

*Lokalisten and Sozialdemokraten: ‘localist’ trade unionism in the  
German building industry, 1868-1893*

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I, John Goddard, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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This study looks at the first part of what for want of a better term could be described as the ‘pre-history’ of German syndicalism, that is, at its earliest roots among building worker supporters of the ‘localist’ conception of trade union organization before 1893. Its aim is not to ‘uncover’ the localist movement’s history for the benefit of English-speaking readers unfamiliar with it but, rather, to seek to find in the earlier history of this movement an explanation as to why a branch of trade unionism which initially defined itself as a tactical response to restrictive state legislation (above all, the Prussian Law of Association of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1850) continued to exist after the ban which most local laws of association placed on political association was over-written by national legislation which guaranteed the right to such (for men) in December 1899. How did a ‘tactical response’ come to assume a longevity none of its earlier advocates had foreseen? This begs a second question: how significant, then, was the legal framework?

It is my belief that the answers to these questions can already be found in the localist building worker movement’s earlier history. Two dates framework this thesis. In September 1868, the Berlin Workers Congress was followed by the growth of trade union *movements*, social democratic and liberal, which contrasted with the isolated establishment of individual trade unions beforehand. In 1893, pottery workers (who included among their number stove fitters) became the last of the four largest groupings of building workers – after the carpenters, building labourers, and bricklayers – to establish a national trade union on a centralist model. After this date, localist building workers dominated a second, formally separate, social democratic trade union movement.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADAV	<i>Allgemeiner deutscher Arbeiterverein</i>
BV	<i>Berliner Volksblatt</i>
FAUD	<i>Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands</i>
FVdG	<i>Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften</i>
FZ	<i>Freisinnige Zeitung</i>
GBA	<i>Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiterbewegung</i>
LaB	<i>Landesarchiv zu Berlin</i>
LADAV	<i>Lassallescher Allgemeiner deutscher Arbeiterverein</i>
SA	<i>Der sozialistische Akademiker</i>
SAPD	<i>Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</i>
SDAP	<i>Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei</i>
StAH	<i>Staatsarchiv Hamburg</i>
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>
SVP	<i>Sächsische Volkspartei</i>
VDAV	<i>Vereinstag deutscher Arbeitervereine</i>

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John Goddard  
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Dedicated to the Memory of

KARLA ROGERS

(née LUCAS, SOCHOVÁ)

1943 – 2009

“A fighter”

## INTRODUCTION

*‘Lokalisten and Sozialdemokraten: ‘localist’ trade unionism in the German building industry, 1868-1893’*

This study looks at the earliest pre-history of German anarcho-syndicalism, that is, at its roots among supporters of the ‘localist’ conception of trade union organization before 1893. Several questions immediately present themselves. Who were the localists and how were they linked to Social Democracy? Why did trade union ‘localism’ find its strongest support among workers in the building industry? Why does this study focus on this particular timeframe? In the course of answering the last of these initial questions, that is, why does this study focus on the period from 1868 to 1893, a contrast will be made between historians of anarcho-syndicalism in Germany (Hans Manfred Bock, Angela Vogel, Hartmut Rübner) and other labour historians (Willy Albrecht, Dirk Müller) for whom the early history of localist trade unionism was a component part of their wider research. This study rests on the premise that ‘formal’ localism (that is, from the mid-1880s onwards), and the ‘centralist’ opposition to it, cannot be fully understood without reference to earlier state repression and trade union theories. This premise informs the key questions which the study aims to answer: why did a branch of trade unionism which had defined itself as a tactical response to restrictive state legislation (above all, to the Prussian Law of Association of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1850) continue to exist once the ban on political association (for men) was over-written by national legislation at the end of 1899?<sup>1</sup> How significant, in the end, was the legal framework? This Introduction contains a guide to the study’s structure before concluding with a brief overview of the wider ‘milieu’ of labour history.

Who were the localists? The localists, whose preferred moniker was ‘the locally organized’ (‘die Lokalorganisierten’),<sup>2</sup> defined themselves as both an economic and a

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 8, Section (a.), of the Prussian Law, which forbade political organizations from accepting women, school students, and apprentices as members, remained in operation until the adoption of a Civil Law Book (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*) for all of Germany in 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Contemporary critics (for example, Ignaz Auer) and opponents (Adam Drunsel, Chair of the Pottery Workers Union of Germany from 1899 to 1922) used the shorthand ‘Lokalisten’. ‘Localist’ has been the accepted English translation. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Lübeck vom 22. bis 28. September 1901,*



political movement.<sup>3</sup> In answering this initial question, I shall first of all briefly describe the movement's craft union origins, before turning to its relationship with Social Democracy. 1880s trade union localism had an antecedent in the Mainz woodworkers' craft union which before 1872 had refused to re-join its national trade union following the dislocation caused by conscription of union members to fight in the Franco-Prussian War. Localist trade unionism re-emerged one decade later as a *movement* as Germany's trade unions reorganized themselves in the wake of their almost total destruction following the enactment of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1878. The craft union basis which this re-organization initially took was not new: the first national trade unions in Germany after 1868 had been centralized bodies of former local craft unions. The first national carpenter and bricklayer trade unions had been no exception to this pattern. Dissatisfied with the master-dominated local guild, some four hundred Berlin carpenters had established the Berlin Association of Journeymen Carpenters in August 1868 to campaign for a pay increase. Carpenters, for the most part from northern and central Germany, had then attended the Berlin Workers Congress called by the social democratic General German Workers Association (ADAV – *Allgemeiner deutscher Arbeiterverein*) one month later; in the wake of this, the General German Carpenters Association was established at the end of that year under the presidency of the Berlin craft union chair, Gustav Lübker. The foundation of the General German Bricklayers Association shortly afterwards followed a split among bricklayer delegates to the Workers Congress, some of whom had opted instead for the no-strike trade association (*Gewerkverein*) model of the Progressive Liberals. A smaller 'International Trade Union for Bricklayers and Carpenters' (*Internationale Gewerksgenossenschaft der Maurer und Zimmerer*) under the tutelage of the Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP - *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*) established in the same wave completed a divided pattern of early unionization in Germany which was mirrored across other industries.

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Berlin 1901 [henceforth: *Protokoll SPD*, 1901 Lübeck], p. 255; Adam Drunsel, *Die Geschichte der deutschen Töferbewegung*, Berlin 1911, pp. 100, 104.

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Kessler, 'Die politische und die gewerkschaftliche Bewegung in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie', *Der sozialistische Akademiker* [henceforth: *SA*], 12 (1896), 756-64 (pp. 761-3)

The localists of the 1880s eschewed a repeat of such centralization citing government legislation, namely the *Vereinsgesetze* or laws of association of the various German states or *Länder*, most of which forbade political combination. These laws had been used repeatedly to ban the openly social democratic national building worker trade unions (but not the Liberal trade associations) after 1873. They remained on the statute books and had been used most recently in 1883 against trade unionist supporters in Berlin of a ‘workers petition’ calling for a nine hour working day. For the Federation of German Carpenters, whose first president Albert Marzian had been a participant in the Berlin petition movement, eschewing ‘politics’ in favour of centralization guaranteed the national union’s existence but in the hands of Marzian’s anti-social democratic successors, it came to be used as a stick with which they excluded ‘radical’ Social Democrats from the union. This tactic of ‘political neutrality’ had most famously been formulated in 1872 by the then president of the national woodworkers’ trade union, Theodor Yorck. Yorck’s theory, however, pre-dated the political persecution of the national trade unions about which it had had nothing to say. Yorck was a Social Democrat for whom legislation was the ultimate guarantee of working-class betterment; he had wanted rather to recruit those workers who were not Social Democrats than to exclude those who were. His theory had aimed at the unification of a divided trade union movement as the prerequisite for successful resistance to employer attacks. This was the argument put forward at the first national bricklayers’ congress (of eight which preceded the establishment of the Central Union of Bricklayers in 1891) in Berlin in 1884 by the Hamburg bricklayer Ernst Knegeendorf, for whom local craft unions were powerless to prevent inward flows of labour during strike action. Only a national union could achieve this.

Localists rejected both of the arguments above. Their theory, rooted in concern with the law, argued that retaining the craft union form would enable the discussion of politics at union meetings and avoid prosecution at the same time: they had no wish to exclude ‘politics’ on either ideological (Federation of Carpenters) or tactical (Yorck, Knegeendorf) grounds. Under the localist model the politicised local union, not the national union executive, was the organizational hub but it refrained from organizing industrial struggles: this was done by the open workers’ meeting and the publicly elected wage negotiating committee, the *Lohnkommission*. As with the craft union,

these forms of organization were inherited from earlier struggles. Knegeborn's wish to counter scab labour was real enough but left its resolution to the future: if one compares the membership figures for the centralist and localist building worker trade unions represented eight years later at the first congress of the Free Trade Unions in 1892 (that is, at the end of the period of this study), namely 31,769 and 12,150 respectively, with that for the total number of building workers in Germany two years previously (1890 – the nearest year for which figures are available) of 1,045,000, the practicality of such 'open' organizing of industrial disputes at a time *when trade union membership numbers remained so low* becomes apparent.<sup>4</sup>

Localism from its outset, therefore, had two sides to it: while its defence of an older form, the craft union, appeared conservative, it did so both to promote political education through the trade union movement, the more so at a time when the Social Democratic Party was banned under the Anti-Socialist Law, and to better utilise (by keeping separate) methods of industrial organizing bequeathed to the trade unions of the 1880s by their predecessors. Under the leadership of the outspoken Social Democrat Paul Grottkau, the national bricklayers' union before it was banned in 1874 had also tolerated strike autonomy. It was on this issue of strike autonomy that elements of personal animosity first began to characterise the debate in the 1880s between the supporters of localism and those of politically neutral centralism. Among bricklayers, the Berlin strike of 1885, conducted on the organizational lines described above, was followed by the accusation from centralist bricklayers in Hamburg that their Berlin colleagues had sabotaged strike action in nearby Rathenow by acting 'unilaterally'; for their part, the Berlin localists countered that not even a national congress could have prevented bricklayers from laying down work when the hourly rate had dropped from one day to the next.<sup>5</sup> Among carpenters, the issue had more final consequences: after

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<sup>4</sup> For totals, see: *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des ersten Kongresses der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Halberstadt von 14. Bis. 18. März 1892*, Hamburg 1892 [henceforth: *Protokoll* Free Trade Unions, 1892 Halberstadt], p. 3; Gerhard A. Ritter & Klaus Tenfelde, 'Der Durchbruch der Freien Gewerkschaften Deutschlands zur Massenbewegung im letzten Viertel des 19. Jahrhunderts', in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Arbeiter, Arbeiterbewegung und soziale Ideen in Deutschland: Beiträge zur Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1996, p. 139 (Tabelle 1).

