

Marc Linder

European Labor Aristocracies

Trade Unionism, the Hierarchy of Skill, and the
Stratification of the Manual Working Class before
the First World War

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Part II

Continental European Labor Aristocracies

The skilled and steady employments are not cumbered with
clowns and idiots. (1)

Chapter 8

Germany

A. The Revolution of 1848

In Germany, as elsewhere, significant wage differentials among various sectors of the manual working class can be traced back to the period prior to the rise of industrial capitalism. (1) But just as it was shown to be conceptually inappropriate to infer the existence of a labor aristocracy from the presence of wage differentials in eighteenth century Britain, so too it is unwarranted to speak of one for the German states in the early nineteenth century. Given the fact that industrialization and proletarianization set in at a later point in time in Germany, (2) a self-reproducing proletariat failed to appear before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. (3) At mid-century, the German working class was as backward as German industrial capitalism. (4) Consisting of a number of disparate groups of numerically unequal strength, manual workers had not yet coalesced into a unified socio-economic, let alone politically conscious class. (5)

In 1846, the number of factory workers (551,244) exceeded the number of wage-dependent craftsmen (384,783) in Prussia, but with the addition of the master craftsmen (457,365), the aggregate artisanate was considerably larger than the industrial proletariat. (6) Although clearly expanding, the Prussian (7) factory working class still accounted for but one of every ten manual workers, whereas agricultural laborers, day laborers and servants constituted more than one-half of the manual working class. (8) In Berlin, the largest German city, only one inhabitant in forty was classified as a worker in 1847. (9)

In spite of the undeveloped state of the German working class, it has been suggested that by 1848 the factory worker, particularly in iron foundries and locomotive works, (10) had become a labor aristocrat, who

refused to play the role of downtrodden plebeian which socialist theory had chosen for him. He remained faithful to king and fatherland ... and he resented the insistence

of the left that he was a proletarian. For it was humiliating to be identified with an uprooted artisan who had neither work nor hope nor pride. As the aristocrat of the lower classes, the factory employee felt himself far above the destitute handicraftsman, and he held on tenaciously to the sense of social superiority which made his hard life more endurable. (11)

This retrojection of the existence of a labor aristocracy to the Germany of 1848 requires close scrutiny. First, the distinction between factory operatives and artisans is overdrawn (12) in the sense that it evokes the image of two sectors, each internally homogeneous and impervious to recruitment from the other. In point of fact, factory workers in the 1840s were recruited largely from among small peasants and agricultural laborers on the one hand and former artisans who had been deprived of their "independent" economic status by the triumph of machine industry, on the other. (13) In particular, the key industry of machine making, which as a new branch of production could not fall back on a core of skilled workers, preferred formerly skilled carpenters, smiths and millwrights for training purposes. (14) Although the temporary bottleneck in the supply of skilled industrial workers may have induced some firms to patronize such employees, which, in turn, may have tempered the latter's rebelliousness, (15) the familial and social background of these workers probably differed but little from that of non-aristocrats. Moreover, the former's alleged "superiority" did not make the machinists, for example, immune to the mass layoffs of these years. (16)

Second, this stratum of workers was not identical with the whole body of factory operatives. Rather, it overlapped with those employed in relatively new branches--such as machine making and metallurgy--which required larger numbers of skilled workers. In the much larger industries of textiles and clothing the advanced degree of mechanization permitted the employment of unskilled workers, symbolized by the extensive use of women and children. (17)

Third, the artisanate did not undergo a uniform process of ruinization and proletarianization. Although many crafts--such as spinning, weaving, nail making and brewing--did succumb to the competition of machine production, others--such as building, printing and baking--were able to maintain themselves or even to expand. (18) Consequently, it is impermissible to contrast the industrial worker and the artisan since many of the former were unskilled and experienced deteriorating conditions whereas many of the latter still enjoyed relative prosperity.



This dichotomous image is, fourth, inadequate because it obscures the fact that numerous artisans became active participants in radical or revolutionary movements not because they had suffered absolute immiseration, but rather because the increasing scale of production limited the number of journey-men who could become self-employed or small masters. This intra-generational consciousness of the ineluctability of wage labor caused them to "experience the oppressive distinction between entrepreneur and worker doubly," since their first-hand knowledge indicated to them that their employers possessed no virtues that they themselves had not acquired. (19)

The ascription, finally, of labor aristocratic status to a body of largely unorganized (20) workers is problematic in light of the socio-historical specificity traditionally associated with the term. (21) For labor aristocracies in nineteenth century capitalist societies differed crucially from the less opaque products of the ruling class tactic in precapitalist societies of patronizing certain sectors of the exploited classes in order to forestall the formation of a solidary political opposition. The salient difference between these two contexts consisted in the fact that pre-capitalist ruling classes endeavored to maintain their position in relation to a fundamentally atomized underclass. (22) Their tactics flowed from policies consciously formulated on a superordinate political level (23) or, alternatively, were implemented directly by local property owners. Common to such politics were the substantial element of initiative on the part of the ruling classes and the virtual passivity on the part of the privileged stratum of the exploited classes.

In modern, capitalist labor aristocracies, on the other hand, bourgeois policy assumed a distinctly subsidiary role, whereas objective economic and derivative political processes became paramount. At the same time, labor aristocrats, though not necessarily having reflected on the societal ramifications of their actions, entered into complicated political-economic negotiations with industrial employers and the state in order to secure a status inaccessible to other proletarian strata. Since such procedures were not restricted to individual plants or firms, (24) but extended to nation-wide industries or to national political institutions, they presupposed a bargaining agent that could act effectively and uniformly on behalf of this stratum. This agent almost invariably proved to be a non-universal trade union organization (since universal membership would have complicated or even precluded the conferral of stratified privileges). Attempts, on the other hand, to by-pass trade unions, that is, to elevate certain groups of unorganized workers to a favored position, differed in political character

from the classical mechanisms of erecting privilege. These highly conscious and aggressively anti-unionist efforts commonly stemmed from sectors of the employing class that perceived either their sectional interests or the aggregate societal equilibrium as menaced by an intractable trade union or socialist movement. (25)

For the foregoing reasons, then, the introduction of the notion of a labor aristocracy into the analysis of Germany at the time of the revolution of 1848 confuses historically disparate phenomena.

B. A Comparison of the Craft Basis of Trade Unionism in Germany and Britain

That fundamentally different national political-economic forces shaped the rise and consolidation of trade unionism in Britain and in Germany is indicated, negatively, by the fact that craft unions predominated in both countries; it would, in other terms, be unwarranted to reduce the differences in the socio-political orientation of the labor movements in these two countries to that which was common to them--namely, the similar (and in part identical) industrial sectors and occupational groupings from which members were recruited as well as the narrow organizational structure of the unions. (26)

This similarity in the composition of the membership applied to the predominance of artisans not only during the years prior to 1848, (27) but to the entire period before World War I. Thus both the Lassallean trade unions (coordinated by the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterschaftsverband) and the more Marxist-inspired unions affiliated with the First International (Internationale Gewerkschaftsgenossenschaften), which were founded in the latter part of the 1860s and forced into dissolution by Bismarck's repressive legislation in the mid-1870s, recruited their members chiefly from the skilled trades; bricklayers, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, woodworkers, bookbinders, bakers and metal workers were particularly well represented. (28) A similar pattern emerged from the first comprehensive enumeration of trade unionists published in 1878. (29)

Contemporary Social Democrats were acutely aware of the difficulties involved in organizing the unskilled industrial proletariat. The central organ in exile of German Social Democracy during the period of the Anti-Socialist Law (30) adduced

two reasons to explain why German factory workers had not been organized: 1. individual plant and firm welfare programs presumably diverted the attention of workers from the underlying cause of their exploitation; and 2. their wages were too "miserable" to enable them to afford to pay union dues. (31)

The two components of this explanation are contradictory; for if wages were in fact very low, it does not seem plausible that "welfare" plans could have been effective enough to forestall all attachment to socialist politics. And indeed, as Der Sozialdemokrat proceeded to point out, although the factory proletariat was not organized, it did support and vote for Social Democracy. (32) Such informal participation indicates that high dues may have rendered mass membership impossible at that time; (33) it also underscores the inflexibility of the Social Democratic movement, which was willing to accept an undemocratic principle of organization that relegated the bulk of the proletariat to passive membership.

