of the GDR that any more creative uses of Marxist theory became effectively ruled out. They invoked the sterility of the official Marxist-Leninist historiography of the East to disqualify the claims of Marxist approaches tout court. Yet the very charges they leveled against Marxism—that its approach to social analysis was economistic, reductionist, crudely deterministic, and disrespectful of the autonomies of ideology, politics, and the state—were ironically the very same critiques Marxist historians in the English-speaking world were already conducting among themselves. By ignoring these debates, which (as I argued in chapter 2) reflected a more general ferment within the Marxist tradition, Wehler and Kocka deflected the more interesting challenge and imprisoned any potential dialogue with Marxism inside the provincialism of an inner-German exchange.³¹

In effect, the battle lines for a modernized “historical social science” were drawn for a two-front war—not only against the conservative dinosaurs of the *Zunft*, but also with one eye on the East German historians across the border. The advocates of “societal history” negotiated a middle path, exposing the limitations of traditionalist history of whatever stripe, while strictly demarcating themselves against the official historiography of the GDR.³² In practice, this effected an unfortunate intellectual closure. It was paralleled and partially encouraged inside West Germany by the attacks launched on “radicals” in public employment by means of the infamous *Berufsverbot*, which potentially rendered the expression of Marxist or equivalent “extremist” opinions reasonable grounds for dismissal or exclusion from the public professions for most of the 1970s.³³ The West German historical profession was not immune against those developments, and in contrast to their earlier engagement for progressive political causes, few of the new “critical historians” seemed willing to come out publicly in defense of this particular cause of academic freedom. Here, the unwillingness to credit the possibility of an independent or critical Marxist historiography began to acquire very tangible meanings. In contrast to Britain and France (and also Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, and North America), there was virtually no Marxist presence in the emerging West German movement for social history.³⁴

Fourth, just as in Britain, the turning to social history in West Germany had an essential political dimension. In West Germany even more so than elsewhere, social history's appeal was directly informed by a public climate of superordinate political conflicts, in which contested images of the national past were weightily in play. The rhetoric of social history in West Germany was always heavily didactic. It was openly driven by a politics of knowledge in that sense. But while the political conjuncture of the late 1960s in West Germany bore clear similarities with what I experienced in Britain (particularly in the turmoil of the universities, the broader cultural radicalisms, and the surrounding intellectual ferment), it also involved powerful specificities that came from the painful and unresolved legacies left by Germany's earlier twentieth-century past.

From the start, the drive for a new kind of history was intimately linked in West Germany to a contemporary discourse about history's political relevance. The interest in social history was always linked to a substantive argument—about the long-run course of the German past—that carried profound implications for the ethical probity of West German democracy in the present. At one level, this West German story was simply the local variant of “a broad international movement of historiographical renewal in Europe and North America”; at another level, its character was much more national and specific, involving both the imperfections and fragilities of West German political culture and a new generation of historians desiring that these problems be honestly faced. However indirectly, Chris Lorenz rightly observes, Wehler, Kocka, and their cothinkers were permanently preoccupied with “the question of how it was possible that Germany started two world wars within three decades and how it had organized a mass murder without precedent in history.” Lorenz maintains, “This so-called problem of the German *Sonderweg* structured the research agenda and the debates of the *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* from the 1960s to the 1990s.”³⁵

Social History as the Critique of Backwardness

Where were my own thoughts during all of this? My first reaction to the new approaches pressed by Wehler and stimulated by the Fischer controversy was excitement. After reading Wehler's big book on Bis-

marck's imperialism in the autumn of 1970, I greedily devoured the new scholarship on the *Kaiserreich* then appearing in such rapid profusion. Another thick book, by Helmut Böhme, one of Fischer's senior students, rewrote the history of German unification as the advance of dominant socioeconomic interests, replacing the old story of Prussian aggrandizement and Bismarckian statecraft ("blood and iron") with a new narrative of the making of the national economy, whose main axis was the lasting coalition of heavy industry and big estate agriculture ("iron and rye").³⁶ Hans Rosenberg's extraordinarily influential book on the political consequences of the so-called Great Depression of 1873–96 also appeared, elaborating an argument he'd originally made in the 1940s and further solidifying the interpretation proposed by Böhme and Wehler.³⁷ There were pathbreaking monographs on agrarian politics, on the political influence of the main industrial lobby, on the interests behind fiscal policy in the pre-1914 decade, on the politics of the "big navy" after 1897, and on the interest-based dynamics of party politics in the same period; and Eckart Kehr's works were revived.³⁸ Three benchmark volumes of essays, edited by Böhme, Wehler, and Michael Stürmer, were especially influential in laying down this ground.³⁹

These works had in common an interest-based understanding of how politics worked under the empire. They contended that a dominant bloc of the most powerful agrarian and industrial interests in the economy ("iron and rye"), further linked to the social power of the ruling elites, was fashioned by Bismarck during the 1870s into the main support of his politics and had remained the reliable parliamentary basis for governing the empire ever since. Böhme called the first solid appearance of this coalition, during Bismarck's break with the liberals and his turn to the right in 1878–79, a social refoundation of the *Reich*. Despite brief oscillations, later governments cleaved consistently to the same ground. It was the political scaffolding behind the persistence of the empire's prevailing authoritarianism.

As an approach to the period's political history, this scholarly effort also stressed the elites' successful manipulation of popular support. Wehler and the other post-Fischerites argued that the undemocratic provisions of the 1871 constitution weren't enough by themselves to guarantee the preservation of the status quo; Bismarck and his successors needed strategies for mobilizing the electorate's allegiance. These strategies were found in various forms of popular nationalism, aggres-

sively exploited for electoral purposes under the pressure of alleged crises of national endangerment, whether the main issue was a strengthening of the army (as in the election campaigns of 1887, 1893, and 1912), the navy (1898), or colonies (1907). In one of his boldest and most seductive conceptual moves, Wehler proposed a generic definition for this plebiscitary mechanism: “social imperialism.”

In Wehler’s understanding, “social imperialism” meant “the diversion outwards of internal tensions and forces of change in order to preserve the social and political status quo,” helping sustain a “defensive ideology” against “the disruptive effects of industrialization on the social and economic structure of Germany.”⁴⁰ Using Bismarck’s colonial policy and mass support for overseas expansion as his model, Wehler described a consistent attempt to use popular nationalism as “a long-term integrative factor which helped stabilize an anachronistic social and power structure.”⁴¹ Social imperialism of this kind was an effective “technique of rule” applied by Bismarck, by his main successors under Wilhelm II, and, later still, by Hitler for the purposes of defeating “the advancing forces of parliamentarization and democratization.”⁴² It was responsible for reconciling the working class to the status quo and containing the rise of the labor movement. Its consequences reached so far that the distinctiveness of German history from Bismarck to Hitler could be defined by this “red thread of social imperialism.”⁴³

Wehler’s approach sharply restated the meaning of the Fischer controversy. “If there [was] a continuity in German imperialism,” Wehler declared, it consisted in “the primacy of social imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler.”⁴⁴ The resulting system of ideological manipulation became endemic to the empire’s governing practices, pervasively targeting sundry “enemies of the Reich,” as in the *Kulturkampf* against the influence of the Catholic Church during the 1870s, the anti-Polish policies in Prussia’s eastern provinces, or the running battles against the SPD.⁴⁵ The popular conformities needed for the continuous “stabilizing of the system” were reproduced more generally by the empire’s key socializing institutions—namely, schooling, conscription, and the churches.⁴⁶ Yet at the same time, in Wehler’s view, this amounted to no more than “secondary integration,” capable only of provisionally and artificially papering over the cracks. The ensuing desperation encouraged ever more extreme recourse to foreign affairs, leading to the ultimate “social imperialist” escalation of July

1914. This continuity burdened the Weimar Republic with a “long catalogue of historical handicaps,” including

the susceptibility to authoritarian politics; the hostility to democracy in education and party politics; the influence of pre-industrial leadership groups, norms, and ideals; the tenacity of the German ideology of the state; the mystique of the bureaucracy; the manipulation of political antisemitism.

After 1918, these continuities “ensured at least one thing: the traditional power elites could hold the stirrups for Hitler.” Without the stirrups, “he could never get into the saddle.”⁴⁷

At the time, this approach was exhilarating for me. The new history in West Germany seemed to have exactly the same qualities that were so exciting in the emergence of social history in Britain. Its advocates were passionately committed to theory, much more explicitly so, in fact, than the British Marxists, whose own use of theory was extremely understated by comparison. The West Germans’ sense of theory was likewise both interdisciplinary and comparative. In the name of “societal history,” they sought equally to draw connections between the social transformations accompanying industrialization and changes in politics, government, and the state. They fundamentally accepted the superiority of materialist social explanation. Their model of determination was heavily structuralist, building from the movements of the economy and large-scale social patterns and trends to careful appraisals of political opportunities and constraints. In all of these ways, the new history had affinities with Marxism. Last but not least, its politics were avowedly progressive. Its foregrounding of the continuity problem and insistence on facing up to the Nazi past were admirable.

I developed big reservations quite quickly. Some of these were about particularities of interpretation in a classic historian’s way. My very first article disputed one of the leading post-Fischer arguments about the precise salience of the alliance of “iron and rye” for German politics, by looking intensively at one of the contexts in which it was supposed to have been forged, namely, a key political realignment in 1897–98; disconcertingly, what I’d found in the archives hadn’t seemed to fit.⁴⁸ From there, I explored doubts about other organizing concepts of the new work, especially Wehler’s “social imperialism.”⁴⁹ Again, these doubts came from the classic historian’s concerns.