<sup>5</sup> *Protokoll des Dritten Kongresses der Maurer Deutschlands am 23., 24. und 25. März 1886. Abgehalten in Dresden im "Stadtwaldschlößchen"*, Hamburg, 1886 [henceforth: *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden], pp. 11, 16.

Magdeburg's carpenters staged a joint strike with their bricklayer colleagues in 1886, their union branch was expelled from the Federation of German Carpenters. As a result, these carpenters and their supporters (for example in Saxony where the law of association prevented the formation of national union branches) were the first building workers in Germany to establish a national network of localist craft unions at the end of April 1887.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, localist bricklayers walked out of the fourth national bricklayers' congress in Bremen. The reason, however, was not one of strike control but of national journal publication: personal animosities had become so great that following the expulsion of the editor and publisher from Berlin in 1886 under the Anti-Socialist Law, Hamburg's bricklayers had published their own replacement in addition to that published from Brunswick by the former editorial staff.<sup>7</sup>

In January 1890 the *Reichstag* rejected the renewal of the Anti-Socialist Law. By this time, a fourth method of workers' organization – in addition to those of the craft union, public workers' meeting, and wage committee – had come to be associated with the localist movement. This was that of national co-ordination via a system of publicly elected representatives or *Vertrauensmänner* after the example of Germany's pottery worker trade unionists among whom nascent centralism had been nipped in the bud by police intervention against national committees first of all in Berlin and then in Hamburg. To the subsequent ire of the *Generalkommission* ('General Commission') of the Free Trade Unions – who made its repudiation a central demand at the trade union congress in Halberstadt in 1892 – the '*Vertrauensmänner* system' required no local branch of a national union. It was a system of representation shared with the district electoral associations of the exiled Social Democratic Party (SPD); at the first congress of the re-legalised SPD at Halle in 1890, it was incorporated into that party's organizational platform. The localist movement and the SPD did not just share a model of co-ordination; they also shared a substantial body of grassroots activists some of

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<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 24 of the Saxon Law of Association of 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1850 banned the association with one another of organizations which discussed 'public affairs' (*öffentliche Angelegenheiten*). The ban was lifted by a unanimous vote of the Saxon state parliament, the *Landtag*, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1898. Up to that time, Saxon members of national unions could not form local branches but could be represented as individuals via a *Vertrauensmann* ('elected representative'). This was the one concession to localism at Halberstadt in 1892. See also: Ch. 8, note 68.

<sup>7</sup> The first congress of localist carpenters took place in Halle on 28th April 1887. The fourth national bricklayers' congress took place in Bremen, 25th-28th April 1887.

whom – the Berlin bricklayers Carl Behrend and Julius Wernau, and the carpenter-architect-journalist Gustav Kessler – were immediately co-opted onto the party's bodies.<sup>8</sup> Speaking eleven years later, one party executive member, Ignaz Auer, explained at the party's Lübeck congress why the SPD leadership had rebuffed calls from Hamburg subsequent to Halle (which had recommended trade union centralization) for the localists to be expelled: 'Without doubt, the localists were in the great majority as we, Bebel, Fischer, Singer, I, all centralist stalwarts, returned to Berlin. What could we have done?'<sup>9</sup> His own preferred model of trade union centralization, and that of other party leaders, for example Karl Kautsky, was not that of the Hamburg opponents of localism but Grottkau's 'political centralism' of the 1870s.<sup>10</sup> While feasible after the ban on political combination was raised in 1899, this 'third strand' remained theoretical in the face of the growing membership of the Free Trade Unions and localist intransigence. The 'alliance' between the localists and the leadership of the SPD – Auer spoke rather of 'toleration'<sup>11</sup> - lasted in total less than twenty-five years: from the first opposition to centralization expressed by a majority of delegates at the first national bricklayers' congress in 1884, to the final exclusion of members of localist trade unions from the SPD in 1908. But although it disagreed with them, the party's leadership acknowledged that at a difficult time, the localists had constituted the backbone of the social democratic movement in Berlin.

The SPD leadership did not dissociate itself from the localist trade union movement until the party's Mannheim congress in 1906. Before this, localism was clearly *not* seen by the party, both during its 'formative' period, which is the subject of this study, and during the more widely researched period of the movement's later history up to and beyond the death in 1904 of its first ideologue Kessler, to constitute a variety of 'anarcho-syndicalism'. Yet in 1990 the then labour historian Richard J. Evans wrote that, 'even in the early 1890s the vast majority of Hamburg's Social Democrats had

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<sup>8</sup> *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Halle a. S. vom 12. bis 18. Oktober 1890*, Berlin 1890, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1901 Lübeck, pp. 255-6.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Kautsky, 'Trade Unions and Socialism', *International Socialist Review*, 1 (1900), 593-9; Ignaz Auer, 'Partei und Gewerkschaft', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 1 (1902), 3-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Protokoll*, op cit.

rejected the ideas of the radicals in Berlin, who formed an ‘independent’ anarcho-syndicalist movement’.<sup>12</sup> Such a characterisation, firstly that two distinct radical movements, namely the radical *Jungen* (‘Young Ones’) movement of dissident Social Democrats and that of the localist trade unionists, were one and the same, and secondly that one can talk of anarcho-syndicalism in Germany at this time, was wrong on both counts. On the first point, the earlier assertion of the German historian Heinz Langerhans, that, ‘naturally there were common threads between both oppositions’ should not be taken to mean that such connections were plentiful or that they prove a symbiotic relationship.<sup>13</sup> With the exception of the Magdeburg carpenter Adolf Schulze, there is little evidence of active localist participation in the *Jungen* movement, or the Independent Socialists as they became known following their expulsion from the SPD at its 1891 congress in Erfurt.<sup>14</sup> The shoemaker Richard Baginski, one of the leading Berlin opponents of the party’s leadership, was recorded as having spoken at three meetings of the Berlin localist craft union, the ‘Free Association of Carpenters’, on 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August 1890, and on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1891, respectively.<sup>15</sup> No localist carpenters, however, were to be found among those expelled from the party at Erfurt. Kessler, while he was later alleged to have expressed private support for the *Jungen* in a letter at the time, was also a member of the 21-member committee which drew up the new ‘Erfurt Programme’ of the party.<sup>16</sup> Two years later, at the SPD’s Cologne congress, he

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<sup>12</sup> Richard J. Evans, *Proletarians and Politics: Socialism, protest and the working class in Germany before the First World War*, New York 1990, p. 131. For a German language variation on the theory of the ‘Verquickung’ (‘inter-connectedness’) of localist trade unionism with the *Jungen* movement, see: Wolfgang Schröder, *Klassenkämpfe und Gewerkschaftseinheit: Die Herausbildung und Konstituierung der gesamtnationalen deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung und der Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands*, Berlin 1965, p. 293. Schröder based his assertion in part on the close proximity to one another of the expulsion of the ‘Independents’ (from the 1891 SPD congress), and the walkout of the localist trade unionists at Halberstadt, and in part on the statement of one Halberstadt delegate, the Augsburg textile worker M. Heinzelmann, that it occurred to him as if the two ‘Berlin’ movements were identical. Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Heinz Langerhans, ‘Richtungsgewerkschaft und gewerkschaftliche Autonomie 1890-1914’, *International Review of Social History*, 2 (1957), 22-51 (pp. 37-8).

<sup>14</sup> For Schulze, see: *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Erfurt vom 14. bis 20. Oktober 1891*, Berlin 1891 [henceforth: *Protokoll SPD*, 1891 Erfurt], pp. 105, 225, 286.

<sup>15</sup> Josef Schmöle, *Die sozialdemokratischen Gewerkschaften in Deutschland seit dem Erlasse des Sozialisten-Gesetzes, Zweiter Teil: Einzelne Organisationen, Erste Abteilung: Der Zimmererverband*, Jena 1898 [henceforth: Schmöle, Vol. 2], p. 226.

<sup>16</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1891 Erfurt, p. 12.

was so effusive in his support for the party leadership, when he spoke against a proposal from Ostrowo party members to restrict membership of the party's executive committee to two successive years ('Vor gewissen Autoritäten beugen wir uns und müssen wir uns beugen' – 'We defer to certain authorities and must so defer'), that any earlier sympathy on his part for opponents of the party executive appears an aberration.<sup>17</sup> Wernau, one of the localist bricklayers who had walked out of the founding congress of the Central Union of Bricklayers in May 1891, was immediately less ambivalent. He strongly supported the SPD party leadership against the *Jungen* at Erfurt and proposed that the party's locally elected representatives be instructed to immediately inform the national party *Kontrolleure* (or overseers, elected annually at congress) of any future re-occurrences of such 'abuse, defamation, and suspicion, directed at the party leadership and parliamentary party'.<sup>18</sup> One bricklayer, Fritz Kater, Kessler's successor at the head of the localist movement after 1904, *did* stand alongside Schulze at Erfurt and insisted, following the latter's expulsion, that a statement, of which Schulze was a co-signatory, from the 'so-called opposition', be read out to the congress.<sup>19</sup> Kater, however, was a centralist at this time. Unlike Wernau, he had not walked out of that year's bricklayer union congress and he did not become an active localist until several years later. Nor was he expelled from the party.

Secondly, to talk of 'anarcho-syndicalism' in, of all places, 1890s Germany, where the Social Democratic Party dominated the labour movement to a much greater extent than socialist parties elsewhere, is to stretch the meaning of this word so far as to render it as meaningless as the epithet 'anarchist' routinely applied by the German media in 1970s West Germany to the Marxist-Leninist Red Army Faction. If one compares Wilhelmine Germany with four other large European countries during the same period – namely,

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<sup>17</sup> August Bringmann (signed article), 'Ein Führer der politischen Gewerkschaftsorganisation', *Das Correspondenzblatt*, 2nd August 1897. See also: *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Köln am Rhein vom 22. Bis 28. Oktober 1893*, Berlin 1893 [henceforth: *Protokoll SPD*, 1893 Cologne], pp. 15-16, 244. Cited speech: *ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>18</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1891 Erfurt, pp. 287, 322. Wernau had attended the International Workers' Congress in Paris in 1889 as part of the German delegation alongside Kessler. From 1892 until 1904 he was a Social Democrat member of the *Berliner Stadtverordnetenversammlung* ('Berlin city council'). *Protokoll des Internationalen Arbeiter-Congresses zu Paris. Abgehalten vom 14. Bis 20. Juli 1889*, Nuremberg 1890, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1891 Erfurt, p. 286.