Der Sozialdemokrat also maintained that only workers in small and medium-sized firms were organized because the master employing five to twenty journeymen did not possess the means to bind them to his shop; nor, on the other hand, did the journeymen become subject to the same type of dependency that characterized the relationship between factory proletarians and factory owner. The craftsmen's skill insured not only greater autonomy vis a vis the individual employer but also the status and respect inhering in a "person." (34)

Although theoretically plausible and historically reflective of the empirical evolution of trade unionism in various countries, this argument was manifestly at variance with the conceptualization of the genesis of class conflict set forth by the doctrinal leaders of German Social Democracy, Marx and Engels. For they perceived political-economic class struggle as arising from a radical transformation of skilled artisans (as well as of peasants and small tradesmen) into unskilled factory proletarians, dehumanized, alienated from their work and product, an appendage to machine and employer, concentrated in ever larger plants and subject to increasingly homogeneous living conditions. (35) To be sure, it is possible to view the situation in Germany as an early stage in the development of the labor movement corresponding to the comparatively retarded development of German industrial capitalism. (36) Even after the rise of large-scale industry in Britain and Germany, however, the vast majority of industrial proletarians remained outside the organized labor movement whereas skilled tradesmen in smaller firms formed the core of membership. (37)

The fact that craftsmen rather than industrial laborers provided the bulk of trade unionists well into the twentieth century compelled Marxists to seek an explanation of this deviation from the expected course. (38) They emphasized, inter alia, the fact that in certain areas of Germany (such as Rhenish Bavaria), in which peasant in contradistinction to feudal estate farming had been the dominant form of land use, the recruits to urban industry were small peasants and agricultural workers who were not only frugal but also "possessed by the property-devil," that is to say, "ideal workers in the sense of the exploiting bourgeoisie." (39)

Apparently dissatisfied with earlier attempts at explanation, Marxist historians have recently undertaken to prove that the dominance of skilled tradesmen in small and medium-sized firms was "not coincidental, but rather socio-economically founded." (40) In a curious inversion of the traditional Marxist critique of the reactionary role of guild traditions in Germany, the latter have been invested with a progressive spirit of solidarity that has been alleged to have united such journeymen as printers, carpenters, shoemakers and masons at a time when they perceived the transformation their occupations were undergoing. (41) To the extent that industrialization not only undermined craft traditions by means of mechanization and the intensified division of labor, (42) but also impaired or rendered almost hopeless the prospect of achieving economic independence, (43) it is plausible that craftsmen undergoing proletarianization banded together in opposition to embryonic capitalist exploitation. (44) Many artisans, on the other hand, particularly at the time of the revolution of 1848-1849, reacted to the threat of proletarianization by demanding the suspension of industrial freedom (Gewerbefreiheit), the introduction of which had marked a major superstructural victory for the agents of capitalist forms of enterprise. (45)

An extended version of the foregoing explanation has stressed that a significant proportion of skilled trade unionists toward the close of the nineteenth century represented precisely such proletarianized craftsmen. (46) This particular form of dequalification presumably radicalized this stratum, whereas the surplus agrarian population, which formed a large segment of the unskilled factory work force, did not bring with it a tradition of collective resistance or organization. (47) Yet analysis of the supposedly retardant influence of the absence of forms of struggle specific to capitalist exploitation reveals the existence of gaps in the aforementioned thesis; for as the example of the masons, the great majority of whom were recruited from villages and rural areas and whose education

more closely resembled that of rural day laborers than that of craftsmen or modern industrial workers, (48) demonstrates, even within the framework of German society agrarian origins did not necessarily preclude the formation of militant anti-capitalist trade unions. (49)

The first result of the preceding discussion confirms the claim that skilled workers, often employed in craft shops, rather than industrial proletarians predominated in the trade union movements of nineteenth century Britain and Germany. If subsequent analysis indicates that a comparable labor aristocracy did not arise in Germany, it may be concluded that monopolization of the trade union movement by the skilled was not a sufficient condition for the generation of a labor aristocracy. Derivatively, the fact that unskilled laborers were not in the forefront of the labor movement in Germany should draw attention to the unfounded prejudice, often espoused in Marxist historiography, that they were imbued with revolutionary consciousness; for as Marx observed, "numbers weigh only in the balance, if united by combination and led by knowledge." (50) Mere subjection to exploitation in developed capitalist forms did not guarantee short-term consciousness of this new social relationship let alone the emergence of collective measures to combat it. (51) Mere concentration and centralization of capital and labor did not automatically sublimate the atomization of industrial recruits; the latter's self-consolidation as a coherent social force proved to be a much more complex and tortuous process than nineteenth century theorists had imagined. (52)

C. From the Revolution to the Expiration of the Anti-Socialist Laws

The type of labor aristocracy that impressed observers during the latter half of the nineteenth century differed considerably from that which had supposedly arisen in 1848 and even more radically from that which manifested itself after the rise of the large central unions affiliated with the Social Democratic Party in the 1890s. If the function of the labor aristocracy in the 1840s had been to stand aloof from revolutionary movements, its role was said to be more activist in the period from the 1850s through the 1870s. For at this time the liberal bourgeoisie, consolidated organizationally in the Fortschritts-

partei, sought to gain a foothold in the urban working class, which was in the process of being molded by capitalist industrialization. The primary vehicle of this effort to influence certain proletarian strata--Worker Education Societies (Arbeiterbildungsvereine)--was launched in the 1860s in connection with attempts by the bourgeoisie to forge alliances that could exert political pressure on the ruling absolutist-feudal classes. (53)

The bourgeoisie needs ... a large staff of intelligent workers which the elementary school under the domination of the orthodox church no longer furnished. It was therefore concerned, wherever possible, to combine trade and continuation schools with the worker education societies, which could be and really were of use to the workers. If in this way it was able to imbue an elite of workers with its spirit, which these sergeants of the bourgeoisie then conveyed to the masses of workers, then it profited doubly. ... The mayor of Leipzig once enunciated it honestly in an official speech: the purpose of worker education societies was to cultivate an aristocracy of workers. ... (54)

According to this conception, then, the rising industrial bourgeoisie also confronted the dual problem of recruiting and training qualified workers for new production processes and of insuring both their subordination within the authority structure of capitalist enterprises and their general loyalty to profit-making property. The specific function of the labor aristocracy in this context derived from the peculiar conflicts generated by class relations during a historically unique transition to self-reproducing capitalist relations of production. For until the latter began to enforce their own strict discipline, extra-economic measures were required to overcome pre-industrial barriers. (55) Although the governmentally sanctioned violence and harsh legislation that accompanied the rise of British capital (56) were not lacking in Germany, they were more conspicuously accompanied by efforts at cultural co-optation than in Britain where the earlier development of a labor movement with its own traditions stymied such endeavors. In particular, atomized rural recruits appeared to offer successful objects of attention in Germany where an embryonic labor aristocracy antedated developed capitalist relations but could not mature into a lasting and stable stratum once the capitalist bourgeoisie had made its peace with the politically ruling classes and settled upon a course of confrontation with rather than integration of the working class.