Exactly how did these concepts function, both by their internal logic and in their wider theoretical ramifications? What larger interpretive work were they doing? How and in which concrete settings should their explanatory claims be assessed? What kind of evidence would show their validity? How did they stand up to the actual evidence of the relevant archive once I'd found it?

My serial unease with the concepts employed by Wehler and his colleagues eventually brought me to the idea of the *Sonderweg* itself. The very grandness of this concept's claims started to seem a very mixed blessing. On the one hand, it captured what appealed to me in the ambitions of social history—namely, the ability to conceptualize the developmental paths of whole societies, in ways that connected big political outcomes to social explanations and required an explicitly comparative approach. The *Sonderweg* thesis likewise offered a deep structural explanation for the origins of Nazism, which, like all German historians, I certainly wanted to understand.

On the other hand, the *Sonderweg* historians gave this deep-structural approach a powerful extra twist. In their view, the absence of a nineteenth-century breakthrough to liberalism on the French or British models allowed the old “preindustrial elites”—the military, the bureaucracy, and the big aristocratic estate owners usually known as the Junkers—to carry on exercising their dominance. Lacking democratic legitimacy, they had to do so repressively and manipulatively, thereby blocking any progressive reform of the polity. As a result, Germany's “modernizing” process was thrown out of kilter: the fundamental clash between economic modernity and political backwardness cast the empire into repeated instability, even a “permanent structural crisis,” which grew from the anachronistic primacy of “preindustrial traditions.” The resulting “structural syndrome” of German authoritarianism made Germany into a site of “misdevelopment,” compared with the healthier societal trajectories further to the West.⁵⁰ This continuity of backwardness was the seedbed of Nazism.

In this way, the *Sonderweg* approach encouraged a teleological line of argument, which inscribed Nazism's origins in the depths of the nineteenth century, when German history supposedly failed to take a “Western” turn. In effect, the quest of West German historians, such as Wehler, for an explanation of the “German catastrophe” of 1933–45 had inspired a chain of reasoning that led them into an extraordinarily deterministic reading of the history of the *Kaiserreich*. They

believed that the undeniable uniqueness of Nazism, the peculiarly vicious and violent resolution of Germany's interwar crisis, implied a deeper-rooted pathology that made German history in general different from the history of the West. But this teleology of German exceptionalism—of the German *Sonderweg*—increasingly gave me doubts.

For one thing, it seemed to begin the explanation for Nazism from the wrong time, shifting focus away from the immediate fascism-producing crises of 1929–33 and 1918–23 and toward the deeper conditions of backwardness under the empire. Wehler and the others believed that these conditions really separated Germany from, say, Britain, France, or the United States and that they explained why Germany produced fascism and the others did not.⁵¹ Yet to my mind, this focus hopelessly exaggerated the pre-1914 instabilities of the political system. The German Empire was the very opposite of a backward state equivalent to czarist Russia or the underdeveloped European periphery. For good reason, contemporaries saw it as the most compelling case of a modern state and the very model of national efficiency, sustained by the most dynamically growing capitalism in Europe. Moreover, German society was hardly any more unstable or violently conflict-ridden than Britain or France during the same pre-1914 years, and the forces of discord were managed just as successfully within the given constitutionalist system. In these terms, both the internal conflicts of imperial German society and its restless foreign expansionism could just as easily be seen precisely as expressions of its modernity, as the symptoms of an exceptionally dynamic modernizing society pushing against its limits.

This unease about the teleology of the *Sonderweg* was also connected to my Marxism. For my generation of Marxists, the particular notions of “modernity” and “modernization” proposed by modernization theory had themselves come to seem extraordinarily problematic—ahistorical, Eurocentric, technocratic, and horribly compromised by their imperialist affiliations.⁵² Such approaches were predicated on highly schematic unilinear and inevitabilist assumptions about where history was headed. They postulated a complex of functionally interrelated desiderata, whose development could be disaggregated in economic, social, political, and cultural terms, but which were also integrated at a level of “values.”⁵³ Modernization theorists also implied an end to history, a point of functional integration at which society could become stabilized in some progressively realized and terminal sense.

For most exponents of modernization theory—including the West German advocates of “historical social science”—the model of such successful integration was provided by the post-1945 societies of “the West.” Wehler, in particular, saw the modern ideal as having triumphed in “the Western societies of the past two hundred years, step by step, with varying tempo and varying intensity and reach, first in the United States, then after the French Revolution in Europe.”⁵⁴ It projected “the end utopia of a society of legally equal, educated and propertied, freely competing, possessively individualist, politically capable citizens, oriented toward the eliciting and implementing of the ‘rational’ common good.”⁵⁵ Of course, pre-1914 Germany was precisely the case that fell out. German history was the site of omissions and failures, of “ruinous manifestations and pathological developments,” of “devastating defeats,” and, ultimately, of the “betrayal of bourgeois society.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the main story of German history under the sign of 1933 was precisely the failure to create a “modern society” in any full and satisfying sense, the failure to traverse “the long hard road to modernity.”⁵⁷

But rather than seeing imperial Germany’s authoritarianism—and the possibility of Nazism beyond—as coming from the legacies of a “feudal” and “absolutist” past, I preferred to regard them as the complex effects of the turbulently evolving early twentieth-century capitalist present. I thought that historical perception of the conflicts of the imperial period was being distorted by Wehler’s narratives of stagnation and rigidity, of “backwardness” and the dominance of “preindustrial traditions,” because Germany was already in the throes of full-throttle capitalist transformation. In that sense, change itself, rather than some reified status quo, supplied the strongest continuity. In light of the explicitly anti-Marxist thrust of the *Sonderweg* advocacy, moreover, the insistence on explaining Nazism’s origins by “feudal” or “preindustrial” holdovers seemed to me increasingly like a way of freeing capitalism from the odium of any causal responsibility for Nazism. By these means, capitalism was being let off the hook.

Class Analysis from Below

My skepticism of Wehler had a further political aspect. The belief in popular agency so vital for social historians and others inspired, like

myself, by Edward Thompson collided with Wehler's kind of history on a double front. On the one hand, it clashed seriously with Wehler's social science predilections. It was no accident that Bielefeld's British connections favored the more classically materialist Hobsbawm over the more "culturalist" Thompson, for example, while a figure like Raymond Williams barely registered on their radar screen at all.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Bielefeld's top-down model of political action was also in tension with a Thompsonian commitment to "history from below." Emphasis on long-term structural changes, large impersonal forces, and measurable social trends wasn't incompatible with the latter, and Wehler's manipulative model of popular politics couldn't fail to seem highly uncongenial and problematic. Both these aspects of the West German approach left a very reduced place for popular agency. One early critique of the post-Fischer "new orthodoxy" spoke for many of us by pointing to this particular problem.

Political processes, changes, and influences are perceived as flowing downwards—though now from the elites who controlled the State, rather than from the socially vaguer entity of the State itself—not upwards from the people. The actions and beliefs of the masses are explained in terms of the influence exerted on them by manipulative elites at the top of society. The German Empire is presented as a puppet theater, with Junkers and industrialists pulling the strings, and middle and lower classes dancing jerkily across the stage of history towards the final curtain of the Third Reich.⁵⁹

In other words, the *Sonderweg* thesis, in all its ramifications, severely discouraged us from taking popular politics in imperial Germany seriously. Claims about the importance of popular mobilization and the potentials for popular citizenship could always be trumped by insisting on the empire's prevailing backwardness, the continued dominance of the preindustrial elites, and the successful defense of authoritarianism. Any evidence of popular activity could be dismissed as the effects of manipulation. Accordingly, neither the vigorous normality of popular politics before 1914 nor the real meanings of the conflicts in German society were likely to be grasped.

On realizing this, my own response was to work at developing a more complex picture of popular political involvement before 1914, one that sought to explain the new mass movements of the period by

the effects of social and political changes at the grass roots rather than by manipulative interventions from above. By reconstructing the coherence, rationality, and self-activating qualities of popular mobilization, I wanted to restore a better sense of popular agency. My immediate work concerned popular politics on the right—more specifically, the role of nationalist pressure groups in radicalizing right-wing politics before 1914.⁶⁰ But there's absolutely no question that I owed much of my skepticism about Wehler's manipulative model to what I'd learned from Thompson, Hobsbawm, and Rudé about the nature of popular protest. I also kept a close interest in German labor history, where the impact of the new social science history was especially revealing.

To some degree, the recent growth of labor history across the North Sea had paralleled that in Britain. A yearbook that began publishing in 1961, the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, initially focused rather austere on the socialist tradition's internal past, but within a decade, it branched out toward a wider vision of social history. The *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (IWK)*—an academic newsletter containing articles, documentations, guides to archives, and inventories of research—was launched in 1965. But whereas the *IWK* followed closely the format of the *Bulletin* of the Labour History Society in Britain, the pattern diverged in other respects. Backed officially by the SPD's institutional resources, the annual *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* reaped the benefits of a political relationship that the Labour History Society could never enjoy. This contrast was confirmed in 1969 with the opening of the SPD's official archive in Bad Godesberg, linked to the party's research arm, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which sponsored an impressive flow of publication and research.