France, Spain, Great Britain, and Italy – it is immediately clear that what the latter have in common with one another is that, unlike Germany, they possessed no socialist party which dominated the working-class political landscape as greatly as did the SPD. In France, this landscape consisted of three rival socialist parties competing with a burgeoning syndicalist movement. In Spain, the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE - *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) enjoyed no parliamentary representation before 1910 and in parts of the country (Asturias, Catalonia) played second fiddle among the working class to anarchism. In Great Britain, while a handful of ‘independent labour’ MPs sat in the House of Commons, the trade unions overwhelmed the plethora of tiny socialist parties in terms of size and even political power (in the person of the engineer John Burns, a member of the Liberal government from 1905). In Italy, the Socialist Party (PSI – *Partito Socialista Italiano*) was divided between a ‘maximalist’ and parliamentary wing (including trade unionists), the latter of which also tolerated a Liberal government. In Germany itself, anarchism remained a small movement which after an initial, and much-publicised association with ‘propaganda by deed’ when August Reinsdorf and two others had spectacularly failed to blow up the German emperor William I and other royalty at the unveiling of the *Niederwalddenkmal* monument in 1883, came to be influenced by the more long-term outlook of intellectual ex-members of the SPD such as Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam. While the localist national network, the ‘Representatives Centralization of Germany’ (*Vertrauensmänner-Zentralisation Deutschlands*), did welcome anarchists, for example the musical instrument maker Andreas Kleinlein, as members, it is mistaken to view it before 1906 as anything other than a movement for the most part of social democratic trade unionists.

Only following the secret agreement of 16<sup>th</sup> February 1906 between the SPD party executive and the General Commission of the Free Trade Unions at which the former deferred to the latter on the ‘mass strike’ question, can one talk of localist disillusionment so great as to represent a real rupture.<sup>20</sup> Before this, party loyalty, which

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<sup>20</sup> For the labour historian Hans Manfred Bock, the bypassing of the will of the party membership by its bureaucratic leadership in 1906 anticipated the ‘betrayal of the workers’ leaders’ of August 1914. Hans Manfred Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918 – 1923: Zur Geschichte und Soziologie der Freien Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (Syndikalistin), der Allgemeinen Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands und der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*, Meisenheim am Glan 1969, p. 27.



had been its battle cry during the Anti-Socialist Law years, continued to represent the public political face of localist trade unionism. Rudolf Rocker, an anarcho-syndicalist of long standing who at that time was active in Britain organizing Jewish clothing workers in the East End of London, later summarised the ultimatum given to the localists by the SPD at Mannheim in 1906, namely that they should join the Free Trade Unions or leave the party, thus:

One witnessed the grotesque spectacle of a socialist party threatening members with expulsion for being over-enthusiastic Social Democrats, who moreover had wished to implant the spirit of Social Democracy in their own trade unions. But in Germany much was possible which in other countries would hardly be believed to be so.<sup>21</sup>

Although Kessler had expressed sympathy for the French *Bourses du Travail* ('labour exchanges'; in reality local centres of working-class trade union and even cultural organization) at a public meeting of Berlin pottery workers on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1890 which followed his attendance at the previous year's International Workers Congress in Paris, it was only following his death in 1904 that the re-named localist national network, the Free Association of German Trade Unions (FVdG - *Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften*), began to associate itself more publicly with other syndicalist themes.<sup>22</sup> At its seventh congress in Berlin, from 16th to 19th April 1906, the FVdG explicitly embraced the tactic of the 'mass or general strike', in pursuit of traditional trade union aims, that is, in improving living standards and working conditions, but also in support of the 'setting aside of class rule'.<sup>23</sup> This followed two years of agitation, which the FVdG in Berlin had sponsored, on behalf of the idea of the General Strike, by the medical doctor and former Berlin city councillor, Raphael Friedeberg.<sup>24</sup> This campaign had taken place against a backdrop of rising industrial

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<sup>21</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Aus den Memoiren eines deutschen Anarchisten*, Magdalena Melnikow & Hans Peter Duerr (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 1974, p. 289.

<sup>22</sup> For Kessler: Drunsel, pp. 146-7, 171.

<sup>23</sup> *Programm der "Freien Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften" und die Resolution betreffend Streiks und Aussperrungen nebst Begründungen*, hrsg. von Geschäftskommission, Berlin 1906. Cited in W. Kulemann, *Die Berufsvereine: Zweiter Band (Deutschland II): Die Arbeiter, Die Arbeiterinnen, Einzelne Organisationen*, Jena 1908, pp. 105-6.

<sup>24</sup> Raphael Friedeberg, 'Parlamentarismus und Generalstreik', *Die Einigkeit*, 13<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> Aug., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1904. Friedeberg was a Social Democrat member of the Berlin city council from 1902 until 1904 who

action generally and increased militancy in the building trade in particular. For example, the Royal Statistical Office (*Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt*) in 1908 reported figures for the building industry in Germany in 1901 of 382 strikes involving 18,971 workers; by 1906 these figures had risen to 1,079 and 79,076 respectively. In both years, each figure represented approximately one third of national totals for all occupational sectors which rose by similar proportions.<sup>25</sup>

The FVdG did not incorporate anti-parliamentarianism into its programme at this time, although it made clear, ‘that if workers are to conduct the economic and political struggle with vigour and success, they must do so as a class struggle with the aim of revolutionary socialism’.<sup>26</sup> In fact, its position on the General Strike, while to the left of August Bebel’s ‘political mass strike’ proposal to the SPD’s 1905 congress in Jena – Bebel had called for ‘the most comprehensive stoppage of work’ in the event of further attacks on universal suffrage and the right of combination - was hardly more radical than that of party figures such as Rosa Luxemburg and Louise Zietz who had voted for Bebel’s proposal while pointing out that strike action in revolutionary Russia had not waited for prior ‘organization’.<sup>27</sup> It was more with a sense of outrage and betrayal, than the glee of an ‘outsider’, that a Social Democrat such as Kater agreed, following the FVdG’s 1906 congress, to publish, under the headline, ‘Behind the curtains’, extracts from the minutes of the February conference between the General Commission of the Free Trade Unions and members of the SPD leadership at the former’s headquarters in Berlin. At this conference, Bebel had declared that the party had every reason to avoid a political mass strike where possible after the trade unions had stated that they would not fund any agitation for such.<sup>28</sup>

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later became an anarchist. He was not expelled from the Social Democratic Party until 25<sup>th</sup> September 1907. *Vorwärts*, 26th Sept. 1907. Cited in Dieter Fricke, *Die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung 1869 bis 1914: Ein Handbuch über ihre Organisation und Tätigkeit im Klassenkampf*, Berlin 1976, p. 750.

<sup>25</sup> *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs: Band 230, Streiks und Aussperrungen im Jahre 1908: Bearbeitet im Kaiserlichen Statistischen Amte*, Berlin 1909, pp. 1, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Einigkeit*, 5th Jan. 1907.

<sup>27</sup> *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Jena vom 17. bis 23. September 1905*, Berlin 1905 [henceforth: *Protokoll SPD*, 1905 Jena], pp. 142-3, 342-3. For Luxemburg: *ibid.*, pp. 320-1. For Zietz: *ibid.*, pp. 325-6.

<sup>28</sup> *Einigkeit*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1906.

Several proposals (not all of them hostile) at the next SPD congress in Mannheim from 23rd to 29<sup>th</sup> September 1906 resulted from the FVdG's intervention.<sup>29</sup> For example, that of the Berlin 6<sup>th</sup> Electoral District noted that the publication of the minutes had once more shown that regrettable ('bedauerliche') differences of opinion existed between the political and trade union organizations of the working class. It proposed that the party executive and the General Commission in future agree to send delegates to all of each other's meetings. A proposal from 'Teltow-Beeskow-Storkow-Charlottenburg' noted that the split between local and centrally organized trade unions was damaging the movement but did not attribute blame to one side. It did, however, ask that the party executive seize the initiative in a renewed attempt at bringing about unity. Most notably, however, the congress passed the proposal of the party executive and control committees that,

Anarcho-socialist aspirations, such as those which have come to the fore in the locally organized trade unions, are incompatible with the aims and interests of the Social Democratic Party. It is therefore the duty of the party press to combat the anarcho-socialist movement with all its energy and it is the task of party comrades to exclude from their ranks such persons, where they are members of the party, who advocate anarcho-socialist aims and campaign for them. The party leadership requests that those party members organized in local trade unions join the centrally organized trade unions in accordance with the resolution of the Lübeck party congress.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Mannheim vom 23. Bis 29. September 1906 sowie Bericht über die 4. Frauenkonferenz am 22. und 23. September 1906 in Mannheim*, Berlin 1906 [henceforth: *Protokoll SPD*, 1906 Mannheim], pp. 127-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1906 Mannheim, pp. 104-5, 140. The last sentence is a reference to a resolution of Eduard Bernstein's, passed at the party's Lübeck congress in 1901 on a contested – the minutes read, 'Die Abstimmung über diesen Antrag bleibt zweifelhaft' ('The vote over this proposal remains doubtful') - majority of three votes (110 to 107). Bernstein's proposal had stated that the struggle of the working class demanded 'uniform centralization' ('einheitliche Zusammenfassung') of all forces with the exercise of strict discipline as a pre-condition coupled with respect for the decisions of the majority. Those who conducted actions contrary to the party or their trade union or indulged in separatism could be expelled by their local party while they persisted in doing so. *Protokoll SPD*, 1901 Lübeck, pp. 97, 259. The Lübeck congress had witnessed a long debate triggered by an earlier decision of a party arbitration panel, chaired by Ignaz Auer, not to expel party members belonging to a breakaway independent union of piece-working bricklayers in Hamburg despite requests to do so from their former union, the Central Union of Bricklayers, and four local SPD electoral organizations. Auer, defending his decision, made it clear that the breakaway union was not affiliated to the localist movement: 'In Berlin too, I participated in a conference of *Vertrauensmänner* from the party and trade unions which discussed the exclusion of piece-working bricklayers. This tendency had become the fashion right across Germany.' *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6. The