Yet even during the period in which the bourgeoisie aspired to imbue segments of the proletariat with its views, success was neither profound nor widespread. Mehring maintained that the liberal bourgeoisie had been doomed to failure because it had undertaken to organize members of the workers education societies as a politically energetic auxiliary force in relation to other strata of the working class and simultaneously to render them weak-willed vis a vis the bourgeoisie. (57) The successful infiltration of the membership and capture of the leadership by Social Democrats also contributed to the ultimate failure of these societies. (58) In this regard the Berlin machinists, a bastion of the modern skilled industrial worker, appear to have been exceptional. (59)

Although owners of large industrial enterprises did pursue policies, such as intentional wage differentiation, designed to undermine solidarity within the work force, (60) this strategy did not originate in the 1870s. (61) On the whole, however, this decade, especially after the Gründerkrise, marked as it was by declining profitability (62) and real wages (63) as well as by a rise in labor's share of national income, (64) witnessed the consolidation of capital and labor as antagonistically organized political-economic classes. The rise of "yellow" unions, sponsored by employers, and the opposition of entrepreneurs to the liberalization of combination laws (65) foreshadowed the enactment of the Anti-Socialist Laws a few years later. The fact that politically organized workers still represented an "elite" did not diminish the single-mindedness with which the police harassed and persecuted them. (66)

With the advent of the Anti-Socialist Laws (in force from 1878 to 1890) and the virtual proscription or dissolution of the entire Social Democratic trade union movement, (67) integrationist tendencies were deprived of any basis that might have promoted them. The increasingly severe oppression and penalties of these years, which embittered all Socialists and virtually all trade unionists, insured a manifestly antagonistic relation between the working class on the one hand and the ruling classes and their state on the other. (68)

In the context of this intensified class repression, some Social Democrats began to voice the view that the "ideological" orientation of the German movement--in contradistinction to that of Britain--could be traced back exclusively to the current political persecutions. (69) The adherents of this position seemed to imply that the English or "normal" course of events was preferable. Those, however, who welcomed the explicitly political direction of the German labor movement, argued that

England, not Germany, represented the aberration. For although in England, too, trade unionists constituted a "labor aristocracy so to speak," the world market basis for this stratum was no longer available to Germany; consequently, a labor aristocratic imitation of English relations was "virtually out of the question." (70)

Despite the contrasting values attaching to these two views, both shared a common if implicit assumption--namely, that the formation of anti-capitalist consciousness had been (e.g., in Britain and the United States) and would continue to be (e.g., in Germany) impeded by the democratization of the bourgeois state. (71) To be sure, the peculiar class alignments in Germany promoted the perception of economic exploitation as political repression. (72) Yet the alleged attenuation of class conflict by means of its restriction to the economic sphere deviated too obviously from Marx's doctrine to be incorporated into the Social Democratic catechism. (73) Socialists were therefore eager to seize on the association of the rise of British socialism with the decline of Britain's world industrial domination as proof of the exceptional status of a national labor aristocracy. (74) Deprived from the outset of monopoly profits similar to those accruing to British capital, Germany would never, so argued Der Sozialdemokrat, be able to sustain a national labor aristocracy. (75)

Social Democracy remained ostracized even after the lapse of the Anti-Socialist Laws. Thus Rosa Luxemburg, who, like many leftists, viewed the desire on the part of the trade union movement for greater autonomy in relation to the Social Democratic Party with suspicion, conceded in 1902 that "the German police state untiringly takes care, by means of legislative attacks ... of drumming this character of class struggle into the trade union movement." (76) In spite of the willingness of some liberal groupings to enter into electoral coalitions with the Social Democrats, (77) the state and the ruling classes fostered an openly adversary relationship with organized labor. (78) Politically organized efforts on the part of oppositional bourgeois elements, on the other hand, to reconcile the working class with the existing social system proved short-lived and unsuccessful. (79)

D. From 1890 to the First World War

1. Comparative Growth of Trade Union Membership

Trade union membership in Germany remained the privilege of a small minority until after the turn of the century. The transformation of the unions into mass organizations was facilitated by the expiration of the Anti-Socialist Laws and the onset of a period of economic expansion which began in the mid-1890s. (80) The trade unions in existence until this time had been created by socialist parties prior to the advent of developed capitalist relations of production; partly as a result of these precocious origins, German trade unions "remained uninfluential until growing industrial conflict had impressed the need for organization on a large part of the working class." (81)

Although the German population was fifty to sixty per cent greater than that of Britain during the four decades preceding the First World War, (82) it was not until the 1880s that the secondary sector in Germany employed more persons than the corresponding sector in Britain.

Table 29. The British and German Labor Force in Construction, Mining, Manufactures and Industry, Census Years, 1871-1911 (83)

	Great Britain	
	Total (in millions)	Share of total occupied population (in per cent)
1871	5.3	43.1
1881	5.7	43.5
1891	6.5	43.9
1901	7.7	46.3
1911	8.6	46.4
	Germany	
1871	5.0	28.9
1875	5.4	29.2
1882	5.9	29.6
1895	8.0	34.0
1907	10.8	38.4

By this time, the rate of increase of industrial employment in Germany began to exceed that in Britain by a considerable margin. Thus, whereas industrial employment rose by 83.1 per cent in Germany during the quarter-century between 1882 and 1907, the three decades between 1881 and 1911 witnessed a rise of only 50.9 per cent in Britain. Nevertheless, as the prewar period drew to a close, the sector of the economy that had historically lent itself most readily to labor organization still accounted for a greater share of aggregate employment in Britain than in Germany. At the same time, the little-organized agricultural sector employed 35.1 per cent of the occupied population in Germany, but only 8.3 per cent of that in Britain. (84)

Not until a decade before the First World War did German trade union membership exceed one million; (85) on the eve of that war, British trade unionists remained considerably more numerous than their counterparts in the German trade union movement affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (i.e., the so-called free trade unions).

The relatively undeveloped state of German trade unionism is also documented by the fact that British strikes were larger and longer. Although there were about twice as many work stoppages in Germany (between 1890 and 1913) as in the United Kingdom (between 1893 and 1913), the number of workers involved per work stoppage was almost seven times larger in the United Kingdom. (87)

A comparison of the aggregate degree of organization in both countries further illustrates the more circumscribed character of German trade unionism. If domestic servants, farmers and their families and members of the armed forces and of the liberal professions are omitted, the proportion of workers organized in the United Kingdom in 1888, 1901 and 1910 was six, fifteen and seventeen per cent respectively. If only adult male manual workers are considered, the corresponding degrees of organization rise to ten, twenty-five and thirty per cent respectively. (88) The explosive growth in membership during the years immediately preceding the First World War increased the density of organization still further.

In Germany, trade unionists accounted for approximately 5.4 per cent of male wage workers, sixteen years and older, employed in industry (including mining and construction), trade and transport in 1895. (89) By 1907 the corresponding degree of organization had risen to 25.6 per cent. (90)

These figures underestimate the real differences between Britain and Germany inasmuch as they exclude the agricultural sector in the latter country. For whereas in England and Wales

Table 30. British and German Free Trade Union Membership, 1891-1913 (in millions) (86)

United Kingdom ^a		Germany ^b	United Kingdom ^a		Germany ^b
1891	c	0.3	1902	2.0	0.7
1892	1.6	0.2	1903	2.0	0.9
1893	1.6	0.2	1904	2.0	1.1
1894	1.5	0.2	1905	2.0	1.3
1895	1.5	0.3	1906	2.2	1.7
1896	1.6	0.3	1907	2.5	1.9
1897	1.7	0.4	1908	2.5	1.8
1898	1.8	0.5	1909	2.5	1.8
1899	1.9	0.6	1910	2.6	2.0
1900	2.0	0.7	1911	3.1	2.3 ^d
1901	2.0	0.7	1912	3.4	2.5
			1913	4.1	2.5

^a Membership at end of year.