It was no accident that the founding works in West German labor history came from the period when the SPD officially repudiated its Marxist heritage and declared itself a "people's party" at the Bad Godesberg Congress of 1959. Those key works included a reading of the influence of Karl Kautsky by Erich Matthias; an intellectual history of the Social Democratic tradition by Susanne Miller (born 1915); a series of studies focusing on the 1860s and 1870s by Werner Conze and his students at the University of Heidelberg; a detailed account of the SPD subculture under the empire by the Weberian sociologist Guenther Roth; and a pioneering study, by Gerhard A. Ritter (born

1929), of the SPD's growth, during the 1890s, into a mass movement.⁶¹ As the Godesberg Program ratified the SPD's long march through the existing institutions of West German society toward its destiny as a "responsible party of government," a new academic historiography emerged to ground those same claims. The convergence was splendidly manifest in the labor movement's centenary celebrations in 1963.⁶²

Because its mentor was such a key forerunner of social history in the West German profession, the Conze school is especially interesting from the point of view of the present study.⁶³ The argument revolved around the fateful consequences of the split between labor and liberalism in the mid-1860s, during the conflicts over unification—or "the separation of the proletariat from the bourgeois democracy," in Gustav Mayer's arresting phrase of 1912.⁶⁴ The resulting recriminations debarred the SPD from its rightful place in the democratic wing of an integrated national consensus, where it might have become something more akin to British labor in the post-1867 Gladstonian coalition. For Conze, that implied "an independent party of labor, allied with the Democrats but organizationally distinct, without revolutionary hostility to the state, and committed to participating in a generally accepted democratic-monarchical constitution."⁶⁵ Indeed, "until 1871," he argued, "the labor movement in Germany was part of the national movement."⁶⁶ Workers became alienated from their patriotism only by Liberal readiness for compromise with Bismarck. Liberal disparagement of democracy preempted labor's "readiness for cooperation in state and society." Their democratic hopes spurned, socialists retreated into revolutionary rhetoric and class-based isolation.⁶⁷

The Conze school's influence was complemented by works dealing with the solidarities of the Social Democratic subculture and with the effects of illegality under the Anti-Socialist Law (1878–90), each of which had deepened the labor movement's isolation from the rest of society, while heightening the integrative importance of the movement's new Marxist creed. By the 1970s, the first spate of monographs formed in the image of the new "historical social science" was also coming to fruition. As well as the next generation of Conze students, their authors included younger scholars working with Kocka and Wehler in Bielefeld, with Ritter in Münster and then in Munich, with Hans Mommsen and others in Bochum, and in a variety of other

centers. Especially important in bringing this work to print were Conze's Industrial World series, published by Klett-Cotta; the Critical Studies series edited by Kocka, Wehler, and others; and the publishing house of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.⁶⁸

Even as a consensus began coalescing during the late seventies and early eighties, new critiques and counterreactions were already emerging. Challenges came from women's history and gender history in particular, although the ascendant social science historians proved no less adept at sidelining the resulting scholarship in West Germany than elsewhere. From more generalized discontents, a new standpoint of cultural history was beginning to crystallize; its most radical West German version was *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life. I'll explore the nature of these departures in chapter 4. Here, I want to say something more about how societal history approached the history of the working class. For my own hopes of social history's possibilities, the goal of fashioning an oppositional narrative of popular-democratic agency capable of contesting the authorized accounts of the national past was always at the core, in a materialist analysis of the working class under capitalism—an analysis best exemplified, in their differing ways, by Edward Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. The pre-1914 German labor movement, so much more socialist, better organized, and apparently more class conscious than its moderate and pragmatic British counterpart, offered ideal materials for such an enterprise. So how far did the West German critical historians deliver the goods?

One answer can be found in the multivolume series *History of Workers and the Labor Movement in Germany since the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Edited by Gerhard A. Ritter for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the series started appearing in 1984. For its respective volumes, this project enlisted the most prestigious West German practitioners, including Jürgen Kocka (nineteenth century), Heinrich August Winkler (Weimar Republic), Michael Schneider (Third Reich), Klaus Tenfelde (*Kaiserreich* and World War I), and Ritter himself (*Kaiserreich*).⁶⁹ These authors confidently avowed their indebtedness to the historical social science shaped by Wehler, Kocka, and others since the 1960s—if not as a full-blooded programmatic declaration, then as an operational commitment that was simply axiomatic, intermittently brought to visibility by the footnotes, as though now self-evidently the form that good history would take.⁷⁰ In

other words, this imposing project's overt framing, including the visible architecture of the chapter organization of the individual books, was entirely assimilable to an established discourse of West German societal history as it emerged from the 1970s. What were the results?

The overall approach was heavily materialist in the now classical social-scientific sense. The foundational context of the labor movement's history was established by aggregating a series of structural analyses, built up in the course of the overall account. These covered the demographics of labor migration and recruitment; aspects of the labor process, productivity, and changes in the divisions of labor; the organization and dynamics of labor markets; the movements of wages and prices; living standards and the material conditions of social life in families, households, and neighborhoods; housing, health, and nutrition; sexuality and reproduction; and the access to welfare and social security. Holding this framework together was the directional logic of long-term processes of development, linked to changes in the social structure and their grand-scale periodization. The underlying theoretical reference points tended to be drawn from Max Weber. The assumptions about long-term societal change were organized into a Western-derived paradigm of modernization.

This was nothing if not "structural history," whose implied understanding of causality delivered the organizing principle behind the boundaries and scope of each of the books in the series.⁷¹ In the dynamics of class formation, the authors fundamentally prioritized structures and processes over human agency; they focused on changing market relations, the character of the labor market, the expansion of wage labor, the spatial growth and concentration of industry, the distribution of incomes, and the "stabilizing of the proletarian milieu" via family, neighborhood, and associated social mores. Furthermore, the history of the labor movement per se, in the form of parties and trade unions, was cleanly separated out—either for entirely free-standing volumes, such as Kocka's on the nineteenth century and Tenfelde's and Ritter's for the prewar *Kaiserreich*, or in distinct parts of the book, as in Winkler's trilogy on Weimar.⁷² With the partial exception of the "subcultural" clubs and associations, which the established wisdom considered a part of the structural working-class milieu, all the organizations and events that gave the German working class its active history under the *Kaiserreich* became formally isolated from the expe-

riential contexts of everyday material life. Everything that made the German working class visible as a collective agency—the SPD, the unions, the cooperatives, the major strikes, the election campaigns, the imposing demonstrations and rallies, the internal controversies, the charismatic personalities—became bracketed from class formation per se.

Thus, the place of politics in the pre-1914 volumes was inconsistent and not a little paradoxical. These authors presumed a model of normal development, a process of class formation deriving from the capitalist economy's structural conditions and relations, to which, over the longer run and given the chance, German workers would also have produced a "normal" response—namely, entering the legitimate public sphere through their organizations, winning support from other social groups, and becoming gradually integrated into the political system. But the reactionary political backwardness of the imperial state and its ruling elites stopped any normal evolution in its tracks. By repressing the German workers' legitimate self-organization, the government and the big employers forced the labor movement back into a posture of defensive militancy. That intransigence allowed the entrenchment of a radical Marxist leadership, who would otherwise have disappeared and made way for the pragmatists and moderate reformers who supposedly characterized the labor movement in, say, Britain.

This critical approach had been refined over a number of decades, not least by Ritter himself, whose first book helped pioneer the argument.⁷³ But it's worth noting how this political explanation is handled relative to what otherwise seems like a textbook case of socioeconomic determinism. In Ritter's and Tenfelde's account of the situation of workers under the *Kaiserreich*, the imperial state was installed at the very front of the book, assuming a foundational explanatory equivalence with the industrializing economy: in effect, the antimodern behavior of the traditional ruling elites was thereby freed from the book's machinery of structural determination and allowed to operate autonomously, acting on and against the labor movement (to block its emancipation), distorting its aspirations into self-isolating radicalism, and limiting its agency. Yet the labor movement's own political actions were given nothing like the same determinative importance in shaping the collective dispositions of the working class. Instead, by

being consigned to the subsequent (and still to be written) volumes, the politics of labor received more of an epiphenomenal meaning, becoming very much “superstructure” to the earlier account’s “base.”

This simultaneous diminishing and overburdening of politics—the argument that politics is not part of the process of class formation but external to it, that politics distorts the collective agency and cultural dispositions that class formation would otherwise produce—has been a hallmark of the German labor history interpretation represented by Ritter and Tenfelde. Yet this was precisely where the social science materialism behind that interpretation bothered me the most. During the seventies, I’d become ever more drawn to the kind of culturalist Marxism practiced by Raymond Williams, which seemed far better suited for capturing the subtleties and indirections that characterize transfers between “the political” and “the social.” The social and cultural theory I found most helpful was seeking to understand ideology and politics inside the manifold practical settings of social and cultural life, whether in the more accessible sites of the workplace or party and trade union organization; in informal spaces, such as the family or the street; or in dynamic experiential contexts, such as an election campaign, a strike, or a riot. Yet, in contrast, the social science historians continued to approach politics and ideology as discrete levels or spheres, proceeding either according to their own logics and rhythms or else connected to the economy and social structure in mainly functionalist and instrumentalized ways—at all events, as warranting a dependent and second-order reflection.

In other words, within social theory at large, the kind of structuralism presumed by *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, which made politics external to the economy and social life, was becoming harder and harder for the more self-critical practitioners to defend. It involved a highly suspect procedure—first bracketing politics out of the discussion of class formation, then reintroducing a political explanation after an exhaustive empirical-sociological analysis has established the determinative power of the economy and its social relations in the more fundamental and underlying sense. But as Peggy Somers has pointed out, “Politics, laws, cultural practices, and belief are not external to the economy; they are the mechanisms through which human livelihood operates, they *are* the economy no less than the accumulation of capital or the attempt to overcome scarcity.”⁷⁴ Far from acting externally on the working class as an already completed structure, politics and

the state should be seen as involved directly—constitutively and inextricably—inside the very processes of class formation themselves.