This resolution was followed by lengthy negotiations between the party, the Free Trade Unions, and the FVdG and its constituent local unions, in an effort to win over what the leadership of the SPD and the Free Trade Unions clearly recognised was a *non*-anarchist majority among the localists. Only following its eighth, ‘extraordinary’, congress in Berlin, from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> January 1908, after which a minority of delegates representing a majority of its members (11,623 of 17,633, including most bricklayers and carpenters) finally decided to accede to the demand of the SPD that they join the Free Trade Unions if they wished to retain their party membership, can one really talk of the FVdG as a syndicalist organization.<sup>31</sup> Kater, FVdG chair, resigned from the party two months later after having rejected offers of a salaried position. Tellingly, Luxemburg, no friend of anarchism, opposed the Mannheim ultimatum to the localists: while centralization was the most suitable form of modern trade union organization, there was no doubt that among the localists there were ‘many good comrades’ (‘viele brave Genossen’); to exclude the ‘anarcho-socialists’ from the party, as proposed by the party executive, would show that the party only had the energy and decisiveness to close itself off on the left while still leaving the doors wide open on the right.<sup>32</sup> She added: ‘We are told that by their propaganda, the localists ... undermine the tenets of Social Democracy at every turn. But social democratic principles are undermined in precisely the same way when

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*Einigkeit* later alleged that the vote on Bernstein’s proposal was taken twice as people were leaving the congress to go home. *Einigkeit*, 5<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1907.

<sup>31</sup> Figures from the *Correspondenzblatt*, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb., 1908. If one, however, compares these – among them 3,310 bricklayers, 2,944 carpenters, and 2,346 building labourers – with those provided by Dieter Fricke – 2,112 bricklayers, 612 carpenters, and 573 building labourers – there is a discrepancy of 5,303. This suggests that apart from bricklayers, a majority of localist building workers did not move over to the Free Trade Unions. While this helps to explain why half of all delegates (35 from 73) to the FVdG’s next national congress in 1910 continued to represent building occupations, it does not explain the fall in FVdG membership from 17,633 in 1908 to 6,454 in 1910. Fricke, p. 754. For membership and delegate figures for the FVdG 1910 national congress, see: Dirk Müller, *Gewerkschaftliche Versammlungsdemokratie und Arbeiterdelegierte vor 1918: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Lokalismus, des Syndikalismus und der entstehenden Rätebewegung*, Berlin 1985, pp. 343, 345 (Tabelle I, III).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Anarchosozialisten’ was a term widely used in SPD circles at this time, sometimes alongside ‘Anarchisten’ in the same sentence. The implied meaning of the former was that they had a foot in both camps. See, for example, Bebel: *Protokoll SPD*, 1905 Jena, p. 299.

someone from the central trade unions, as did Bringmann at your conference in February, declares themselves against the principle of the class struggle.’<sup>33</sup>

The ‘shorthand’ equation of turn-of-the-century trade union localism in Germany, first of all with the *Jungen* movement, and then with ‘anarcho-syndicalism’, is an unsustainable one. In contrast, its association with building workers (the focus of this study) appears incontrovertible when the occupations of those localist delegates (twelve of thirteen) who walked out of the first congress of the Free Trade Unions in 1892 and of delegates (twenty of thirty four) to the founding congress of the Representatives Centralization in 1897 are borne in mind but this does not tell the whole story.<sup>34</sup> In 1885 Germany’s metalworkers had also adopted the localist form after their national trade union, the Association of Metalworkers (*Vereinigung deutscher Metallarbeiter*), had been banned as a ‘socialist’ organization under the Anti-Socialist Law. At the first subsequent national congress of German metalworkers in 1888, Berlin’s metalworkers argued that recentralization was premature, a position they maintained until 1897 when they finally joined the German Metalworkers Union (*Deutscher Metallarbeiterverband*) after the latter changed its statutes to allow for local strike autonomy. A minority of metalworkers, again for the most part in Berlin, nonetheless did choose later in the same year to participate in the founding of the Representatives Centralization as the second largest occupational group.<sup>35</sup> This is a history with elements in common with, and divergent to, the experience of the numerically stronger localist building workers: for example, owing to the multiplicity of metalworking trades Germany’s metalworker trade unionists, both centralist and localist, were characterised much earlier by an insistence on industrial organization. This study has, however, foresworn a comparative approach to concentrate instead on localist trade unionism where it was both strongest and where it was most contested: in the German building industry.

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<sup>33</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1906 Mannheim, pp. 315-16. For Luxemburg’s opposition to anarchism, see in particular: Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, The Political Party and The Trade Unions*, London 1964, pp. 11-14.

<sup>34</sup> *Protokoll Free Trade Unions*, 1892 Halberstadt, p. 62; Dirk Müller, op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Ten years later, metalworkers (3,010) remained the second largest occupational group of an FVdG membership of 17,633. *Correspondenzblatt*, op. cit.

Up to the split in the movement in 1908, building workers continued to comprise the backbone of the localist movement. At the ‘extraordinary’ eighth congress of the FVdG in January of that year, bricklayers, carpenters, building labourers, and pottery workers (including stove fitters) still comprised a total of 9,200 of 17,633 members.<sup>36</sup> But while it was true that long-term support for localism was to be found among workers producing for a local market and for whom working conditions and wages also depended on local circumstances, the largest group of whom were building workers, this does not explain why some of their number were attracted to it but others not.<sup>37</sup> Speaking before the first national bricklayers’ congress in 1884, Knegendorf unwittingly pointed to a major reason for this pattern of affiliation and non-affiliation when he stated that it was the duty of a trade union not to provoke war with the [guild] masters but to effect a resolution of the ‘work question’ on a peaceful basis. Knegendorf’s assertion rested on personal experience of collaboration with Hamburg city councillors.<sup>38</sup> Such benevolence was not the ‘personal experience’ of bricklayers in Prussia who were confronted both with state authorities much more willing to use the law against workers’ organization, and with employers who had the ready ear of that state. In 1886, Kessler and two bricklayers, Behrend and Fritz Wilke, were expelled from Berlin at employer behest.<sup>39</sup> In the face of such obduracy, a resolution of the work question along the lines suggested by Knegendorf seemed fanciful to many.

Berlin in particular was different from Hamburg in another respect: hostility to the ‘caste spirit’, which was seen as a remnant of guild domination, was much more marked among that city’s building workers. Why this had happened is considered in the first chapter of this study. The combination of these two factors, of an experience of greater state repression and a more marked hostility to the guild, can be read into the minutes of

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich: Die Sozialdemokratische Partei und die Freien Gewerkschaften 1890-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Berlin 1963, p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> *Protokoll des Kongresses der Maurer Deutschlands am 28. und 29. April 1884 zu Berlin im Konzert-Saale Sanssouci, Kottbuserstraße Nr.4a*, Berlin 1884 [henceforth: *Protokoll*, Bricklayers, 1884 Berlin], p. 5; Fritz Paepow, *Die Organisationen der Maurer Deutschlands von 1869 bis 1899: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Maurerbewegung*, Hamburg 1900, p. 103.

<sup>39</sup> Ignaz Auer, *Nach zehn Jahren: Material und Glossen zur Geschichte des Sozialistengesetzes, 1. Historisches, 2. Die Opfer des Sozialistengesetzes*, London 1889, p. 108.

that first bricklayers' congress in 1884 which reveal a much greater pre-occupation of Berlin delegates with the laws of association and a 'guild remnant' such as piece work.<sup>40</sup> While Kessler's role in the growth of the localist trade union movement has unfortunately overshadowed that of others, such as Behrend (who had led the 1885 Berlin strike) and Wilke, by virtue of the fact that he wrote more, his contribution as a spokesperson was a significant one nonetheless. It can be contended that a third factor, that of individual intervention, of which that of Kessler was one such among several, is more demonstrable as a further reason for the varied reception of localist ideas than an economic factor such as the fact that wages were consistently higher in Hamburg. This was true but when one, for example, compares wage rates as compiled for the fourth national bricklayers' congress in Bremen in 1887, that is, at the very congress which saw the split between centralists and localists become public, those in Berlin came in at second place behind those for Hamburg and its immediate environs. Among the worst paid were no centres of localist agitation.<sup>41</sup>

The contrast between the reception of the respective theories of trade union organization in Berlin and Hamburg is an important theme of this study. Support for localism, however, was not limited to Berlin. Before 1890, localist trade unionism among carpenters, for example, was centred on Magdeburg; that among pottery workers, on Halle. In the case of Magdeburg, a rapidly expanding city in which Social Democracy had long-established roots, this occurred after the local carpenters' union branch was expelled from the national trade union at the end of 1886.<sup>42</sup> The localist 'Free Association of Carpenters' was founded there shortly afterwards. After 1890, while no longer the 'main seat of the radical opposition' (the baton had indeed passed to Berlin), Magdeburg, a centre also of social democratic *Jungen* agitation, retained its carpenters'

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<sup>40</sup> Carl Behrend was especially critical of the 'envy and resentment' which often accompanied piece working. *Protokoll Bricklayers, 1884 Berlin*, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Respective figures for 1887 (in *Pfennig* per hour) are: Hamburg (50), Altona (50), Ottensen (50), Wandsbek (50), Berlin (45-55), Charlottenburg (45-55), Wilhelmshaven (46), Harburg (40-45), Bremen (40), Stettin (40), Bergedorf (40), Leipzig (37-42), Magdeburg (35-40), Hanover ("37½-38"), Flensburg (36), Itzehoe (36), Lübeck (35), Elmshorn (35), Rostock (35), Frankfurt am Main (33-35), Potsdam (32-35), Uetersen (33), Osnabrück (30-35), Dessau (28-35), Frankfurt an der Oder ("27½-32½"), Eckernförde (30), Uelzen (29), Neuahaldensleben ("24-27½"). Cited in Paepelow, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>42</sup> Magdeburg Social Democrats Julius Bremer and Wilhelm Klees were among the founders of the Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP) at Eisenach in 1869.