^b Average annual membership

^c Before 1892 data collection was not comprehensive.

^d From 1911 on the data do not include the membership of the Domestic and Agricultural Laborers unions, which were however relatively small.

fewer than 600,000 males above the age of fifteen were employed as non-familial agricultural laborers and servants in 1901 and 1911, (91) the corresponding numbers for Germany were more than twice as great in 1907; with the addition of non-all-year-round workers, the figure becomes four times greater. (92) Inclusion of these workers reduces the proportion of adult males in trade unions to below one-fifth in 1907. (93)

These global averages conceal significant variations among branches and occupations. Thus in 1896, thirty-seven per cent of printers, thirty-three per cent of coppersmiths, thirty-two per cent of glove makers and twenty-two per cent of lithographers were organized; in contrast with these relatively skilled workers, fewer than three per cent of textile workers and fewer than one per cent of construction laborers were

organized. (94) Data for the early 1900s indicate a similar differential. Thus, whereas more than seventy-one per cent of the printing industry, thirty-nine per cent of the building trades and thirty-seven per cent of the metal and machine making industry were organized in 1911, only twenty-one per cent of general factory workers and sixteen per cent of textile workers were organized. (95)

These aggregate and sectional limitations of the trade union movement appeared so self-explanatory to some Social Democratic leaders that they were at times disposed to view universal organization of wage workers not only as impossible but also as unnecessary. As a result, the party tended, particularly until the early 1890s, to act passively with regard to the furtherance of specifically trade unionist goals. (96) At the party convention in 1893 (97) Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel declared that increasing concentration and centralization of capital would soon render trade union struggles ineffective and political struggles essential. The state, moreover, by assuming control of various insurance systems, would undermine the basis upon which unions recruited members. (98) The party could readily accept the minimal degree of trade union organization as long as it remained convinced that the politically revolutionary situation in Germany rendered universal organization of workers qua wage earners superfluous. (99) This almost fatalistic approach was not restricted to the analysis of German conditions. Examining the far from universal organization of the British working class, both Kautsky and Bernstein concluded that trade unions would always be confined to an aristocracy of the working class. (100)

Distracted by the alleged superfluosity of universal organization, Social Democrats failed to explain why so few German workers joined trade unions. (101) It appears, however, that political resistance by employers as well as the patriarchal relations to which many workers were subject in rural areas, small handicraft shops and some large factories induced the party leadership to believe that legally compulsory membership was, to be sure, advantageous, but also politically utopian. (102)

Such short-sighted views (103) paradoxically reinforced precisely what the party was combating--the restriction of the labor movement to an elite stratum. (104) In contrast with the party, the policies of which had become a contradictory amalgam of revolutionary Attentismus (105) and practical reformism, the trade unions, by concentrating on the improvement of working conditions within capitalism, did not lose sight of the importance of broadening their membership. (106) Unlike British trade

unions, German labor organizations did not engage in widespread exclusionary practices (107) such as exacting high dues. (108)

2. The Industrial Skill Basis of German Trade Unionism

The basic reason for this less selective or elitist approach to intra-industry organization lay in the generally more rapid, sudden and comprehensive nature of industrialization in Germany. For as a result of this more condensed process of socio-economic change, the pre-capitalist and early capitalist industrial customs and traditions of entrepreneurial organization (109) and of the workplace that characterized Britain well into the twentieth century never consolidated themselves as relevant conservative forces in German capital-labor relations. Thus, for example, the "co-exploitation" of less skilled workers by more highly skilled co-working subcontractors in iron and steel manufacture, shipbuilding, cotton manufacture and mining, which constituted one of the principal microeconomic and micro-social sources of an intra-plant and intra-union labor aristocracy in Britain, was largely absent in Germany. (110)

Moreover, the fact that the repression of early trade unions had tended to sever the links between superior living conditions on the one hand and generalized societal recognition of an intermediary position with respect to social class, status or prestige on the other, meant that the socio-political gulf between economically better and worse-situated strata of the German working class did not assume the same proportions as in Britain. (111) Finally, the relatively late emergence of unions among the new skilled workers of the metallurgic industries, in which a long tradition of artisan-small master relations was lacking, meant that a major sector of what constituted the British labor aristocracy never arose in Germany. Thus in spite of the heavy concentration of skilled occupations in these industries, the principal labor organization in this field, the Deutscher Metallarbeiter-Verband, embraced all occupations, having become by 1913 a mammoth union with well in excess of 500,000 members. (112)

The skilled metallurgical workers have recently been cast in the role of the "motor of Wilhelmine labor reformism." (113) Apart from the failure of the adherents of this thesis to explain how such a category of workers was able to seize control of the labor movement, (114) no documentation has been provided that such control was ever established during the prewar period. Although these "new" skilled workers may have represented the new direction that industrial skills subsequently

took in the twentieth century, during the prewar years they accounted for but one sector of the skilled. As was the case in Britain and elsewhere, the artisans of those branches that had not yet been revolutionized by machinery (such as masons, carpenters, tailors, bookbinders and others) still exercised considerable authority within the labor movement. Thus despite the fact that the number of organized metal workers increased at twice the rate of increase of total union membership between 1892 and 1913, (115) unionists in the largely skilled, non-revolutionized trades still represented the largest contingent of trade union members on the eve of the First World War. (116)

Although capital-labor relations indisputably assumed a different quality in an iron and steel mill employing in excess of 1,000 workers (117) from that which obtained in a cabinet-making workshop employing five or fewer persons, (118) no unambiguous correlation existed between plant size on the one hand and the stage of technological development or capital-labor relations on the other. Thus if foundries and smelteries are excluded, in which as early as 1895 97.8 per cent of employees worked in units employing more than fifty persons, (119) the metalworking and machine-making industries--the citadel of the "new" skilled worker--are seen to have more closely resembled branches generally considered technologically backward than the thesis of "the mass worker" suggests was the case. (See Table 31.)

Thus as late as 1907, the average unit in the building trades was larger than that in metalworking, while the average number of persons employed by machine-making plants was only marginally greater than that in the printing trades. Indeed, in that year these two metallurgical branches employed more persons in plants with five or fewer persons (408,703) than the building and printing trades. (121) This unanticipated result is explained by the heterogeneous structure of the metalworking and machine-making branches; for these were characterized by several sub-branches employing large numbers of workers in individual plants and a larger sector of sub-branches producing non-standardized commodities in much smaller plants. While ironworks employed on the average seventy-eight persons and sheet metal and tin plate plants 176 persons, smiths employed but two or three in 1907; similarly, while plants producing steam engines and locomotives employed on the average 265 persons and cannon foundries 503 persons, producers of wagons and various instruments employed fewer than ten. (122)

Given the large number of "new" skilled workers employed by small firms and the fierce resistance to unionization by

**Table 31. Plant Size for selected Branches in Germany,
1895 and 1907 (120)**

	Percentage of persons occupied in plants with fewer than five persons	Average number of persons per plant
Metalworking		
1895	44.9	4.0
1907	29.0	6.1
Machine-making		
1895	22.1	6.6
1907	12.2	11.9
Building trades		
1895	27.0	5.3
1907	20.2	7.5
Printing trades		
1895	16.4	9.0
1907	12.8	11.1

large capitalists in heavy industry who were, especially during the decade prior to the First World War, increasingly organized in anti-trade union and anti-Social Democratic Party employers' associations, (123) the claim that this stratum of workers achieved "the first historically significant status quo between capital and labor" in Germany (124) is highly questionable. To the extent that a "status quo" occurred at all, it was the historically antecedent accomplishment of the traditional artisans in small establishments the (mostly working) proprietors of which had not been in a position to exert counter-pressure on largely organized workers beyond that flowing from market factors. (125) The absence of developed methods of surplus-value production further weakened these small employers, who in almost all capitalist countries became the first sector to recognize trade unions.