In that case, we are back once again to the central flaw in the master concept of the *Sonderweg*. In support of their approach within labor history, the latter's exponents always pointed to the repressive labor relations of so much of Germany's large-scale industry before 1914, together with the associated debarring of the SPD and trade unions from the legitimate political nation. By maintaining such a system of exclusion, the reactionary attitudes of the *Kaiserreich*'s most powerful capitalists were to be regarded as the redundant holdovers from a "preindustrial" or traditionalist mentality. But in response, I came to argue that we might just as well see the illiberal political outlook so prevalent among the big industrialists—their banning of unions, their heavy-handedly authoritarian approach to relations on the shop floor, and their company-based welfare paternalism—as a resourcefully modern response to the distinctive labor problems encountered during an exceptionally rapid, large-scale, and dynamic type of industrialization. In fact, rather than being pathologies or survivals intruding from a "preindustrial" past that ought to have been superseded, both the imperial polity's distinctive authoritarianism and the forms of the SPD's radicalism might be traced perfectly well to the extreme modernity of German society. Before 1914, Germany was not following an aberrant or "exceptional" path but offering a particularly extreme version of "normality."

At the heart of the problem was a lack of readiness to treat historical agency seriously enough—to honor its own terms and time while always bringing the appropriate comparative and theoretical criteria to bear, within longer-drawn perspectives of historical locatedness and change. In my view, we would never get much closer to an understanding of short-term and longer-term historical outcomes (which here meant all the complicated historical reasoning needed for a more successful positioning of the meanings of the events of 1933), unless we got further inside the political subjectivities produced by the distinctive conflicts of the different periods between the 1860s and the 1930s. In this respect, during the late seventies and early eighties, I was more and more preoccupied with the challenge of bringing my own two historian's identities more consistently together—of bridging between, on the one hand, a British historiographical scene where I was most interested in the complexities of working-class culture and

the intricacies of popular ideology and, on the other, a West German one where the dominant school of social historians thought in such relentlessly structuralist ways.⁷⁵ The dilemma was posed particularly tellingly by the new West German histories of the working class. In their stress on large-scale structures and objective processes, these studies narrowly cramped the space for any element of popular agency. They offered the opposite of a Thompsonian account. In the works of Kocka, Ritter, and Tenfelde, the German working class was decidedly not present at its own making.

On the Edge

The mid-1980s brought to a head the tensions I'm trying to describe. It's notoriously hard to date changes in the history of ideas very exactly, especially those we've lived through ourselves. Put a dozen historians around a table, and they'll each have a slightly differing version. But most will agree on this significant watershed in the life of the discipline: beforehand, social history gave the main impetus for innovation; afterward, it came from cultural history, certainly in the attention-grabbing debates and controversies. The *Sonderweg* discussion remained powerfully focused on the reasons for Nazism and the unique enormity of the genocide of the Jews, and my German interests had their own "local" momentum, but my thinking was constantly informed, challenged, and troubled by the wider debates surrounding this big transition.

The temporalities of the change varied from field to field and country to country. Among Europeanists, it occurred most rapidly in French history as opposed to other national fields, such as the British or German, and more easily among early modernists than modernists. It gathered greatest momentum most quickly among the profession in the United States, elsewhere growing far more on the margins and in the interstices. In large part, the main pressure for change in West Germany came from outside university history departments altogether, in the grassroots activism of a History Workshop movement modeling itself partly on the British forerunner. Likewise, from outside the university profession, the History Workshops remained a vital source of new ideas in Britain, establishing a much stronger presence

in the polytechnics and other second-tier institutions eventually given university standing in 1992. In the British case, many cultural historians initially found a home in cultural studies rather than history departments *per se*. In most fields, the changes took a long time to percolate. In my own cohort of German historians, the transition began among a few of us during the later 1980s, but even after a decade, arguments for the “new cultural history” were still meeting angry or dismissive resistance.

Unease crept up on us slowly, a gradual doubt in the sufficiency of social history’s totalizing claims, a slight fraying of the optimism about what it could be expected to deliver. The early debates also developed inside social history’s new frame, for by the later 1970s, this was, to a great degree, hegemonic. There was a confidence that, whatever one’s particular topic or specialism, the power of social explanation would still provide the establishing rules. In the wryly repeated phrase of the time, we were “all social historians now.” Even as we acknowledged—in fact, relished—the continuing difficulties (however much we struggled with the complexities of culture and ideology or with the never-ending need for still more sophisticated ways of theorizing the relationship of politics and society or the state and the economy), we still assumed the permanence of the underlying turn to social history itself. Even as we stepped tentatively into the forbidden zone of subjectivity and the unconscious, this held good. “In the final instance,” the sovereignty of the social would prevail. Nothing else was yet thinkable. Too many hopes, intellectually and politically, were invested. Its legitimacy was too dearly bought.

My own immediate work on the radicalization of the Right in pre-1914 Germany found me grappling firsthand with the emerging predicament. I wanted to explain the rise of radical nationalist ideology without either succumbing to a simple continuity thesis focused on 1933 or resorting to stereotypical claims about the “German mind” or a peculiar “German ideology.” Yet having started with the assumption—naturally—that this would require mainly a sociology of patriotic activism, I learned, during the distance separating my dissertation (1974) from my book (1977–78), that this wouldn’t work. Instead, I needed an improved theory of ideology, one better attuned to the experiential dynamics, self-contained logics, and independent efficacy of the radical nationalist appeals and rhetorics than the materialist ana-

lytic of the available social history approaches allowed—one capable of capturing ideology’s “relative autonomy” (in the important phrase of the time).

I found this in a number of intersecting influences, few of which troubled the thinking of many German historians. One was Gramsci, whose prison notebooks had been anthologized in 1971, followed by translations of his prison letters in 1974–75 and by increasingly extensive commentaries, reaching a climax around 1977.⁷⁶ Close in importance was Raymond Williams, whose 1973 article “Base and Superstructure” gave me a constant point of reference, leading to his more elaborate *Marxism and Literature*, published in 1977. Beginning in early 1975, I struggled with the implications of Louis Althusser’s influence, which increasingly preoccupied British Marxists. This wrestling with Althusser’s ideas did more than anything else to release thinking about ideology from its older tethers in ideas of “false consciousness,” just as the agonies of reading Nicos Poulantzas enabled a more complex grasp of the relations linking the state, political power, and social classes.⁷⁷ Most far-reaching of all over the longer term, the consequences of the new feminism, working away still somewhat beneath the surface of these other discussions, were increasingly unassimilable and a source of ever-widening disturbance.⁷⁸ Finally, two influences especially moved the thinking that went into my book: *On Ideology*, a volume of papers published by Stuart Hall and others at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and Ernesto Laclau’s essays in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*.⁷⁹ (Both works appeared in 1977 and prefigured later elaborations that came during the 1980s.)

Such discussions pushed on the edges of the materialist consensus without wanting to leave its terrain. They saw the problems with “base and superstructure” materialism while seeking to stay within a rethought structuralist Marxist idiom. As social historians turned their minds in this same direction, moreover, the second half of the 1970s brought much taking of stock. Polemical essays published in 1976 by Stedman Jones and the Genoveses were quickly taken as signs of a “crisis” in social history, for example.⁸⁰ But these were still far more the self-confident expressions of forward momentum than any sign of uncertainty. They were a further instance of the desire to recast the whole of the discipline rather than merely creating another specialism. If achieving the latter left older specialisms, such as political history, simply intact, they argued, little in the overall discipline would change.

Thus, social history now needed to make good on its totalizing promise. It should lay materialist claim to the analysis of politics, too, rather than remaining content with “the social” narrowly conceived.

There were plenty of differences among social historians. Those between Marxist-inclined Thompsonians and social science historians of various stripes, from West German advocates of “societal history” to North American admirers of Charles Tilly, come first to mind. But social historians mainly explored varying versions of a common materialist paradigm—whether pushing toward the more anthropologically inflected conception of a society’s “whole way of life” in the manner of Raymond Williams’s “cultural materialism” or looking toward more structuralist directions grounded once again in the economy or mode of production. In perhaps the most significant British debate of this kind in the late 1970s, “structuralists” inspired by the ideas of Althusser faced a broad front of social historians (dubbed “culturalists”) taking their stand with Edward Thompson, whom the author of the original intervention, Richard Johnson, had described as not taking the economy seriously enough. Each side bridled against what they saw as the other’s reductionist proclivities, whose procedures were inflating either the mode of production’s structural determinism or the explanatory reach of culture.⁸¹

But these were, again, conflicts over a common materialist goal. Cracks in the project itself appeared only more slowly. By using a decidedly nonmaterialist form of linguistic analysis to attack the validity of social interpretations of the failure of Chartism, for example, Gareth Stedman Jones questioned the class-analytical orthodoxies of British social history in one of their main nineteenth-century heartlands. His critique called into doubt the received assumptions of social history and was an early stalking horse for what became known as the “linguistic turn.” But while versions of his argument were presented in papers beginning in 1977–78, the larger implications weren’t fully apparent until his essay on the topic appeared in 1982–83.⁸² Similarly, William Sewell, who mixed with anthropologists and a few sympathetic historians during a five-year stint at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in the late 1970s, was clearly in the process of revising his commitments as a social historian and getting ready to take the linguistic turn (as he now puts it). But this bent wasn’t widely visible until 1980, when he published his book *Work and Revolution in France*.⁸³

These dispersed signs of change were only partially perceptible to most people before the early 1980s, including even the few pacesetters themselves. Yet, in seeking to grapple with the conceptual difficulties I've been describing, social historians were encountering the limits of what had so far remained a broadly consensual project. The process of rethinking an approach to questions of culture and ideology, meaning and subjectivity, was taking some people to the edges of what social history was usually thought to allow. In the interests of a nonreductionist approach to such questions, some were pushing so insistently on the boundaries of the materialist paradigm that it started to come apart.