craft union despite the support of its former secretary, August Bringmann, for the national union.<sup>43</sup> Among pottery workers the choice of Halle in 1888 as seat of their ‘general committee’ followed the prosecution of former incarnations in Berlin and Hamburg. While at first sight this appears incidental – the small pottery workers’ network had thereby exhausted its two greatest bases of support – Halle was an apt choice for a localist network which was more geographically spread out than those of the other building trades: in 1889 it held its national congress in Breslau; in 1890 in Munich. Halle had also witnessed the first conference of localist bricklayers in 1887 but it was in non-Prussian Brunswick, under the stewardship of the 1870s survivor Heinrich Rieke, that bricklayer localism found a temporary organizational base following the police clampdown in Berlin. While the primacy of support for localism in Berlin among bricklayers, carpenters and pottery workers later became more marked, support among a fourth group, namely building labourers, became more diffuse when 500 members of the national union in Hamburg defected to form their own localist organization in 1901.<sup>44</sup> In addition to Magdeburg, Halle, and Brunswick, strong centres of localist agitation among building workers could be found in Stralsund (from 1885), Königsberg (from 1886), and Wernigerode (from 1891).<sup>45</sup>

This study concentrates on the period up to 1893. The establishment, in 1893 of the General Association of Germany’s Pottery Workers and Allied Trades, the final one of four national building worker trade unions, preceded in turn by those of the carpenters (1883), building labourers (1891), and bricklayers (1891), to be established in the occupational bastions of localist trade unionism, marked a sea change in the nature of the trade union debate within these four trades. In this new terrain, the questions ‘whether’ and ‘when’ to centralize had been answered in the affirmative by significant

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<sup>43</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Troeltsch and Paul Hirschfeld, *Die deutschen Sozialdemokratischen Gewerkschaften: Untersuchungen und Materialien über ihre geographische Verbreitung 1896-1903*, 2nd Ed., Berlin 1907, Appendix p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> For Stralsund, see: *Protocoll des Congresses der Maurer Deutschlands am 23., 24. und 25. März in Hannover in den Sälen des Ballhofes*, Hamburg 1885 [henceforth: *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1885 Hanover], p. 21. For Königsberg: *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1886 Dresden, pp. 3, 5. For Wernigerode: *Protokoll des Achten Kongresses der Maurer Deutschlands und der konstituierenden Verbandsversammlung. Abgehalten am 8., 9., 11., 12., 13., 14. und 15. Mai 1891 in Gotha*, Hamburg 1891 [henceforth: *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1891 Gotha], p. 3.



numbers of unionized building workers. The split between localists and centralists had been formalised. Among pottery workers, centralization fulfilled the recommendation of the first congress of the Free Trade Unions at Halberstadt the previous year that all local organizations, with the exception of those in Saxony, should do so. To this seminal change one can also add the impact which Halberstadt had on both the 1893 congress of the Federation of Carpenters, which decided to open up union membership to non-carpenters in support of the industrial unionist metalworkers, and on the 1893 congress of the SPD, at which the party leadership chose not to intervene in what was now a dispute between competing organizations. All three such close outcomes of the Halberstadt recommendation merit consideration alongside it.

A further reason suggests 1893 as an appropriate cut off point. The subsequent history of the localist movement has long been much more well-known. Writing in 1989, Hans Manfred Bock described how his initial interest in anarchism as a subject of research was in part awakened by an encounter some twenty five years earlier with ‘intellectual anarchist’ writings from the English-speaking world. Bock cited a later commentator at this point, the Canadian author George Woodcock, who had written that this intellectual anarchism had played a bridging role between that anarchist movement which had fallen into decline following the Spanish Civil War, and the student revolts at the end of the 1960s.<sup>46</sup> While the foci of Bock’s research in this area had been histories of the FAUD (*Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* – Free Workers Union of Germany) and German Left Communism from 1918 onwards, he had been careful to provide a summary of the localist movement which had preceded both. His summary, which began by citing the localist argument as presented by its representatives at the Halberstadt trade union congress in 1892, namely that they did not believe that it was possible within the framework of the existing social order to improve the situation of the workers by purely trade union means, noted the emergence of the *Vertrauensmänner* system of regional representatives by this time.<sup>47</sup> For the most part, however, Bock’s summary was of the

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<sup>46</sup> George Woodcock (ed.), *The Anarchist Reader*, London 1977, pp. 47-53; Hans Manfred Bock, ‘Anarchosyndikalismus in Deutschland: eine Zwischenbilanz’, *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 25 (1989), 293-358 (p. 293). In my opinion, both Bock and Woodcock overplayed the significance of these intellectuals at the expense of ‘traditional’ British anarchist activists such as Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie.

<sup>47</sup> Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus*, pp. 23-4. ‘Vertrauensmann’ is often translated into English in a trade union context as ‘shop steward’ where the role being described is one of representation

years which followed the founding of the ‘Representatives Centralization’ in 1897. In contrast to his later critic, Angela Vogel, Bock identified Kessler above all as having shaped the localist movement’s self-image of itself before 1904 as a ‘trade union avant-garde’ of Social Democracy.<sup>48</sup> For Vogel, this role had fallen instead to Carl Hillmann, an earlier trade union theorist who in 1873 had written that, ‘today’s trade unions are the means for the emancipation of the working-class’.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, Hillmann had added that because the activities of the trade unions brought ideas of such emancipation to maturity, these ‘natural organizations’ had to hold a position equal to that of purely political agitation.<sup>50</sup> While the first of these statements can be read as ‘syndicalist’, it is also almost a word-for-word echo of the position of Karl Marx with whom Hillmann had co-operated in the First International. Neither statement mentions organizational form.<sup>51</sup> In addition to this, there were two additional problems with Vogel’s championing of Hillmann: firstly, unlike the localists, he had nothing to say on circumventing the laws of association. He merely called for their abolition.<sup>52</sup> Secondly, there is no evidence, not just in Kessler’s writings but also, for example, in the minutes of the crucial first four national bricklayer congresses from 1884 to 1887, that the early localists, if they had heard of him, paid him any attention.<sup>53</sup> Hillmann’s views are considered in greater detail elsewhere in this study alongside those of the more well-known early theoreticians of *centralist* trade unionism, Bebel and Yorck.<sup>54</sup>

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of one or several smaller geographically close workplaces. That is its modern German usage; in late nineteenth century Germany, the *Platzdeputierte* or ‘site deputies’ fulfilled this role.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Carl Hillmann, *Praktische Emanzipationswinke: Eine Wort zur Förderung der Gewerksgenossenschaften*, Leipzig 1873, p.10. Angela Vogel, *Der deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalismus: Genese und Theorie einer vergessenen Bewegung*, Berlin 1977, pp. 33-8.

<sup>50</sup> Hillmann, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> For a ‘centralist’ interpretation of Hillmann, see: John A. Moses, *Trade Unionism in Germany from Bismarck to Hitler 1869-1933, Vol. 1: 1869-1918*, London 1982, pp. 56-7. More recently, Hartmut Rübner, like Vogel, also cites Hillmann as anticipating later anarcho-syndicalism but does admit, ‘Whether – and to what extent – Hillmann was adopted by the localists cannot be proven up to now.’ Hartmut Rübner, *Freiheit und Brot: Die Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands, Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Anarchosyndikalismus*, Cologne 1994, p. 24, note 4. For Marx, see Ch. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Hillmann, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> See Chs. 5 and 6.

<sup>54</sup> See Ch. 4.

Against the backdrop of his reply to Vogel, who had criticised him for concentrating on the role of ‘history-making men’, above all Rudolf Rocker, in the formation of the FAUD in 1919 to the detriment of continuity with earlier localist history, Bock drew attention to the deficiencies hitherto in knowledge of the localist movement before Halberstadt and cited in this respect one of his primary sources, the retired District Court Councillor, W. Kulemann, to whom Kater had provided the minutes of all national congresses of the FVdG between 1897 and 1908.<sup>55</sup> Kulemann’s account of the localist movement begins precisely with the Halberstadt walkout.<sup>56</sup> Another ‘post-Halberstadt’ account, that of Gerhard Ritter writing in 1963, described localism as ‘a typical product of abnormal relations during the Anti-Socialist Law’.<sup>57</sup> Later, with Klaus Tenfelde, Ritter would add, following a brief reference to the national bricklayer congresses of the 1880s, that, ‘the craft unions remained the organizational lever until the abolition of the Anti-Socialist Law’.<sup>58</sup> What all such post-1892 summaries have in common *by default* is a shared view of the continuation of the localist movement after this date; in contrast, for one GDR labour historian, Wolfgang Schröder, Halberstadt was the point from which the localist movement, ‘a disappearing minority’ which represented ‘the past of the trade unions’, merited little further consideration.<sup>59</sup>

Two trade union histories published in the 1980s provided a much more comprehensive account of the formative years of the localist movement. Firstly, in 1982, Willy Albrecht published his monumental *Fachverein-Berufsgewerkschaft-Zentralverband: Organisationsprobleme der deutschen Gewerkschaften 1870-1890*.<sup>60</sup> This, a

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<sup>55</sup> Vogel, pp. 22-4. Vogel’s evidence for the continuity of the localist movement is much sparser than that provided by Bock.

<sup>56</sup> Bock, ‘Anarchosyndikalismus in Deutschland’, p. 296; Kulemann, pp. 96-108.

<sup>57</sup> Ritter, op. cit., pp. 113-14.

<sup>58</sup> Gerhard A. Ritter & Klaus Tenfelde, ‘Der Durchbruch der Freien Gewerkschaften Deutschlands zur Massenbewegung im letzten Viertel des 19. Jahrhunderts’, in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Arbeiter, Arbeiterbewegung und soziale Ideen in Deutschland: Beiträge zur Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1996, pp. 131-82 (p. 146).

<sup>59</sup> Schröder, op. cit., pp. 288, 293-4. Another GDR labour historian, Dieter Fricke, took an opposite view. In common with other post-Halberstadt summaries, it acknowledges the ideological role before this of Kessler. Fricke, p. 746.