Despite attempts to ascribe to the "new" skilled workers a positive attitude to their work, which allegedly tended to transform them into "professionals," vitally interested in the use-value aspects of production, (126) by the first decade of the twentieth century they too were subject to the socio-techno-

logical development that Marx had described for the textile industry. (127) More specifically, "an enormous leveling of the masses of workers was going on, in part gradually, in part violently," whereby some unskilled workers (including women) experienced upward mobility within the occupational ranks of the branch. (128)

Among the "new" skilled workers who escaped dequalification, however, the trade unionistic monopolization of special skills that had founded the peculiar position of the traditional skilled artisans in relation to employers and the unskilled reappeared. (129) In most unions, for example, the increasing division of labor was ultimately responsible for the integration of unskilled workers into the unions of the skilled as it was gradually recognized that standards could not be defended let alone raised while potential cheaper competitors remained outside the organizations. (130) Nevertheless, for a period of years many skilled workers rejected organizational mergers with unskilled co-workers as degrading. (131) By the outset of the First World War, however, most of these barriers had been eliminated organizationally if not always attitudinally. (132)

The integrationist moments associated with the particular responsibilities assumed by skilled workers within the sphere of production did not preclude the creation of antagonisms as intense as those which prevailed between the state and employers' organizations on the one hand and the socialist movement on the other. That more strikes and lockouts took place in the building trades than in any other branch during the fifteen years preceding World War I (133) underscored the absence of a "status quo" in the skilled trades. The largest strike/lockout of the prewar period--conducted in 1910 in the building trades--erupted into a class-wide confrontation. A non-Marxist observer of this conflict was so impressed by the centralized management of the lockout by capitalist organizations both within and outside the construction industry that he spoke of an "enormous sharpening of class antagonisms"; employer-initiated class struggle appeared to dominate economic life more and more. (134) Finally, in spite of the general aversion of the trade union leadership to left-wing Social Democratic appeals for a "mass strike," Carl Legien, the chairman of the General Commission of the German free trade unions, was constrained to concede that such concerted action would be practicable particularly in the metallurgical industry and in the entire building industry. (135)

3. German Theories of Skilled Trade Unionists as Labor Aristocrats

This evidence that craft unionists engaged in class-conscious struggles notwithstanding, a tradition comprehending contemporary and subsequent authors, Marxists and non-Marxists, scholars and political activists, exists that explicitly or implicitly casts this stratum in the role of a co-opted labor aristocracy in opposition to a revolutionary or at least revolt-inclined underclass of the unskilled. (136) Thus as early as 1907 a historian of the free trade unions ventured the prediction that the latter, as representatives of the better-situated skilled and unskilled workers, would withdraw from the Social Democratic movement to form a radical reform party, while the mass of the unskilled, the dissatisfied, would continue to support a revolutionary Social Democracy. (137)

In part influenced by the general political conflicts of the Weimar Republic, in the course of which the Communist party propagated the notion of the eventual organizational polarization of the labor aristocracy and of the unskilled/unemployed in the Social Democratic party and the Communist party respectively, (138) a number of authors began to argue that skilled unionists in Germany, as the counterpart of the British "trade union aristocracy," tended toward revisionism; the unskilled were seen as forming the basis of communist, syndicalist and progressive unionist movements. (139) Common to most of these authors was not only the failure to document such claims, (140) but also--and more importantly--the absence of a rigorous analysis of the aggregate socio-economic and political mechanisms that must, according to the logic of such claims, have given rise to and helped perpetuate the existence of a labor aristocracy.

Trotsky, who did proceed along analytic lines, based his view on a conception of revisionism as a constituent historical element of German Social Democracy. Accordingly, the general reformist orientation of the day-to-day politics of the movement resulted from the fact that a revolutionary situation did not objectively exist in Germany. (141) The left-wing of the Social Democratic party, at least prior to the party's advocacy of a policy of national defense during the First World War, maintained a more differentiated, or perhaps merely more optimistic, position that distinguished between the party and the trade unions. The latter, according to Luxemburg, represented "group interests and a stage of development of the labor movement," whereas the party represented "the working class and its emancipatory interests as a whole." (142) The fact that German

trade union leaders none the less claimed equality of status for their organizations was based on "an illusion of the quiet, 'normal' period of bourgeois society in which the political struggle of Social Democracy seems to merge with the parliamentary struggle." The latter Luxemburg equated with trade unionistic struggles as reform work within bourgeois society. (143) She perceived the partial autonomization of the trade union movement as a function of the bureaucratization and specialization that accompanied its explosive growth following the fall of the Anti-Socialist Laws. (144) Nevertheless, the German trade unions, which had been founded by Social Democracy whose "doctrine forms the soul of trade union practice," (145) were less likely to follow a reformist path than those of any other country. (146) Ultimately, Luxemburg maintained, the alleged opposition between the party and the unions was nothing more than that "between Social Democracy and the upper stratum of the trade union officials, which however is at the same time an opposition within the trade unions between a part of the trade union leaders and the proletarian mass organized in trade unions." (147) Echoing the sentiments of trade union leaders (148) and prominent Social Democrats, (149) Luxemburg contended that the very fact that a million trade unionists consciously conceived of their unions as Social Democratic organs would insure adherence to revolutionary policies. (150)

Whereas Luxemburg tended to focus on the quality of leadership and thus to retain the hope that an upsurge from below would infuse a practical anti-capitalist spirit into the movement, other leftists regarded the trade union base itself as corrupt. Thus as early as 1906, the Leipziger Volkszeitung, to the editorial board of which Luxemburg belonged, sharply criticized the unions in connection with the then current debate concerning the general strike; proceeding one step further than Luxemburg in rejecting the claim that the unions and the party enjoyed equal status as mutually complementary components of the proletarian class movement, the newspaper charged that "the trade union movement is no class movement at all. It is the movement of the labor aristocracy, not of the working class. It does not have a complementary or antagonistic relationship, but rather no relationship at all to the political class movement." (151) This position, reminiscent of contemporary attacks on the British trade unions by the Social Democratic Federation, (152) formed part of a radical left-wing tradition that insisted that German trade unions had been transformed, during the two decades preceding the First World War, from organs of the revolutionary working class into social-reformist professional associations. (153)

Subsequently, the trade unions were portrayed as having sapped the revolutionary energies of the party.