In West Germany, for example, a scattering of individuals—Alf Lütke (born 1943) and Hans Medick (born 1939) at the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen, Lutz Niethammer (born 1939) at the University of Essen, Karin Hausen (born 1938) at the Technical University in Berlin, Adelheid von Saldern (born 1938) at the University of Hanover, and Dieter Groh (born 1932) at the University of Konstanz—were pursuing new directions that pushed deliberately past the structuralism of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Though from the same generation in terms of birth, these figures differed markedly from the social science historians in their outlook, bringing political dispositions influenced less by the modernizing reformism of the SPD and liberal democratic veneration of the United States than by the student movement and the New Left, by the new feminism, and by the resurgent extraparliamentary radicalisms shortly to culminate in the Greens.

Just as societal history declared its credentials with the new journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, these alternative voices began to be heard. In 1976, for example, Lutz Niethammer joined with Franz Brüggemeier (born 1951) to publish a remarkable study of working-class housing under the *Kaiserreich*. They developed an argument about patterns of working-class solidarity running through social life beneath the levels of party, union, and club activity normally associated with the shaping of working-class political consciousness. They urged that to understand the distinctive forms of that consciousness and, still more, its potential strengths and weaknesses, the informal settings of workers' everydayness needed to be explored. Then, in 1977, Alf Lütke edited an issue of the journal *SOWI (Sozialwissenschaftliche Informationen für Unterricht und Studium)* entitled "Needs, Experience, and Behav-

ior,” which gave the first systematic indication of what an emerging interest in the history of everyday life might mean. In the next year, Jürgen Reulecke and Wolfhard Weber (both born 1940) took this a step further, in an edited showcase of empirical research with fourteen essays on “the social history of everyday life in the industrial age,” covering aspects of work time, family, and leisure.⁸⁴

Each of these initiatives had in common a pronounced shifting of social history away from the prevailing definitions of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, without a return to the older institutionally or politically bounded approaches of traditional labor history. The purpose was to reach a more qualitative grasp of ordinary people’s lives by exploring the circumstances of daily existence at work, at home, and at play, thereby entering the inner world of popular experience. Lüdtke and the others argued that by exploring social history in those experiential or subjective dimensions, conventional distinctions between the “public” and the “private” might be overcome; the interior complexities of ordinary lives and the possible forms of political subjectivity might be opened up; and a better way of making the elusive connection between the political and cultural realms might finally be found. In the works of social science historians, precisely these “insides” of the “structures, processes, and patterns” of social analysis, “the daily experiences of people in their concrete life-situations, which also stamp their needs,” were usually left out.⁸⁵ *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life, was excellently fitted for bringing them in.

These new West German proposals emerged at the end of the 1970s as a radical solution to the problems of “base and superstructure” that, in so many ways, had preoccupied my own generation of left-tending social historians since the advent of Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class*. Certainly for those influenced by Marxism, those years had seen a sustained series of encounters with a persisting dilemma—that of finding more subtle and sophisticated ways of making connections between “the social” and “the political” (or between the ground of material life and the spheres of ideology and politics) while simultaneously providing a better strategy for conceptualizing the forms of individual and collective human agency. Beyond this larger theoretical task, moreover, was the more particular historiographical problem of connecting the increasingly rich knowledge generated by social historians with the conventional narratives that political historians were still busily reproducing.

Of course, most social historians influenced by Thompson approached agency via the dynamics of the production of class consciousness. But by the late 1970s, a belief in that model of class political agency was becoming much harder to sustain. Misgivings about the “base and superstructure” metaphor were linked by now to an increasingly generalized ferment within theory itself, reflecting critiques of economic determinism, doubts about the foundational materialism of Marx’s 1859 preface, feminist attacks on the monomania of class, and the retheorizing of ideology associated with the reception of the ideas of Althusser and Gramsci.⁸⁶ The resulting debates pulled Marxists further and further away from deterministic forms of thinking and toward a concern with matters of culture, meanings, and subjectivities in their own right. The entire logic of discussion among British Marxists during the 1970s was toward one kind of antireductionist critique or another, and these certainly had their effects on how Thompsonians now thought about the model of class formation contained in *The Making*.

Furthermore, the impact these intellectual debates had on social historians was intimately connected to developments in politics. Just as the political excitements of 1968–69 lent momentum to new kinds of history (inspiring huge self-confidence in the explanatory power of the materialist paradigm), equally severe political setbacks at the end of the next decade helped take the wind from social history’s sails. The new period opened by 1968 had fired belief in the potency of class as a prime mover in politics, not least because it also brought the last great transnational wave of Western European industrial militancy in 1967–76 and the unprecedented influence of an academic Marxist intelligentsia. For a while, the signs were conflicting. By 1978, the Eurocommunist experiment may have run into the sand, but socialists were still riding the democratic transitions in Spain, Portugal, and Greece into office, just as the French Socialists were also forming a government for the first time. In Poland, the extraordinary success of *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity) seemed to reaffirm the efficacy of class as a powerful source of political agency. But for anyone writing in the Marxist tradition in Britain, the years 1979–85 were a dismaying shock to the system. Amid two Conservative election victories and the escalating rhetoric of a New Right, masses of workers deserted the Labour Party, and the Left slid into disarray. Unemployment, deindustrialization, and capitalist restructuring gutted working-class com-

munities with brutal and alarming speed, while the crushing of the great miners' strike in 1984–85 brought the old class-based politics to an especially demoralizing impasse.

The effect for social historians was maximized by a series of prestigious commentaries that set out specifically to historicize the meanings of this new conjuncture.⁸⁷ Most resonant for British historians was a commentary by Eric Hobsbawm, who initiated widespread debate with a 1978 lecture called “The Forward March of Labour Halted?”⁸⁸ Hobsbawm argued that class had decisively changed its valency as a source of alignment and motivation in politics. Persuasively pulling together the contemporary evidence of fragmentation, he contrasted the new patterns of disintegration with the histories of class concentration from the end of the nineteenth century, which had originally sustained the labor movement's progressivist momentum. The older infrastructure of class-political allegiance and identification was falling apart, and Hobsbawm averred that if the Left wanted to retain its primary bearings in a class analysis of the inequalities of wealth and power, it needed to think creatively about how new forms of political coalescence might occur, both at the level of coalition building among old and new constituencies and at the level of rhetoric and ideas. Simple reflex to the “unity of the working class,” relying axiomatically on its progressive collective agency, wouldn't suffice.

This argument about the present was soon picked up and applied historically, forcing historians to think more searchingly about all the processes of coalition building and concentration needed to sustain forms of working-class political agency at different times in the past. If the working class could be dethroned from its natural or automatic centrality for the thinking of the Left now, what would happen to our analysis if it also became dethroned for the past? It now became easier to see that, far from a natural or “objective” unity growing sociologically from the material conditions of life in the economy and flowing logically into politics, the forms of working-class political agency had to be deliberately and creatively worked at and produced, whether in Thompson's period or in any other. Over time, a certain set of class-political traditions obviously acquired durable continuity from the end of the nineteenth century. However, the popular persuasiveness of the associated political languages—their capacity to go on doing their work—could never be taken for granted, whether in national campaigning or in the microsettings of local community life. Moreover, if

the resonance of the languages of class could certainly be enhanced, it could also, under other circumstances, undergo damage.

In that case, the social historian's decisive questions started to change. Rather than asking about the conditions under which a set of assumed working-class interests could or couldn't become expressed in their natural or appropriate forms of action and belief, perhaps we should be questioning the ascriptive modeling of class consciousness in the first place. When so many actual workers were always left out and whole categories were only partially or unevenly present in the achieved manifestations of class consciousness, what did it mean to expect workers to behave "as a class"? Which operative categories of workers were embraced—rhetorically and practically—in any particular collective action, and which were not? How did the prevailing imagery and assumptions about what constituted the working class come to be produced? How did particular practices, ideas, and institutions encourage or hamper particular attributions and interpretations of working-class interest? How did one particular complex of images about the working class become accepted and entrenched over another? Through this kind of questioning, working-class interests seemed to be far more a contingent effect than an underlying cause.

These new doubts about the class concept increased under the impact of other political developments with equally far-reaching theoretical consequences, which then also worked their way into historians' debates. By far the most important challenge came from feminism. Feminist insistence that vast categories of work and workers should no longer be marginalized from working-class history and that fundamental areas of social life simply couldn't be subsumed into the analytical terms class provided increasingly damaged the integrity of the established materialist outlook. To the disruptions and difficulties of gender would soon be added the implications of other differences: race, ethnicity, sexuality, nation and region, space, generation, religion, and so forth. All the resulting historiographies were shadowed during the 1980s by the related pluralizing of progressive political agendas, as women's movements became joined by peace movements, environmentalisms, sexual radicalisms, antiracist agitations, and the wider repertoire of identitarian and new social movement politics. In all of these ways, a wedge became driven between the analytics of class and the progressive political possibilities they had previously been used to explain.