<sup>60</sup> Willy Albrecht, *Fachverein-Berufsgewerkschaft-Zentralverband: Organisatorische Probleme der deutschen Gewerkschaften 1870-1890*, Bonn 1982.

chronological survey which embraced all trade unions of that period including the liberal *Gewerkvereine* ('trade associations'), placed their respective histories firmly in the context of the legal limitations of the time. His survey of the emerging localist movement drew on various sources; in concentrating in particular on the minutes of national congresses, Albrecht's sections on the organizational dispute among the bricklayers, for example, brought into the light crucial figures other than Kessler, figures such as Rieke, Behrend, Wilke, and Carl Blaurock, the last of whom helped to hold the movement together in Berlin as others were expelled. Secondly, in 1985 Dirk Müller's *Gewerkschaftliche Versammlungsdemokratie und Arbeiterdelegierte vor 1918* postulated that attempts in the immediate aftermath of the First World War to establish a direct democratic form of representation were no novelty in the German workers' movement. Müller's hypothesis rested on the examples of 'craft union' localism among building workers, based for the most part around existing trade demarcations, and on that of the metalworkers (see above).<sup>61</sup>

Both Albrecht and Müller should rightly be regarded as pioneers in their research on the neglected early history of localist trade unionism in Germany. It is not the aim here to 'uncover' the same history for the benefit of English-speaking readers unfamiliar with it, although as a translation exercise that would be a worthy intention. Such a narrative account, which is what it would be, would possibly embrace the Berlin workers' clubs of the 1840s, and almost certainly draw on Müller's earlier examination of the origins of direct democratic practices, for example in the institution of the *Platzdeputierte* ('site deputy', later 'shop steward'), among Berlin's carpenters before 1869.<sup>62</sup> Such, however, is not the purpose of this research project which begins in 1868, the year in which two competing workers' congresses representing both wings of the divided social democratic movement, that of the Congress of German Workers Clubs (VDAV - *Vereinstag deutscher Arbeitervereine*) in Nuremberg from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September, and the ADAV's 'Workers Congress' in Berlin from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> September, called for the

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<sup>61</sup> Dirk Müller, op. cit., pp. 9, 198.

<sup>62</sup> Dirk Müller, 'Binnenstruktur und Selbstverständnis der Gesellschaft der Berliner Zimmerer im Übergang von der handwerklichen zur gewerkschaftlichen Interessenvertretung', in Ulrich Engelhardt (ed.), *Handwerker in der Industrialisierung: Lager, Kultur und Politik vom späten 18. bis ins frühe 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart (Klett-Cotta) 1984, 627-36.

establishment of trade unions. Between that year and the open emergence of localist dissent at the national bricklayers' congress in 1884, state repression of the early building worker trade unions and the development of centralist trade union theory, above all that of Yorck, in the 1870s, were to have a decisive impact on the organizational debates of a decade later.

It is not my intention to re-examine the localist phenomenon, conclude that it was of its time, and then consign it to the historical dustbin. In a changed industrial relations climate across the developed world of minority (or no) trade union membership in most workplaces while job security is non-existent for most workers, local wildcat action cutting across membership barriers may, today, have more to recommend it than waiting to 'build the union'. My aim, rather, is to seek to find in the earlier history of the localist movement an explanation as to why a branch of trade unionism born out of resistance to restrictive state legislation continued doggedly to defend its independence once that impediment, the ban on political association, was removed after 1899. Why did 'for the time being' assume a permanence none of its earlier advocates had foreseen? This begs a second question: how significant, then, was the legal framework? It is my belief that the answers to these questions can already be found in the localist building worker movement's early history before 1893. The most decisive part of that movement's earliest history consisted of its interaction with those who held a different view, namely the centralists. That interaction, at times, witnessed the exchange of huge amounts of personal vitriol but such animosities, while real and debilitating enough, could be found elsewhere (for example, between Auer and Carl Legien, both trade union centralists, during the trade union debate at the 1893 Cologne party congress). Underlying the vitriol, which was matched at times by efforts at conciliation, for example those of Knegendorf and Wilke at national bricklayer congresses before 1886, were emerging differences concerning the nature of accountability. At this point, unevenness is introduced, for while craft union localism during this period was overwhelmingly a phenomenon associated with building workers, centralist building workers were part of a much larger whole. For this reason, the second chapter of the

study focuses on the early non-building worker ideologues of centralist trade unionism whose influence, most notably on the Hamburg bricklayers, is undisputed.<sup>63</sup>

For localist building workers on the other hand, there was no earlier ideology to exercise an influence. Instead, as previously indicated, localist trade unionism inherited methods of struggle such as the wage committee and the open public meeting which had been deployed by more flexible national unions in the 1870s which had tolerated local strike autonomy so long as no financial demands ensued.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the *Gründerjahre* ('early years') of the new German Empire coincided with a building boom in Berlin which placed that city's building workers in a very advantageous position before the onset of economic depression and state persecution. Being the country's biggest trade union representing members on the country's biggest building site placed the General German Bricklayers Association under Grottkau's leadership at the forefront of the earliest struggles of the new national trade unions.<sup>65</sup> Unlike Yorck, Grottkau remained a member of the ADAV despite disagreeing with its leadership's demand for trade union subservience; his contribution to trade union theory is less well-known. Chapter 1 of this study examines these events and the role of Grottkau with reference to the socio-economic factors which constituted their backdrop. Chapter 2, as previously indicated, then concentrates on the centralist theories of Bebel, Yorck, and Hillmann. State repression in Prussia after 1874 forced both social democratic political parties and many trade unions to relocate to Hamburg where local legislation did not ban political association. Whereas the national carpenters' trade union, under the leadership of the Kapell brothers, August and Otto, at this point took the lead in campaigning for Yorck's ideas following the latter's death, the national bricklayers

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<sup>63</sup> A later variant of centralist argumentation which mirrored the concern of localists with the restrictive impact of the laws of association on the right of combination as laid down in Paragraph 152 of the Industrial Code of 1869, namely that derived from the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1887 ruling of the Third Criminal Division of the Supreme Court (*Reichsgericht*), can be found in Ch. 7.

<sup>64</sup> Dirk Müller, 'Probleme gewerkschaftlicher Organisation und Perspektiven im Rahmen eines arbeitsteiligen Organisationskonzeptes', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 15 (1979), 569-80 (p. 572)

<sup>65</sup> At its Annual General Meeting from 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June 1873, the Bricklayers Association reported a national membership of 10,091. This compares with 6,900 members of the Federation of German Print Workers, the next largest trade union, for the turn of year 1872/3. Paepelow, op. cit., p. 44. For the print workers, see: 'Tabelle 3. Gewerkschaftliche Zentralorganisationen 1872/3', Albrecht, pp. 531-3.

union, most vociferously under the leadership of the imprisoned Grottkau's deputy, Fritz Hurlemann, and that of the building labourers, led by Wilhelm Wissmann, opposed such a stance.<sup>66</sup> This first organizational dispute, which pitted unions rather than divided memberships against one another, is the subject of Chapter 3, which concludes Part One.

Part Two is concerned with the emergence of localist trade unionism from 1884 onwards. While at the same time synonymous with increasingly fractious debates at national bricklayer congresses up to 1887, the consolidation of a movement which formed around a desire to defend craft union autonomy of action against the general centralising impulse was considerably boosted as a result of the Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885. The strike's immediate wake saw Kessler, whose relationship with many Berlin bricklayer activists had by this point broken down, reconcile himself with most of these activists who continued to support him following his expulsion from the capital city the following year. Furthermore, the strike's outcome placed the issue of strike support firmly at the core of the differences between the localist and centralist sides. While neither side was 'strike happy' in the sense of wishing to see strike support funds exhausted willy-nilly on strikes with no prospects of success, the debate at the 1886 national bricklayers' congress around the unilateral support which Berlin bricklayers had earlier provided to strikers in nearby Rathenow, and their refusal to hand over to the Hamburg 'control committee' the surplus from their own strike funds, citing mutual obligations to, among others, local carpenters who had supported them, brought the differences of ideology between the two sides into sharp relief. In this case, the difference clearly had nothing to do with the laws of association. For Müller, the 1885 strike precipitated the split of 1887. Unfortunately, while Müller's panoramic account of the whole period to 1918 notes the strike's impact on the debate at the 1886 congress, it has nothing to say about the strike itself and perhaps for this reason overlooks the continuity evident in the fact that Behrend, the strike's leader, was one of the twelve localists to walk out of the Halberstadt trade unions' congress seven years later.<sup>67</sup> Contemporaneously, Auer noted that the intensification of the use of the full array of

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<sup>66</sup> Wissmann's *Allgemeiner Deutscher Bau-, Land- und Erdarbeiterverein* ('General German Labourers Union') was actually open to non-building workers.

<sup>67</sup> Dirk Müller, *Versammlungsdemokratie*, p. 37.

legislation at the disposal of state authorities, including the national Anti-Socialist Law and local laws of association, from April 1886 followed a visit to the Imperial and Prussian Minister of the Interior, Robert von Puttkamer, by a deputation of Berlin building employers. The strike, therefore, was a significant event not just in localist history but also in that of state attitudes to trade unionism more generally. The 1885 strike, its origins, course, and outcome, comprises Chapter 4 of the study.

Chapter 5 focuses on the four national bricklayers' congresses between 1884 and 1887 with an especially close focus on the strike and national journal debates at the congress of 1886. While the contrast between the respective bricklayer powerhouses, Berlin and Hamburg, is evident, a closer reading of the minutes of these meetings allows the contributions of lesser known voices from other locations to be noted. The divisions around attitudes to piece work are highlighted as another indication that even at this early stage, further differences in outlook, crudely put between the 'realistic' (as its Hamburg proponents would put it) and 'idealist', came to the fore, differences which once more transcended the legal framework. The chapter concludes Part Two with the expulsions from Berlin in 1886 of Kessler, Wilke, and Behrend under the Anti-Socialist Law and the localist walkouts at the following year's national bricklayers' congress in Bremen.

Part Three deals with the consolidation of localist ideas into a recognisable ideology. In part this was as a result of Kessler's writings from 1886 onwards, although even the earlier statutes of the first national pottery workers' 'control committee' bore some of his imprint. The first organizational blueprint to bear Kessler's name, that which appeared in the localist journal *Der Baugewerkschafter* ('The Builder Trade Unionist') between November 1886 and March 1887, was written against the backdrop of a bitter split in the national carpenters' union, the Federation of German Carpenters, (*Verband deutscher Zimmerleute*), following which localism came to be seen as a refuge, in particular for Bringmann, later one of its most bitter opponents, and other Social Democrats against a politically reactionary national leadership. These events and Kessler's views and subsequent influence are discussed in Chapter 6. Unlike the bricklayers and carpenters, pottery worker trade unionists before 1892 experienced little personal animosity and no split in their ranks. They did not set up a national union at



this time. Chapter 7 contrasts this relative harmony among pottery worker trade unionists with the renewed outbreak of hostilities among bricklayers which followed temporary 'reunification' in 1889; with Kessler from this point prevented from speaking at national bricklayer congresses, Wilke henceforth assumed a more prominent role in asserting the localist viewpoint among bricklayers. Finally, Chapter 8, although its central focus is on the localist walkout at the first congress of the Free Trade Unions at Halberstadt and the immediate effects of this, explains such actions by looking at centralist consolidation among the bricklayers, building labourers, and carpenters, and concludes with pottery worker centralization and the emergence of the later anarcho-syndicalist Carl Thieme as spokesperson for the localist pottery workers. Thieme, alongside Kessler and Kater, would be instrumental in establishing the Representatives' Centralization in 1897.