The unionists, with their anti-revolutionary attitude, may be presumed to have represented more accurately than the Social Democratic Party the mass of German workers. ... By organizing these masses where the party could not, the union leaders were able to transmit the subjective attitudes of the politically passive workers into the Social Democratic Party itself, with the party executive as their agent. In this sense the trade-union conquest made the party more representative of German labor than it had been before 1906. (154)

Such a view is problematic because of its failure to differentiate sufficiently between leaders and the rank and file as well as between the organized and unorganized sectors of the working class. Although the catalog of issues concerning which trade union representatives exerted a conservative influence on party policy (155) expressed real conflicts of interest between the trade union bureaucracy and the radical wing of the party, the fact that the centrist executive of the party acquiesced in various anti-radical demands (156) indicated less divergence of opinion between the two organizations than the aforementioned view suggests. More importantly, however, the latter, based as it is on a formal organizational analysis, which relies chiefly on official sources such as convention proceedings, provides little insight into the attitudes of the rank and file. Specifically, this view confuses "the mass of German workers" with the minority organized in trade unions. It not only conceals the issue of differentiation within the working class, but also inaccurately describes the minority of trade unionists as uniformly passive. It thereby overlooks the fact that the German labor aristocracy constituted a stratum of distinctively active and progressive workers. (157)

Although, as Luxemburg observed, dual membership in a trade union and the party presupposed an extraordinary degree of idealism, intelligence and commitment, which could be expected only in "the most enlightened and intelligent minority of the Social Democratic working class in the metropolises," (158) even non-radical trade union leaders encouraged their members to join the party. (159) And in point of fact, the number of trade unionists willing to undergo the sacrifices associated with dual membership was considerable. (160) An official study, for example, of party membership in Greater Berlin in 1906 (161) ascertained that more than 40,000 of the approximately 250,000 trade unionists in that district were also

party members. (162) Disaggregated by trade union, these data do not support the conclusion--implied by the thesis of the trade-unionization of the party--that the more aristocratic trade unions were also those characterized by greater political passivity. For the better-paid and more highly organized trades disclosed an above-average degree of dual members. (163) The Book Printers, Lithographers, Smiths and Upholsterers proved to be the only major exceptions. (164) The Metalworkers accounted for almost one-fourth of the total joint trade union-party membership. (165)

Such evidence supports the argument that the more highly skilled, organized and paid workers did not, in general, pursue purely trade unionistic goals; rather, they represented a more conscious stratum of the German proletariat compared with less skilled workers, whose rates of trade union and party affiliation were considerably lower. (166) A similar study of union-party membership in Frankfurt/Main in 1905 not only confirmed that Social Democratic workers were "the elite of the industrial working class," (167) but also introduced a further variable--that of access to self-employment. This claim that a high positive correlation obtained between restricted access to "economic independence" and socialist attitudes ("the intimate nexus between socialism and capitalism") (168) is worth examining more closely.

4. Self-Employment

Table 32 summarizes the relevant data concerning employers and the self-employed in prewar Germany.

From 1895 to 1907, male proprietors as a share of all males occupied in the industrial sector fell from about one-quarter to about one-sixth. (170) This decline was common to all industries except the food industry. The individual values from which the aggregate averages are derived varied significantly--from less than one per cent in mining and foundries to more than one-half in the clothing industry. The other major industries with a below-average share of male owners were (in ascending order for 1907): stone/clay/glass, chemicals, machinery, paper, printing, the building trades, textiles and metallurgy; the other major industries with an above-average share were: wood, leather, food and clothing.

Most of the more highly skilled, paid and organized trades (i.e., machinery, metallurgy, printing and building) belonged to the first group, which, however, also included large-scale industries with many unorganized and unskilled workers (i.e.,

Table 32. Employers and the Self-Employed in German Industry, 1895 and 1907 (169)

	Male owners as a percentage of occupied males		Increase or decrease in the number of male owners from 1895 to 1907	Owners not employing any workers as a percentage of all owners	
	1895	1907		1895	1907
All industry	24.2	17.3	-58,199	60.0	50.0
Mining/foundries	0.5	0.3	369	13.8	5.7
Stone/clay/glass	6.6	5.1	- 280	28.7	19.4
Metallurgy	25.3	16.4	-10,609	37.5	31.1
Machinery	15.0	8.3	3,582	52.4	42.5
Chemicals	10.1	7.1	227	29.9	21.3
Fuels, etc.	10.0	6.3	- 39	22.5	12.0
Textiles	24.4	13.2	-59,522	74.1	62.4
Paper	14.8	10.4	226	39.3	33.9
Leather	30.9	26.0	1,355	46.2	44.1
Wood	35.6	25.6	-19,922	55.4	45.9
Food	27.1	27.6	29,006	25.4	19.4
Clothing	57.5	54.2	-37,003	77.3	71.1
Cleaning	47.6	43.7	19,142	77.7	64.5
Building trades	18.8	13.2	8,547	53.8	36.5
Printing	12.5	11.0	4,515	28.1	24.9
Arts	47.6	40.1	2,207	79.7	71.7

chemicals, paper and textiles). (171) Thus although the better-situated workers had statistically below-average access to economic proprietorship, they not only shared this status with the unskilled (many of whom had considerably less access), but did not suffer an above-average deterioration of such opportunities.

It must be borne in mind, however, that large numbers of the formally self-employed in reality led, as a result of their subordination to larger, capitalist producing and merchandising

units (e.g., as subcontractors or cottage industry workers), a "proletaroid" existence. (172) This was particularly true of the proletarianized self-employed artisans who worked alone (Alleinmeister). (173) Their universal tendency to decline as a share of all proprietors underscored their insecure status. (174) Nevertheless, at the turn of the century Alleinmeister still abounded in the clothing, textile, wood, leather, machinery and in sectors of the building industry. (175)

It appears, therefore, that particularly in trades that generated rapidly deteriorating conditions for the self-employed but that also permitted the reintegration of proletarianized Alleinmeister into relatively small producing units that employed workers with a tradition of collective resistance (such as those in the building trades, woodworking and machine-building), conditions for the formation of Social Democratic consciousness were favorable. It was, then, not only or not so much the absolute size of the work unit or the degree of access to self-employment (176) that determined the development of organized solidarity, but rather the confrontation with the consequences of capitalist accumulation and centralization, expressed on the market level as the inability to compete. (177)

The transformation of an Alleinmeister, barely able to eke out a livelihood, into a regularly employed, comparatively well-paid skilled worker in a small firm, generated a peculiar set of capital-labor relations which inevitably left its imprint on the Social Democratic labor movement. Thus many of these former Alleinmeister did not experience proletarianization as immiseration, unlike large groups of their classmates. They not only improved their material status but also came to receive wages in excess of the incomes of many small masters. (178)

Although the similarity of working and living conditions between artisans and small masters created a sector within which conflict was muted or transmuted into patriarchal or quasi-comradely disputes, (179) the very smallness of these units, as expressed in their below-average productivity and degree of mechanization, (180) meant that they were compelled to compensate for their inferior competitive position by trying to exact lower wages and longer hours from their employees. But since it was precisely such small workshops that were most vulnerable in relation to organized artisans, small masters were frequently drawn into anti-trade union alliances which were under the auspices of large capitals. (181) On the other hand, in numerous sectors few mediations connected even the smaller masters and their skilled employees, who had clearly become segregated into a separate socio-economic class. (182)

Advancement by artisans to and within larger units of production was accompanied by a new pattern of income (183) stratification and a tendential intergenerational polarization of affiliation between skilled personnel in supervisory positions and the bulk of the wage-dependent unskilled. (184) Such upward mobility created a conflict of interest between supervisors and their former class "comrades," but it may also have made the gulf between employers and employees seem easier to bridge. (185) Although this conflict may have been mitigated in the case of skilled employees who possessed sufficient control of the work process to ward off what they regarded as pernicious intervention by management, it was exacerbated in large factories in which supervisory personnel and the unskilled were concentrated. (186)