In the late seventies, these gathering uncertainties became dramatized in a variety of ways. Most powerfully of all (in retrospect), the public political climate began lurching to the right, in ways that bruised and impaired the accustomed routines of commentary and debate, creating an excess of political anger and anxiety that the available class-political standpoints couldn't easily address. The "German Autumn" of 1977, a dismaying climacteric of ultra-left-wing terrorist futility and state-repressive response, brought one such drama, mirrored six months later in Italy by the spectacle of the Aldo Moro kidnapping and murder. These were both indications of an acute difficulty for anyone relying on the usual materialist compass. Politics was manifestly running beyond the reach of the latter and its class-analytical bearings. Then, in Britain, the hardening of workplace militancy, the radicalizing of community-based activism, and the strengthening of the Left inside the Labour Party were all trumped by the electoral outcome of 1979. The polarizing of British political life under the aegis of Thatcherism between 1975 and 1983 began concentrating energies for a political assault on the entire infrastructure of class-based popular-democratic identifications that the Thompsonian vision had so optimistically presupposed.

In other words, no sooner had a younger generation of social historians heavily influenced by Thompson begun consolidating themselves than the surrounding political conjuncture abruptly changed. In the Britain of the seventies, with industrial militancy radicalizing, unions growing in influence, the Left apparently much stronger in the Labour Party, and new radicalisms flowing from 1968, class analysis had seemed to offer a way forward, building on the social democratic gains of the postwar settlement and the strengthened civil liberties of the 1960s, while assembling the signs of returning social conflict into an oppositional political narrative of some persuasive power. But I well remember the shift from that more optimistic reading of social crisis to a mood of uneasy foreboding. During 1977–78, the New Right waxed confidently into the emerging neo-McCarthyite tones of its rhetoric, mobilizing the language of "freedom" against dissent, sharpening its hostility against the unions, and playing the race card of populist anger against immigration.

I vividly remember two episodes in particular. In September 1977, together with several hundred representatives from the various left-wing periodicals then proliferating across the disciplines and associ-

ated professions, I went to a conference entitled “Left Intellectual Work” at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The day was divided into parallel topical sessions under two overarching themes—“Problems of Ideology” and “Problems of Left Intellectual Work”—but the event was ultimately dominated in the final plenary by an understandably nervous and sometimes overwrought discussion of the hot-off-the-press publication of the so-called Gould Report, the latest in the Black Papers on Education series, which had been spearheading the right-wing counterattack against progressive education. Titled *The Attack on Higher Education: Marxist and Radical Penetration* and edited by the conservative sociologist Julius Gould, this survey of Marxists in the universities appended lists of participants at left-wing conferences of various kinds, if not with the intention of a blacklist, then clearly for the purposes of instilling fear.⁸⁹ Several months later, I spoke in a public meeting in Cambridge on the subject of the *Berufsverbot*, which was already damaging civil liberties in West Germany in the manner Gould was now intimating for Britain.⁹⁰ The sense of contracting opportunities—of politics shrinking around more limited and defensive needs—hung in the air. Both these occasions portended a very different political climate, one in which the tones and dominant terms would be set by the Right.⁹¹

In effect, class was weakening in its persuasiveness as a master concept. By the mid-1980s, battle lines were becoming very bitterly drawn, with the most forthright revisionists among the social history generation calling for the flat discarding of the old materialist standpoint, while its diehard defenders charged the former with backsliding and betrayal. Faced with such a polarity, most social historians found themselves not exactly “in the middle,” because that phrase usually implies a fudged and compromising moderation or type of confusion, a disablement before difficulty or reluctance in taking a stand. My memory of those years is rather different. However upsetting the discouragements of politics, the undoubted disappointments could also translate into a productive uncertainty, a willingness to think through difficult things. The diminishing purchase of the old explanatory materialism opened a space of fruitful indeterminacy, in which other kinds of thinking might grow. As the sovereignty of the social became challenged, other claims could be raised.

In the meantime, of course, social historians were still busy with their own work while launching journals, building institutions, and

generally benefiting from all the existing momentum. In July 1978, back in my German historical scene, I went to the University of East Anglia in Norwich for the first meeting of the Research Seminar Group on German Social History, organized by Richard Evans (born 1947). Ten of these workshops would eventually be held by 1986, leading to seven volumes of essays whose themes—the family, the working class, religion, peasant society, unemployment, the “underworld,” and the bourgeoisie—nicely encompassed the new ground of social history assembled in the course of the seventies.⁹² The purpose was to present new research from the German and English-speaking worlds in a spirit of collaboration and debate. As it happened, the seminar’s main links to Germany bypassed both the centers of partisanship for social science history and the emergent circles of *Alltagshistoriker* (historians of everyday life),⁹³ and German women’s history was also not notably present. Generationality was very clear: with the exception of the East German contingent for the volume on rural society, nearly all the participants were born in the 1940s, most of them after World War II. The group’s meetings were crucial in allowing the British community of German historians to cohere.

As I recall them, the group’s earliest discussions expressed all the sense of discovery and ambition so essential to social history’s excitements at the time.⁹⁴ But they also afforded a snapshot of the changes I’ve just described. Provoked by discussions on the history of the family in the seminar’s first meeting, I wrote a paper arguing why its subject should be made central to the next meeting, in January 1979, on the history of the working class. My purposes were certainly political. I’d spent much of that time educating myself in feminist theory (with all the severity that the reading-group culture of those years prescribed), focusing especially on critiques of the family and domestic labor but also on theories of “sexed subjectivity,” the early borrowings from Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the ideas of Michel Foucault. However, the relation of politics to history remained indivisible. The whole point of calling on such discussions was to follow through on social history’s totalizing claim—its ambition to integrate different kinds of analysis within a common history of society. I wanted to show that if we took that charge seriously, the new specialisms identified with social history’s ascendancy couldn’t be left by themselves. Once brought together, they’d illuminate the larger questions we still wanted to pursue about politics and ideology.

However, the axis of integration for radical historians was about to change. Feminist theory, for example, turned rapidly away from the Marxist terminology of women's material oppression under capitalism—with its language of patriarchy, domestic labor, social reproduction, and the sexual division of labor—toward theories of lived subjectivity centering on language and influenced by psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and literary deconstruction. The intended collaboration of “feminism and materialism” slid from the “unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism” into predictable divorce.⁹⁵ Since the 1960s, feminists had, in any case, consistently troubled the old “base and superstructure” thinking, and many now broke wholly from the materialist frame. In so doing, they both responded to and set the standard for a more general crisis of materialist thought. My 1979 paper remains a trace of the earlier self-confidence, chasing the ideal of a totalizing analysis just as it started falling apart. It's one of the few substantial papers I've written that never found their way into print. There it sits in my drawer almost a quarter of a century later, rather like a piece of bulky and exotic flotsam beached by an especially broad and powerful wave that crested impressively and then broke.

Tim Mason

Tim Mason (1940–90) was the premier social historian of the Third Reich in the 1970s. The author of a monumental 1971 Oxford dissertation on Nazi policies toward the working class, he was known for his brilliant essays and for an imposing volume of documentation and a book-length accompanying analysis on the creation of the Nazi system. For my generation of German historians, he was an inspiring and unforgettable presence. He pioneered the archivally based social history of the Third Reich from a clear stance of politically committed scholarship. An independent Marxist energized by the example of *The Making of the English Working Class*, he embodied the best of the social history produced in the Thompsonian tradition. Twenty-three years old when *The Making* was published, he was formed in the distinctive intellectual-political culture created by the British Marxist historians, becoming an assistant editor of *Past and Present* during 1967–70 and serving on its editorial board until 1971. A close friend and collaborator of Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones, Mason then became

a key member of the collective who launched *History Workshop Journal* in the mid-1970s.

While believing passionately in history's moral-political purpose, Mason set the highest standards of meticulous empirical research. He was determined never to sacrifice the complexities of interpreting the documentary record to the demands of theory or to the anti-Nazi moral imperative. Thus, when West German conservatives began accusing social historians of "trivializing" Nazism by allowing their complex explanations to efface issues of individual responsibility and the need for moral condemnation, Mason rightly rejected that charge. "[C]omplex historical arguments are not indifferent to moral issues just because they are complex," he responded. The ethical injunctions of working on Nazism could never absolve historians from other kinds of difficulty. Indeed, he argued, "[i]f historians do have a public responsibility, if hating is part of their method and warning part of their task, it is necessary that they should hate precisely."⁶

Mason was one of the first to tackle the question of working-class resistance against Nazism by going beyond the straightforwardly celebratory or heroizing approach so familiar from the orthodox Communist historiography of the GDR. His analysis likewise differed from the dominant views in the West, which had always cleaved obsessively to the aristocratic and military opposition associated with the July 1944 assassination plot against Hitler. Looking beyond the courageous, but ultimately isolated, resistance of the Communist and Social Democratic illegal undergrounds, Mason asked how else the dissidence of workers might be conceptualized under circumstances where the usual forms of collective organization were denied: "In what sense can one speak of class conflict in a situation where the class had been deprived of the possibility of organizing itself and of educating itself politically?"⁷ This was an exciting departure in itself. Studying a time when popular freedom seemed to have been most violently and comprehensively taken away, Mason sought to restore agency to the working class. His work affirmed the necessity of doing social history even where conventional types of political, military, biographical, and related kinds of history most powerfully held sway. It affirmed certain basic Marxist commitments by giving history back to the German working class under the Third Reich. It affirmed certain values of socialist humanism as they appeared to the British New Left of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

For those who became German historians at the time, Mason's work was an invaluable support. I first read him in my last year at grammar school, in 1966. Learning my history through a series of current controversies and modeling myself on A. J. P. Taylor, I read Mason's *Past and Present* essays "Some Origins of the Second World War" and "Labour in the Third Reich, 1933–1939" and immediately discovered new ways of asking the pertinent questions.⁹⁸ I neither was taught by him while a student in Oxford nor even worked in his own period or field, but his presence was a vital fixture for history undergraduates active on the Left. The Social History Seminar he ran from St. Antony's College with Joaquín Romero Maura, Raphael Samuel, and Gareth Stedman Jones was a beacon of alternative history in a university whose official curriculum offered so little. It opened a window onto ways of doing history differently. In launching a similar seminar in Cambridge in 1975, I had very much this ideal in mind. Tim Mason was a model of critical and committed scholarship. He worked in a field where being a historian really mattered, where the issues of relevance that occupied so many of us in the late 1960s could patently be addressed. One obituary appreciation called him a "comet among his contemporaries."⁹⁹ For me, he was a lodestar.