Twenty years ago, Marcel van der Linden, for the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, posed the following question as the title of a supplementary edition of the *International Review of Social History*: 'The end of labour history?' Summarising the attempt to place research into labour history within the context of wider society, van der Linden noted the rise of various sub-disciplines, among them 'women's history, cultural history, the history of mentalities, and urban history', as well as the application of insights from anthropology and sociology.<sup>68</sup> Noting the discipline's failure to develop a coherent synthesis, he then cited the Australian academic and political activist, Verity Burgmann, who, critical of its marginalisation and specialisation as mirroring the mistakes of more traditional histories, described labour history's decline in Australia thus: 'Within history departments, labour history fell into desuetude, joining religious history as an outmoded sub-discipline consigned, if not to the rubbish bin of history, then at least to the laws of natural wastage so far as staff replenishment was concerned.'<sup>69</sup> For van der Linden, this decline was especially pronounced across advanced industrial societies and appeared to be due more to external factors: the collapse of 'socialism' in Eastern Europe, the crisis among

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<sup>68</sup> Marcel van der Linden, 'Editorial'. *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), 1-3.

<sup>69</sup> Verity Burgmann, 'The Strange Death of Labour History', in Bob Carr *et al.*, *Bede Nairn and Labor History*, Leichhardt NSW, 1991, pp. 69-81 (pp. 70-71). Cited in Van der Linden, p. 1.

working-class parties, and the displacement of work as a ‘central and self-evident factor of life’.<sup>70</sup>

Fast forward twenty years with a focus this time on Britain and working-class history is no longer widely studied at academic level, although the continued existence of a volunteer-run archive such as the Working Class Movement Library in Salford testifies to ongoing wider interest outside of the universities.<sup>71</sup> Van der Linden’s suggested remedy to the general trend – namely, that labour history integrate other historical perspectives, among them those of geography, daily life, race, and gender<sup>72</sup> – coincided with debate about similar concerns among British labour historians, in particular in the pages of *Labour History Review*, faced with the challenge of postmodernism.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, for the German historian Thomas Welskopp such articles as those which van der Linden published as examples of an ‘integrated social history of labour’ – which had as their topics geography, ‘daily life’, the role of entrepreneurs, race, gender, and households – showed that labour history was not dead, even if at times it was ‘mega-out’. The impression created rather was that, ‘labour history has turned out to be so open in the last thirty years to new methodical and thematic developments that its identity as a sub-discipline has suffered as a result.’<sup>74</sup> The study of labour history in Germany, however, has not been immune from seeking to re-position itself, in its case even more especially following the historical events in Central and Eastern Europe between 1988 and 1992 in the midst of which Germany found itself, as reflected in the decision in 1999 of the *Institut zur Erforschung der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung*

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<sup>70</sup> Van der Linden, p.1.

<sup>71</sup> See online at <http://www.wcml.org.uk/>.

<sup>72</sup> Van der Linden, pp. 2-3.

<sup>73</sup> For example, see: David Howell, ‘Editorial’, *Labour History Review*, 60.1 (1995), 2; Malcolm Chase, ‘Labour History in the mainstream: not drowning but waving?’, *Labour History Review*, 60.3 (1995), 46-8; Steven Fielding, ‘The crisis in labour history’, *ibid.*, 48-9; Keith Flett, ‘Urgent action needed’, *ibid.*, 49-50; John Halstead, David Martin, ‘The labour history prospect’, *ibid.*, 51-3. For a postmodernist contribution to this debate, see: Patrick Joyce, ‘The end of social history?’, *Social History*, 20 (1995), 73-91.

<sup>74</sup> Van der Linden, p. 3. Thomas Welskopp (Review), ‘Marcel van der Linden (ed.), “The End of Labour History?” (International Review of Social History 38 [1993] Suppl. 1.)’, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 55 (1998), 121-4 (p. 122). More recently, Jürgen Schmidt shares Welskopp’s analysis. Jürgen Schmidt, ‘Arbeiterbewegungen und Arbeiterparteien von 1860 bis 1914’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 53 (2013), 19-46 (p. 19).

(‘Institute for Research into the European Workers’ Movement’) based at the Ruhr University, Bochum, to change its name to the *Institut für soziale Bewegungen* (‘Institute for Social Movements’). Appropriately, the first issue of its re-named journal dedicated itself to the historiography of social history and social movements in the Czech and Slovak republics.<sup>75</sup>

Is there, then, still a place within the field of labour history for a study such as this one which has as its subject matter workers who are white, skilled, and male? This is a bias which cannot be wished away. The wives and children of those many building workers expelled from their homes under the Anti-Socialist Law, for example, only feature as numbered statistics in the lists compiled at the time by Auer and more recently by Heinzpeter Thümmel.<sup>76</sup> A reading of the minutes of bricklayer and building labourer congresses from 1884 onwards reveals that some women did work on German building sites as labourers during the period under study, but we do not hear their voices.<sup>77</sup> One contemporary commentator also noted women’s employment on a few bricklaying projects in Silesia and Saxony.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, the fourth national congress of pottery worker craft unions in Stettin in 1889 noted that of 36,325 pottery workers in Germany, 900 were women.<sup>79</sup> Until 1908, however, the laws of association forbade the participation of women and youths in political associations (such as the localist craft unions) alongside men; one argument of the ‘non-political’ centralists was that women could, and did, join their trade unions. At the same time, several local, women-only, trade unions were recorded in attendance at Halberstadt – for example, that of the cigarette case labellers (*Kistenbekleberinnen*) from Bremen – but none from the building industry. Deeper research would need to be undertaken in future to uncover the

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<sup>75</sup> *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 23 (2000). For an analysis of the impact of German unification on the historical and social sciences in Germany, see: Jürgen Kocka, *Die Auswirkungen der deutschen Einigung auf die Geschichts- und Sozialwissenschaften*, Bonn 1992.

<sup>76</sup> Auer, *Nach zehn Jahren*; Heinzpeter Thümmel, *Sozialistengesetz §28: Ausweisungen und Ausgewiesene 1878-1890*, Vaduz 1979.

<sup>77</sup> *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1884 Berlin, pp. 14-15. For building labourers, see: Fritz Paeplow, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Bauarbeiterbewegung: Werden des Deutschen Baugewerksbundes*, Berlin 1932, p. 439.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Oldenberg, *Das deutsche Bauhandwerk der Gegenwart*, Diss., Altenberg 1888, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Drunsel, pp. 133-4.

lost voices of the women building workers. Such a restriction on the framework of this study is therefore regrettable but unavoidable. Nonetheless, bearing this limitation in mind, I hope that in seeking reasons for the continuity of localist building worker trade unionism in Germany in its earlier history, I also bring a fresh perspective to research on the subject. Male localist voices, for example those of Wilke and Behrend, for which evidence is more easily available have been absent from most histories of the movement. I hope this study redresses that imbalance.

## PART ONE

## CHAPTER ONE:

### *First stirrings: Berlin, the General German Bricklayers Association and the role of Paul Grottkau, 1868-1874*

1868 represented a turning point in the history of German trade unionism. In that year, a series of model statutes were published, following which recognisable trade union movements replaced the hitherto sporadic founding of individual trade unions. These statutes were, respectively, the 'Model Statute for Worker Organizations', the 'Statute of the General German Federation of Workers' Unions', the 'Model Statutes for German Trade Unions', and the 'Model Statutes for Trade Associations'.<sup>1</sup> They reflected party political divisions of the time, namely those between the ADAV (statutes 1 and 2) and the SDAP (statute 3), and between these two socialist organizations and the Progressive Liberal Party (*Fortschrittspartei*) (statute 4). Before the unification of the socialist political parties and trade unions after 1875, building worker unionization took place primarily under the ADAV banner as reflected in comparative membership figures for 1872/3 for the General German Bricklayers Association (ADAV) of 10,091, and for the SDAP's International Trade Union for Bricklayers and Carpenters of 'approximately 1,000'. At the same time, the liberal 'Trade Association of Bricklayers and Stone Carvers' (*Gewerkverein der Maurer und Steinhauer*) had 2,049 members.<sup>2</sup> While the latter organization, which eschewed strike action and campaigns to reduce working hours as interferences with freedom of trade, can hardly be said to represent even mainstream trade unionism, never mind the militant variety which is the subject of this study, the support of a minority of organized workers for its point of view should not be overlooked; nor should the fact that at this early point in time only small minorities of all workers joined trade unions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Respectively: *Mustersatzung für die Arbeiterschaften*; *Satzung für den Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterschaftsverband*; *Musterstatuten für Deutsche Gewerksgenossenschaften*; *Musterstatuten der Deutschen Gewerkvereine*.

<sup>2</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 44. For the *Internationale Gewerksgenossenschaft*, *Gewerkverein*, see: Albrecht, p. 531.