From 1895 to 1907 the number of salaried male administrative, office, technical and supervisory employees in German industry rose from 258,460 to 562,089 or by 117.4 per cent; the share of non-production employees rose during these years from 4.0 to 6.5 per cent. (187) Male technical and supervisory personnel alone rose by 165.2 per cent, thus doubling their share of total male industrial employment. Two industries-- machine-making and construction--, which accounted for 30.0 per cent of male industrial employment, employed 40.9 per cent of all male technical and supervisory personnel in 1907. If in 1907 (1895) there were approximately twenty-three (forty-three) male production workers in all firms with employees for every technical or supervisory employee, then there were twenty-two (seventy-two) in the building trades, fifteen (twenty-four) in machine-making, eight (nineteen) in chemicals and thirty-six (ninety-six) in clothing. (188)

5. National Peculiarities of the German Labor Aristocracy

Contemporary discussions of the possible existence of a labor aristocracy in Germany stressed, even when affirmative, the attenuated version in contrast to the English original. (189) What struck observers as most threatening to the unity of the working class was neither widespread upward inter-class mobility (190) nor some implicit understanding between trade unions and sectors of the capitalist class to the exclusion of the unorganized majority of the proletariat--as was alleged to have been the case in the United States. (191) To be sure, there was no dearth of liberal politicians and academics, centered in the Verein für Socialpolitik, (192) working toward the recreation in Germany of the trade union aristocracy that

they admired in England. (193) Little indicates, however, that trade unionists sought such an accommodation or that employers would have accommodated them if approached. (194) Rather, the major impulse to the formation of a cleavage in the working class in the form of the detachment of a privileged upper stratum was perceived, if at all, (195) as having originated more or less spontaneously in the historical fact of the prior organization of the skilled workers. (196)

Although neither the pre-existing objective and subjective heterogeneity of the working class nor the original restriction of trade union membership to the skilled was fortuitous, the subsequent course of proletarian unity was a function, inter alia, of: 1. the effects of capital accumulation on the socio-economic hierarchies within the working class; and 2. the measures which those at the top of the hierarchies took to integrate the less skilled into the general struggle of labor against capital.

1. German Social Democrats, thoroughly in the theoretical tradition molded by Marx, were convinced that the course of industrial development would compress the hierarchy of skills by undermining the basis of the highly skilled. (197) This prediction appeared to them borne out during the prewar years; for census data as well as studies conducted by the Verein für Socialpolitik revealed a reduction in the relative number of skilled workers. (198) The flattening of the skill pyramid as expressed by the absolute and relative expansion of the sector of semi-skilled machine workers at the expense of the skilled and the unskilled motivated Max Weber to remark that this homogenization was accompanied by the constitution of the working class as a social class engaged in class action. (199) Moreover, the fact that wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers declined, beginning with the latter half of the 1880s, (200) may be taken as an indirect indicator of the narrowing of skill differentials. (201)

Significant gaps in wage levels persisted nevertheless. As late as 1913, hourly rates of skilled building tradesmen exceeded those of their unskilled co-workers by 26.8 per cent; the corresponding differential in annual earnings in cotton spinning amounted to 40.9 per cent. (202) Skilled industrial workers earned, in the years immediately preceding World War I, in the range of 1,500 to 2,400 marks annually while the annual wages of the unskilled fell within the range of 900 to 1,500 marks (averaging 1,100 to 1,200 marks). (203) A study of negotiated (i.e., minimum and not effective) wages, conducted in 1913, of more than 100,000 plants employing more than one million workers, revealed that whereas 42.2 per cent of the

skilled males earned fifty-five pfennigs or more per hour, only 20.2 per cent of the unskilled men reached this level; at the other end of the scale, only 3.6 per cent of the skilled, but 12.6 per cent of the unskilled men earned less than thirty-five pfennigs per hour. (204)

These differentials, which were narrower than those obtaining in Britain and the United States, (205) did not enable large numbers of skilled workers to afford bourgeois lifestyles. (206) And even if it were true that income differentiation within the working class at the turn of the century had been greater than that between the best-paid workers and the part of the petty bourgeoisie consisting of lower-echelon civil servants, small masters and shopkeepers, (207) this circumstance alone would not suffice to prove that this stratum of workers had coalesced politically and socio-economically with the petty bourgeoisie. Such a conclusion would presuppose the existence of a broader set of material conditions illustrating similar working and living conditions as well as of a conscious policy on the part of the labor aristocracy to distinguish itself from the bulk of the working class. (208)

In this connection average annual incomes of manual workers and, for example, civil servants, did not constitute a commensurable basis for the comparison of lifetime incomes. During the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, approximately fifteen per cent of skilled machinemakers in Berlin earned more than 2,000 marks per annum--about twice the average annual earnings of all industrial workers. (209) Although these wages approached the "bourgeois incomes of civil servants," this "elite" of machinists not only confronted old age without pensions but was forced to withdraw from the skilled labor force--indeed from the ranks of the employable in general--in large numbers before reaching the age of fifty. (210) Thus the insecurity inherent in surplus value-producing labor--as expressed by the disparity between high wage rates and low lifetime earnings--rendered comparisons with other types of income recipients illusory. (211) Analogously, high rates of unemployment meant that high hourly wages did not lead to high annual wages. (212) Skilled building tradesmen, for example, who had once been able to secure their subsistence during the winter months (213) by means of secondary employment in agriculture, were confronted with the fact that the labor-saving mechanization of agriculture rendered this expedient less and less accessible. (214) Unable to survive during the winter on the basis of accumulated savings, "a large number" were compelled to "beg." (215) Moreover, the above-average accident and fatality rates among many skilled workers reduced annual and lifetime incomes even more radically. (216)

2. The evidence pertaining to the attitudes and policies of the unions of the skilled toward the objective forces that shaped intra-working class differentiation is ambiguous. Numerous sources disclose a willingness to accept the existing pattern of material inequalities. This viewpoint applied not only to the refusal on the part of trade unions to press for collective bargaining procedures and institutional arrangements that would have compressed the wage hierarchy, (217) but also to the almost fatalistic toleration by the Social Democratic party of capitalistically generated intra-working class inequalities. In connection, for example, with a debate concerning the salaries of party officials at the party convention in 1892, Wilhelm Liebknecht delivered the following polemic:

You who are sitting here are after all for the most part aristocrats among the workers as it were--I mean with regard to income. The working population in the Saxon Ore Mountains, the weavers in Silesia would consider what you earn the income of a Croesus. What would you say if the weavers demanded, No one shall have a higher income than they themselves have? Do we who aspire to a more decent human existence want to seek to level down? In bourgeois society equality is just impossible. (218)

Few party members or trade unionists would, presumably, have denied that bourgeois society enforced inequalities that would continue as long as capitalism prevailed; similarly, Liebknecht's audience included few who would have proposed achieving greater equality by reducing the better-paid to the level of the worse-paid. But within the restrictions imposed upon the labor movement by a wage hierarchy that roughly corresponded to a hierarchy of values of labor power as determined by skills levels, it was one of the implicit goals of the party to mold autonomous working class institutions that created embryonic forms of socialist (re-)distribution by inculcating and reinforcing socialist attitudes and behavior. Self-fulfilling prophecies to the effect that "that circle of party comrades is considered the better one which has a better income and a better standard of living" (219) scarcely furthered that goal. And even those who argued that hunger did not constitute the sole motivation of class struggle and that "bourgeois society itself makes certain that the workers were not too well-off" (220) tacitly relegated the low-paid and unorganized workers to a permanently subordinate role within the movement.

The unemployment insurance system represented another area of ambiguity. During the prewar period, that is, prior to the introduction of compulsory state unemployment insurance

programs, trade unions performed an important function as insurance agents. In part because the costs were regarded as burdensome, (221) but also because opponents, considering unemployment and hence the alleviation of its consequences as the responsibility of capital, maintained that unemployment insurance funds would lead to a decline of class struggle, (222) many unions resisted the introduction of such systems. If in 1892 only ten unions provided unemployment benefits, (223) two decades later only five failed to offer them; by 1912 more than 2,500,000 members were insured against unemployment. (224) Even if payments replaced but a small fraction of a member's normal wages, (225) they still served to set off recipients from non-recipients.