In some ultimate sense, Nazism brought most of us into German history at that time. It was the dark secret that history could empower us to unlock. It shadowed our thoughts and conversations, whatever our particular periods and topics. We found ourselves recurring there all the time—facing up to its grotesque moral enormities, referring it to social explanation, locating it in the longer German past, probing the failures of the Left and the disabling of opposition, and puzzling over what exactly had brought Germany to the Third Reich. No one did more than Mason to help clarify those issues. He was one of the first on the Left to grasp the nettle of the autonomy of politics and to loosen the causal nexus of Nazism and the economy far enough to allow the links and mediations to come better into view.¹⁰⁰ He was the first to reformulate the questions of popular resistance and accommodation that motivated the best work on the social history of the Third Reich. While his peers buried their heads firmly in the sand, he insisted that women's history be taken seriously.¹⁰¹ In the last period of his life, he began comparing Nazism with Italian fascism.¹⁰²

More than anyone else, Mason rendered Nazism vulnerable to social history—not by "normalizing" it into a subject like all others

(divesting Nazi ideology of its horror or the Nazi terror of its brutality), but by showing as carefully as possible how Nazism remained subject to social determinations. He insisted on the class-political context of Nazism's emergence, its origins in the field of conflict defined by the German revolution of 1918 and the polarized political culture of the Weimar Republic. Nazism, he argued, was originally about the destruction of the working-class movement in Germany. Whatever else it may have been—and he always knew it was much more—Nazism had antisocialism inscribed at its very center. Everything else—from the political modalities of the economic recovery to the racialized ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the community of the race-nation-people), the drive to the East, and the dynamics of the Final Solution—flowed from the regime's founding acts of violence. To produce the regime's freedom of action, the forces of democracy organized around the labor movement had to be rooted out and destroyed.

Social historians, such as Mason, were highly skeptical about the effectiveness of Nazi ideology. Mason claimed that German workers, both underrepresented in the Nazis' ranks before 1933 and solid in their own Communist and Social Democratic allegiances, proved relatively resistant to the Nazi political message. Even after the labor movement's violent destruction in 1933, he argued, the regime only exercised its political control within certain practical limits, frustrated by the workers' strong residual and defensive class consciousness. In fact, the potential for class conflict remained structural and endemic even under the Third Reich, a permanent and irreducible feature of social life under capitalism, giving working-class culture an opacity and imperviousness to certain kinds of ideological persuasion, which neither the Nazis' repression nor their propaganda offensives could ever completely penetrate or sweep away.

Mason took pains to distinguish between, on the one hand, the political resistance of the labor movement's illegal Communist and Social Democratic undergrounds, which were isolated from wider support, and, on the other, the slow reemergence of class conflict in industry, which he termed the workers' "opposition." Coerced and deprived of their historic legal representation, the mass of ordinary workers pragmatically accepted the Third Reich's delivery of material improvements, he suggested, while still withholding their positive allegiance. But that "opposition" was essentially nonpolitical. It was a

silent refusal of the regime's ideological message, a withholding of active consent, either by pulling back into the relative safety of private life or by holding onto an economically defined self-interest. The residual resourcefulness of working-class culture kept the full demanding voraciousness of the Third Reich at bay. Yet while the "workers' opposition" posed big problems for the regime during 1936–40, it did so, in Mason's view, without any explicit political challenge: "It manifested itself through spontaneous strikes, through the exercise of collective pressure on employers and Nazi organizations, through the most various acts of defiance against workplace rules and government decrees, through slowdowns in production, absenteeism, the taking of sick-leave, demonstrations of discontent, etc."¹⁰³

Most influential social histories of the 1970s followed some version of Mason's logic. In the work of Martin Broszat, the doyen of Third Reich historians inside West Germany itself, the analogue to Mason's concept of "opposition" was the more qualified idea of *Resistenz*. Broszat used this term to capture not the forms of a translated or displaced authentic opposition whose actions thwarted the regime's fundamental goals, as Mason sought to suggest, but, rather, a category of behaviors that exercised only a limiting effect on its totalizing ambition.¹⁰⁴ Yet the implications reached no less far. The fine social histories published under the auspices of Broszat's Bavaria Project during 1977–83 had the effect of shifting attention away from the failed assassination plot of July 1944, which had long monopolized perceptions of the German Resistance, and refocused it instead on the level of everyday life. Broszat and his colleagues insisted that the efficacy of the Third Reich's governing system needed to be judged through the experiences of ordinary citizens, who lacked the conspiratorial resources, social privileges, and languages of ethical heroism available to the elite participants in the July plot but faced no less acute moral and practical dilemmas in their working, social, and familial lives. Broszat and his colleagues claimed that a more subtle idea of resistance as nonconformity or nonpermeability would allow us to grasp those quotidian realities of social life far more effectively. It could show us "how people behaved during the Nazi dictatorship, how they compromised with the regime but also where they drew the line—sometimes successfully—at the regime's attempts at interference, penetration, and control."¹⁰⁵

This approach markedly downplayed the power of Nazi ideology. To put it another way, such historians as Mason and Broszat acknowledged the practical complicity of the ordinary population in the regime's daily working, only to counterpose this complicity against German workers' apathy and practical indifference toward the Nazis' specific ideological claims (their "opposition" or *Resistenz*). It was no accident that the accent of this work was on the Left. In a complicated sense, the argument about nonpermeability seemed to become a way of honoring the integrity of the German working class and its ability to keep the Nazis at bay—in a subtle counterpoint to the celebratory antifascism of East German Marxist-Leninist historians, as a kind of fallback position once the beleaguered and isolated qualities of the actually existing Communist and Social Democratic undergrounds had been admitted.¹⁰⁶

In fact, Mason was very much inspired by Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*. He wished to rescue the honor and dignity of the German working class from the defeat and humiliation inflicted on it by the Nazis. He approached Nazism with an underlying master category of "society" as his guide: while he accepted the breadth of the Third Reich's social support, he wanted to preserve the existence of this "society" as an intact and separable domain, as a source of viable agency that, however limited and compromised, still allowed Nazism's impact to be contained. In that sense, society remained a damaged but recuperable resource. Its resilience allowed the "effective warding off, limiting, damming up of the NS rule or its claims," whatever the particular "motives, reasons or strengths" of individuals may have been.¹⁰⁷ Mason also proceeded from the continuing sovereignty of German capitalism and the primacy of class as determinants shaping and constraining the ability of the Nazis to realize their goals, certainly in the years 1933–39. Even during the war, when militarist expansion and the racist frenzy of genocide overwhelmed everything else, the integrity of the "social context," however battered and reduced, could still be analytically upheld. Indeed, Mason's grand ambition was to build a general analysis of Nazi rule from the ground up in that way, deriving both its driving force and its continuing constraints from the shape-shifting dynamics of class conflict and class relations.

This was the apogee of the social history ambitions emerging into the 1970s. Yet, twenty years later, German historians have almost

entirely jettisoned that attempt to explore the subtle and submerged ways in which society's autonomy was preserved. They now concentrate instead on showing how the bases of the social order were comprehensively disorganized and then remade. Different social groups may have kept some defenses against Nazism's explicit ideological message or protected some remaining privacy against Nazi coercion, but their behavior was influenced more insidiously by the spreading of racialized discourse across all the shelters and crevices of ordinary life. Moreover, that hegemony of racialized thinking—across social groups, in multiple sites of policymaking and knowledge production, in state and nonstate institutions, in academic and popular culture—can only be grasped by returning to the study of ideology, which social historians adamantly left behind. This has become the new orthodoxy for historians of Nazism, irrespective of the complexities of social differentiation in that older, 1970s sense.

In fact, in the thinking of most Third Reich historians these days, Mason ascribed to the working class an immunity against Nazi influences that has definitively gone. Whether colluding in the exploitation of coerced foreign labor in the war economy, wearing the uniforms of the genocidal army on the Eastern Front, or generally joining in the “good times” of the Nazi era from the mid-1930s to 1942–43, German workers could no more withdraw themselves from the consequences of Nazi rule than any other group. Their complicity ensued whether those consequences were structural, in the racialized labor market and its rewards; social, in the new patterns of discriminatory sociality; or cultural, in the new public mores and their sanctions.¹⁰⁸ In regarding the working class as Nazism's principal antagonist, moreover, Mason had used an overarching framework of fascism for understanding the Nazi regime, and that, too, has gone: “Theories of fascism have been replaced by models of the racial state, in which biological rather than social categories are preeminent.”¹⁰⁹ As the main organizing category of Third Reich historiography, “class” is now trumped by “race.”

These new patterns of thinking began developing in the course of the 1980s, as Mason gradually receded from the discussions of German historians and turned his attention to Italian fascism. The ground of social history from which the best minds had sought, since the sixties, to confront the enormities of Nazism was—at first gradually and then decisively—left behind. Like the earlier turning to social history,

this change was shaped by broader trends in the discipline, whose character forms the subject matter of chapter 4 of this book. Among German historians, those trends included the vital impact of women's history and gender analysis; the remarkable upsurge of *Alltagsgeschichte*; a burgeoning interest in "biological politics," or the histories of medicalization and racialization in the social policy domain; and—last but certainly not least—the new centrality of the Holocaust for how German historians began thinking about their field.

Each of those developments brought ideology back into the very center of discussion. In the course of the 1980s, historians stopped being mainly interested in Nazism's variable social contexts in the classical materialist or sociological sense, which, almost by definition, had encouraged them into doubting or relativizing the efficacy of Nazi ideological appeals. They turned instead to exploring the deeper, more elaborate, and often submerged genealogies of Nazism's big ideas. In so doing, they didn't so much abandon social history's underlying commitment as attempt to build further on its gains. They retained the skepticism about how far the continuing exegesis of "Hitler's worldview," in the immediate sense, could take us. But they concentrated on the broader societal settings where thinking sympathetic or conducive to Nazi policies could be found. Emphasizing the practical circulation of racialized styles of thought, they examined the instantiating of Nazi ideals in the basic social intercourse of everyday life, in the ordinary behavior of institutions, and in all the more insidious kinds of ideological diffusion. The powerful implication of this new approach—that for anyone facing the spread of Nazi ideology, there was increasingly no safe place—began to corrode Mason's default belief in the damaged but resilient intactness of society and in the survival of the working class as a continuing source of agency, the place from which "opposition" could begin.

Mason also held passionately to a belief in the historian's ethical responsibilities, to the paramount necessity of keeping the larger picture in view. It mattered decisively where one chose to end and begin a particular historical account, he reflected. Which processes or possibilities were brought to an ending in 1945, and where might they have begun? Even more important, how definitive was the closure? What continuing lessons might there be? The importance of these questions grew if the story remained unfinished.

The imperative to assess the whole is above all a moral and political imperative. The suffering and destruction of life that the Nazi regime brought about was on so vast a scale and of such novel quality, that any study of a part of the story that fails to confront this central fact must, at least by implication, trivialize the whole. If this study of the working class in Germany were a piece of labor history in the conventional sense, it would be an intellectual, moral and political evasion, however accurate it might be in detail. This obligation to attempt to interpret the whole through one of its constituent parts is not, in the end, different in kind from that which faces all historians working on all subjects. It is just more massively obvious. Casting a small, finely finished stone onto a heap which might one day transform itself into a mosaic is here an unmistakable capitulation. Elsewhere this is just less obviously the case.¹¹⁰

From this point of view, Mason had wanted to use a study of the working class to produce a general history of the Third Reich—not by presenting the view “from below,” in some populist perspectival sense, but as a way of opening up the tense and conflicted dialectic between the regime’s driving objectives and its ability to enlist the resources of Germany’s class-divided society. He convincingly argued that varying versions of this implied dilemma—involving the negotiation, focusing, and containment of the political tensions resulting from the class divisiveness of the period—formed the common ground of Europe’s inter-war political history. He devoted great resourcefulness to reconstructing “the story of working-class insubordination” under the Third Reich, oscillating “between depicting it as the quasi-spontaneous expression of class conflict on the one hand, and, on the other, as the muted echo of working-class traditions of political militancy which even the Nazis were unable to stamp out until the intensified terror of the wartime regime.”¹¹¹ To the end of his career, Mason stood by the view that “class conflict remained endemic in Nazi Germany.” Given the brutal specificity of Nazi rule, “which denied the working class its own organizations,” the forms of that class conflict could “only be understood as a diffuse, dynamic, relational phenomenon (lived experience).”¹¹² The Thompsonian resonances in this view are very clear.

But the stronger contention that “class relations are *the* constitutive element in the history of industrialized capitalist states,” the Marxist

social historian's axiomatic wish, was given up.¹¹³ Reaching such a recognition involved the profoundest disappointment. The extremes of that disappointment also had an acutely gendered quality because the slow collapse of the hopes invested in a class-based analysis by social historians was to prove far more disorienting for men who were on the Left than for women. Feminists had already grasped the insufficiencies of class-centered thinking after all, but made women's history their alternative ground for holding politics and social history together. Absent some comparable positivity, the frustrations and failures acquired a more painful emotional register—even where male socialists were making themselves into feminists too, as Mason himself certainly did.¹¹⁴ Despite all Mason showed about the centrality of class conflict to the thinking of the Nazi leadership and the dynamics of policymaking in the 1930s, he came to acknowledge that for certain vital purposes, the class-analytical framework simply couldn't suffice. Indeed, precisely Nazism's worst violence and atrocities—the genocidal project of the Holocaust, which he urged the historian never to evade—most exceeded the social historian's reach.

At the end of his life, Mason reflected brilliantly and movingly on this insufficiency. In important aspects, he now saw, the original argument he'd tried to make about “the interlocking crisis of domestic and foreign policies” in 1939—the relationship of the decision for war to a putative general crisis of the regime—was flawed. In particular, contrary to his earlier thoughts, the plentiful evidence of industrial discontent couldn't be used to “indicate a wide-scale, hidden political discontent” of the working class.

At bottom [that view] rested on the unsustainable proposition that a passive, latent loyalty to the class organizations destroyed in 1933 was still widespread in 1938–39. I greatly underestimated the disillusionment and fatalism which the policies of the parties and the trade unions caused among their supporters in 1933, and the depoliticization that followed the crushing of the first waves of underground resistance. More recent local studies and oral history research underline . . . the degree to which some elements of Nazi attitudes made inroads into popular consciousness from the mid-1930s on.

He didn't withdraw his arguments about the severity of the Nazi policymaking dilemmas on the eve of war or their rootedness in economic

dysfunctions and the associated popular discontents. Yet he argued that “rejection of Nazi social and economic policies where they hit people’s immediate material interests did not *necessarily* imply a disguised rejection of the regime in general, even though such partial rejections were often resolute and sustained.”¹¹⁵

Everything implied by Mason’s reference to Nazi “inroads into popular consciousness” caused the most damaging doubts. The best work on the Third Reich during the 1980s started exploring the histories of popular complicity, still using Mason’s and Broszat’s frameworks of negotiation and accommodation, but now seeing as the leitmotif collusion and co-optation rather than “opposition” and *Resistenz*. By the nineties, such work was focusing overwhelmingly on 1939–45, when the war economy’s massive enslavement of foreign labor combined with the conscription of German workers into the genocidal army disorganized once and for all any remaining traces of the labor movement’s older countervailing solidarities. Even the class-cultural resilience of workers when left to themselves, in the mutualities of the shop floor or the pride taken in work, presupposed forms of adjustment to the *Volksgemeinschaft*’s ideological power, in both its beneficial and coercive dimensions.¹¹⁶

By the end of the 1980s, Mason had abandoned his original goal. He no longer believed it was possible “to move outwards from the ‘core area’ of class relations towards a potentially all-inclusive political social history of Nazism and the Third Reich.” His work stopped in 1939, so on two of the most decisive fronts for such a general history (the regime’s lasting popular allegiance during the war years and its pursuit of genocide), it had nothing to say. This came partly from emotional choice. Before the horrifying actualities of biological racism and genocidal extermination, Mason felt “emotionally, and thus intellectually paralyzed”: these were “facts which I could not face, and therefore could not understand and not give a proper place to.”¹¹⁷ Actually, he did reflect very acutely on the meanings of this absence. When, in his closing summation at a 1988 conference in Philadelphia, he described the main theme of the new research on Nazism as “biological politics,” it was the first time I heard that now familiar argument.¹¹⁸ But if “murderous biological politics of all kinds” was indeed “the great legacy of National Socialism,” the class-analytical standpoint of Thompsonian social history clearly had its limits. As Mason came to acknowledge, “no clear path” could “be traced from class conflict to

the fundamental projects of the Third Reich.” Under Nazism, in fact, the “constitutive element” was not capitalism or its class relations at all but, on the contrary, the political regime of the Third Reich itself.¹¹⁹

In this sense, Tim Mason’s project of writing a general class-based account of National Socialism’s relationship to German society failed. His project hit an impasse, in an extreme and tragic case of materialist social history running up against its limits. By the early 1980s, Mason was doubting his ability to carry his book to an end. He resigned his teaching position in Oxford and moved to Italy in 1984, turning to the study of Italian fascism. Right to the last, he continued publishing extraordinarily important and suggestive essays. His final writing on Nazism remains among the best we have. But he never returned to his magnum opus. In fact, in March 1990, impossibly weighed down by a sense of personal, scholarly, and political difficulty, he killed himself, quite carefully and deliberately, in a weekend hotel room in Rome.