During this period unions demanded the application in Germany of the Ghent system, which provided for state and communal subsidies to trade unions without interfering with the latter's administrative autonomy. (226) By excluding the unorganized, such a system widened the gulf between them and the organized workers. In cities such as Erlangen in which the Ghent system was practiced, "one could not assign to members of the aristocracy of labor who had become unemployed such lowly jobs as (say) to day laborers or hod carriers." (227) The distribution of money to trade unionists and public works jobs to the unorganized added a new dimension to the existing model of material and psychological inequality. (228)

The rationale underlying trade union support for this system consisted in the latter's tendential enforcement of universal organization. The force of this weapon--which the state perceived and hence refused to enact--was founded upon the belief that those who had not yet comprehended the necessity of trade union membership did not "deserve" unemployment insurance benefits. (229) To the extent that trade unions succeeded in attracting otherwise excluded strata of the working class--rather than in detaching a privileged stratum from the rest of the class--, they exerted a unifying influence on the proletariat. (230) To be sure, a part of the strong increase in membership during the years following the introduction of the Ghent system in some German cities may be attributed to the desire by new members to participate in the unemployment insurance system. Nevertheless, large numbers of workers (especially women and agricultural laborers) remained unorganized not for lack of interest but because of resistance by employers or insufficient recruitment by the unions. In other words, whereas this system of compelling workers to choose between acting in a collective manner or suffering the consequences of pretending to be able to afford

the life-style of an economically independent bourgeois may have been appropriate in Denmark, (231) it was inexpedient in Germany where a majority of those addressed by the unions did not consist of the free agents presupposed by the system's underlying principles.

E. Summary

The same economic forces that acted to create a materially superior stratum of manual workers in Britain were also at work in Germany--namely, a specific historical stage (232) in the development of the forces of production as expressed in a broader range of deskilling than of upward skilling embedded in the general capitalist laws governing the value of labor power. A trade union movement also evolved that revealed incipient elitist and isolationist characteristics. (233) Yet these tendencies were not consolidated in a system of institutionalized privileges sanctioned by explicit or implicit positive functions performed for the benefit of the ruling classes. On the contrary, much more so than in Britain, German employers as a class power combated the very existence of trade unions until the advent of the Burgfrieden during World War I. (234) The unions, as a part of the anti-capitalist Social Democratic movement, which was treated as an alien body by German capital and the German state, reciprocated by maintaining an official socialist spirit quite unknown to the bulk of the established unions of the skilled in Britain. And even when this anti-capitalism remained predominantly rhetorical, the fact that the largely non-radical leadership felt compelled to infuse Marxist terminology into trade union struggles indicated that the consciousness of the membership was not purely "trade-unionistic." (235)

Whereas--according to those who have taken the existence of a labor aristocracy in Germany for granted--the objective function of a materially privileged stratum of workers in Germany was to provide the socio-economic basis of reformism and revisionism, the labor aristocracy in Britain stood outside of and opposed the socialist movement. What rendered the notion of a German labor aristocracy particularly unrealistic was the fact that whereas in Britain a significant opposition to the labor aristocracy arose as early as the end of the 1880s among working class socialists, the basic opposition in prewar Germany was restricted to the left-wing intellectuals of the party. In Germany no mass-based socialist alternative emerged

to the upper stratum of the working class which continued to constitute the core of the socialist movement. (236)

This crucial functional difference between the upper strata of two national working classes underscores the inadequacy of one-sided reliance upon quantitative income criteria in stratification analysis. This stricture applies with special force to authors who include in a labor aristocracy all members of the working class whose incomes exceeded a certain fixed level. (237) For such an approach, associated as it is with the undocumented claim that immiseration leads to heightened class consciousness, (238) creates a logical hiatus which is then filled by ad hoc assertions concerning the non-equivalence of economic or "objective bribery" on the one hand and political or "subjective corruption" on the other. (239)

Apparently aware of the historical absurdity of including the entire corps of skilled German workers--who, numbering almost 5,000,000, accounted for more than half of all industrial workers in 1907 (240)--among the labor aristocracy, the author of the empirically most detailed study of the German labor aristocracy chose to restrict this stratum to the "tip of the skilled workers," in particular to overseers, gangers, foremen, sweaters, paymasters and to a very select group of highly skilled workmen in key positions some of whom functioned as subcontractors. (241) Apart from the issues--already alluded to--associated with the inadequacies inherent in comparisons of the wages of manual workers and the salaries of civil servants and other empirical problems, (242) the aforementioned analysis is fundamentally marred by its failure to mediate firm-level strategies to cultivate a favored group within the work force with the specific macro-social function performed by the German labor aristocracy. (243) Proceeding from an a priori assumption that the creation of the labor aristocracy was a conscious "aspiration" (244) of the capitalist class in general, such an analysis tends to view the formation of this stratum as "artificial"; this implication derives from the notion that "pure" capitalist development would not have brought into being such a counter-revolutionary sector of the working class. Extraordinarily high wages are therefore viewed as having been determined not by the normal workings of capital accumulation but rather by the bourgeois policy of seeking support and causing disruption within the working class. (245)

Although micro-economic wage policies of this type flourished, they were largely geared to shop-level supervisors many of whom also engaged in manual labor. (246) If in fact, however, this circumscribed category of labor aristocrats was perceived by the majority of dependent wage laborers as agents or

extensions of capitalist exploitation, (247) then the resentment which class or even trade-unionistically conscious workers presumably bore these supervisors would have prevented the latter from insidiously introducing bourgeois ideology into the labor movement. It is, moreover, unlikely that such management-oriented employees were represented in large numbers in free trade unions or in the Social Democratic party. Indeed, infiltration of the socialist movement was, according to one author, apparently not even the major purpose behind the "creation" of the labor aristocracy. "In order to rally its support within the working class organizationally, the bourgeoisie began to attempt to organize 'yellow' (company) unions." (248) Yet this type of organization, (249) far from undermining the socialist labor movement, actually evoked universal denunciation from the free trade unions as well as from the Christian and Hirsch-Duncker unions. (250) Although the growth of company unions in the years immediately preceding World War I impeded the spread of free trade unions within heavy industry, this entrepreneurial strategy was too obviously part of a general class confrontation to have been interpreted as a sophisticated attempt to "cultivate" a labor aristocracy as a vehicle of bourgeois ideology within the labor movement. (251) Finally, such combative policies stood in sharp contrast to the alleged tactic of simultaneously recognizing the Social Democratic party and trade unions in order to foster the growth of a labor aristocracy qua labor bureaucracy. (252) For although far-sighted liberals such as Max Weber may have understood that outlawing these organizations served merely to radicalize them, the ruling classes were forced to legalize them not as the result of insight into their own long-term self-interest, but rather as a result of Social Democratic resistance to repression.

Thus in spite of important similarities with regard to the socio-economic forces underlying the formation of a materially advantaged stratum of the working class in Britain and Germany, overriding national differences intervened. In contrast to Britain, Germany did not enjoy unparalleled international economic superiority during the formative years of its industrial proletariat; unlike Britain, it did not acquire economically significant colonial possessions. (253) Most importantly, however, no tradition of system-conformist action existed that could have issued in notable economic or political gains for any sector of the working class. (254) In contrast to the contemporary situation in the United States, German radicalism was but little hampered by the (real) prospects of

individual economic independence in agriculture or industry or by rapid upward mobility at the expense of immigrant minorities. (255)