<sup>3</sup> At the first full annual general meeting of the ADAV's 'General German Federation of Workers' Unions' (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterschaftsverband*) in May 1869, 100 delegates represented 35,232 members of 13 trade unions. 23 delegates represented 4,125 bricklayers. In 1875, there were 530,000 building workers alone in Germany. *Correspondenzblatt*, 27th April 1896; August Bringmann,

One piece of legislation more than any other forms the immediate backdrop to the first years of building worker trade unionism after 1868. This, the Industrial Code (*Gewerbeordnung*) of 21<sup>st</sup> June 1869, first of the North German Confederation, and after 1871 of the new Empire, represented a clear attempt, on the one hand, to regulate, and on the other, to restrict, the growth of trade unionism among German workers. This growth became noticeable after cigar workers and printers established national trade unions in 1865 and 1866 respectively, but in Prussia it dated back at least to the late 1850s and coincided with the re-emergence of political liberalism after a period of repression in the wake of the failed revolution of 1848.<sup>4</sup> Here, one effect of the new national legislation had been to over-ride those sections of the earlier Prussian Industrial Code of 1845 which banned collective industrial action. Under this earlier regimen, carpenters in Berlin had not seen a wage increase since 1849.<sup>5</sup> What was now given with one hand, however, was taken away with the other: whereas Paragraph 152 of the 1869 law guaranteed freedom of combination in economic matters, namely in the pursuit of better working conditions, Paragraph 153 prescribed penalties for the perceived misuse of this right. Calling for a boycott (*Verrufserklärung*), for example, was punishable by up to three months imprisonment.<sup>6</sup>

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*Geschichte der deutschen Zimmerer-Bewegung: Hrsg. im Auftrag des Zentralverbandes der Zimmerer und verwandten Berufsgenossen Deutschlands*, Vol. 1, 2nd Ed., Hamburg 1909, pp. 347-52. Latter figure for 1875 cited in Walter G. Hoffmann *et al.*, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1965, pp. 172, 196, 205.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the tobacco workers of the Berlin firm “Calmus” who unsuccessfully went on strike for increased wages in June 1858 can be seen as representing a part of a tradition which stretched back to the Cigar Workers’ Association (*Assoziation der Zigarrenarbeiter*) of 1848, and forward to the General German Cigar Workers Association (under the umbrella of the ADAV) of 1865. See also: Heinz Habedank (ed.), *Geschichte der revolutionären Berliner Arbeiterbewegung*, Vol.1, Berlin 1987, pp. 88-90, 110. A later localist bricklayer, Julius Wernau, is recorded as having spoken on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1889 before a meeting of the Berlin bricklayers’ craft union on the importance of the workers’ movement of the 1840s. *Der Grundstein*, 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb. 1889.

<sup>5</sup> Max von Mietzel *et al.*, ‘Anschreiben an die Zimmermeister Berlins’, 19th Aug. 1868. Reprinted in August Bringmann, *Geschichte der deutschen Zimmerer-Bewegung: Hrsg. im Auftrag des Zentralverbandes der Zimmerer und verwandten Berufsgenossen Deutschlands*, Vol.2, Stuttgart 1905, pp. 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Petition of Berlin bricklayers, stonemasons and allied trades to the *Reichstag*, June 1887. Cited in the *Berliner Volks-Tribüne*, 19th May 1888. See also: *Freisinnige Zeitung*, 20th Aug. 1885.

The Industrial Code of 1869 had another consequence of some relevance for the German building industry, for it drew a line under developments already under way in Prussia since the Trade Tax Edict of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1810: henceforth, the prerequisite of a prior examination before becoming a journeyman (*Geselle*) was dropped.<sup>7</sup> This did not mean the end of the prior period of apprenticeship but it did further reduce the hold which the guild, via the masters, had over journeymen. The earlier Trade Tax Edict had aimed at fostering competition by breaking the productive monopoly of the guilds: henceforth, any citizen had been able to open up a business without proof of prior qualification as long as they paid the tax. In the building industry, the sheer increase in the size of building projects in urban areas as a result of population growth and early industrialisation, especially in Berlin, raised the profile of the '*Bauherr*' or principal contractor, often an investor with no trade background, who held several construction sites at any one time. Among those sub-contractors he directly employed, it was the responsibility of the various trade masters to hire what journeymen and apprentice bricklayers, stonemasons, carpenters, and roofers, etc., were needed.<sup>8</sup> As the hopes of most journeymen for a master's independence became meaningless with the growth of ever larger-scale building projects on which the guild master operated as one sub-contractor alongside many others working on factory or tenement block (*Mietskaserne*) construction, they now sought fully waged employment.<sup>9</sup> This change promoted the ending of traditional 'board and lodging' (*Kost und Logis*) arrangements whereby apprentices and journeymen lodged with their master employer. One outcome of this was an expansion of the existing network of hostels (*Herberge*) for the single, unmarried journeyman.<sup>10</sup> Having lost direct control of their journeymen, traditional building masters had felt further undermined as they were increasingly replaced by qualified architects at the draftsman stage as building projects became larger. This development received confirmation in law when Paragraph 25 of the Trade Boards

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<sup>7</sup> Oldenberg, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-10.

<sup>9</sup> *Mietskaserne* ('rental barracks' – tenement blocks), which would house a whole family, typically consisted of one or two rooms and a kitchen, closely packed together around a series of interconnecting courtyards. Tenement blocks of this type, with five such courtyards, are recorded as having been constructed around the Hamburger Tor in Berlin as early as between 1820 and 1824. By 1825, 3,200 people lived in their 420 apartments. Habedank, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Oldenberg, p. 22.



Decree of 9<sup>th</sup> February 1849 stipulated that when directing building projects, building masters who did not possess the state qualification had to employ those who did (that is, architects).<sup>11</sup>

Among bricklayers, such developments, in Prussia, were accompanied by growing hostility on the part of the guild masters towards the journeymen fraternities (*Bruderschaften*).<sup>12</sup> These associations of journeymen had a long history which went back to the Middle Ages. While they had concerned themselves more with providing hostels for travelling journeymen and with arranging local employment, than with wages and working conditions, the fraternities had not been afraid to organize strike action against arrogant masters and it was after their example that the tactic of boycotting whole towns, for example, during the Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885, was later deployed. While it had been obligatory up to the beginning of the nineteenth century for every journeyman working under a guild master to join a fraternity, in the wake of the Prussian Industrial Code of 1845 it was reported that guild masters were employing journeymen *expelled* from the fraternities for transgressions.<sup>13</sup> The 1845 law had retained the examination system for the building trade. More ominously, those paragraphs which restricted workers' combination were said to have been inserted at the insistence of the masters; if so, this would have been among the earliest precursors to more verifiable later such instances.<sup>14</sup>

For its part, the new national Industrial Code of 1869 became law to a backdrop of industrial action in Berlin involving both bricklayers and carpenters, part of a strike wave simultaneously affecting other towns and cities across Germany.<sup>15</sup> Whereas the Prussian industrial code of 1845, and others like it such as those of Bavaria and of

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<sup>11</sup> Theodor Risch, *Die Verordnung vom 9. Februar 1849 betreffend die Errichtung von Gewerberäthen, Gewerbegerichten und verschiedenen Abänderungen der allgemeinen Gewerbeordnung*, Berlin 1853, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*: report of joint meeting of carpenter and bricklayer masters. Cited in *Die Zukunft*, 28th April 1869.

Saxony in 1825 and 1838 respectively, had proscribed collective action in furtherance of higher wages, the 1869 law now allowed it.<sup>16</sup> This caused initial uncertainty on the part of employers and the Berlin authorities, fearful of a later appeal by the new workers' organizations against any collective attack on them. With this in mind, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* speculated at the time of the Berlin carpenters strike of spring 1869 that the Berlin authorities had appeared for this reason to have decided against recourse to the Prussian Law of Association of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1850, and had opted instead to prosecute individuals such as Gustav Lübker, president of the ADAV affiliate trade union, the General German Carpenters' Association (*Allgemeiner deutscher Zimmererverein*), since its founding in December 1868, on the criminal charge of incitement (*Aufwiegelung*).<sup>17</sup> Lübker, a carpenter *Polier* ('foreman') who had been sacked by his employer shortly before the strike,<sup>18</sup> enjoyed good relations with Berlin's bricklayers and it was at his prompting that the General German Bricklayers Association (*Allgemeiner deutscher Maurerverein*) had been formally founded following a meeting in Berlin in January 1869.<sup>19</sup> Lübker, while still holding the same position in the carpenters' trade union, was its first president.

Such close co-operation between bricklayers and carpenters in Berlin would later come to characterise the localist trade union movement from the mid-1880s onwards. For carpenters, the continued requirement after 1869 of an apprenticeship of several years continued to constitute a difference between skilled and unskilled.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, it was alleged of bricklayers in 1888 that, 'a large number of today's bricklayers have never completed an apprenticeship, their training consists, rather, of no more than having been sent packing by their cheated employers four or five times as incompetent novices until

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<sup>16</sup> Elisabeth Todt, *Die Gewerkschaftliche Betätigung in Deutschland von 1850 bis 1859*, Berlin 1950, pp. 31-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*: cited in *Die Zukunft*, 25th April 1869; *Börsen-Zeitung*: cited in *Die Zukunft*, 29th April 1869. Lübker was subsequently sentenced to six weeks imprisonment: *Zukunft*, 5th May 1869.

<sup>18</sup> *Zukunft*, 18th April 1869.

<sup>19</sup> Fritz Paepow, *Bauarbeit, Bauarbeiter und Bauarbeiter Organisationen im Altertum, im Mittelalter und in der Jetztzeit*, Berlin 1930, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Oldenberg, p. 24.

they succeeded in acquiring the most basic grasp of everyday requirements'.<sup>21</sup> This was some accusation and its author, the researcher Karl Oldenberg, appears to have based it on the fact that many bricklayers were seasonal summer workers with a second job elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> What *can* be demonstrated beyond doubt is that whereas in the less frenzied building climate of pre-industrial times a bricklayer had been responsible for providing his own stones and mortar, the pressure of increased urbanization, where profits were maximized the shorter the construction time, had seen the gradual introduction of unskilled labourers or *Handlänger* on to building sites whose main task was stone-carrying. Such extra labour was increasingly imported from the surrounding countryside and as far afield as Bohemia and Italy.<sup>23</sup> These developments fostered an erosion of the guild mentality; even carpenters now worked alongside a 'board cutter' (*Brettschneider*) who sawed their planks for them.<sup>24</sup> Whereas in Hamburg the unifying influence of this erosion was counteracted to an extent by the mass prevalence of piece work among bricklayers, especially following the Great Fire of 1842, in Berlin such a working practice was the exception rather than the norm.<sup>25</sup> The interdependence of bricklayers and carpenters was everywhere of longer standing, for the fitting of ceiling beams and floorboards had always complemented the work of the wall builders. One can imagine the impact of a stoppage of work by either occupation: 'Delay on the part of bricklayers, for instance due to freezing weather or strike action, as a result affected the continuation of the carpenters' work, not right away but soon afterwards, and vice versa.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: 'Eine große Zahl unserer heutigen Maurer hat eine Lehrzeit niemals durchgemacht, sondern die Ausbildung darauf beschränkt, daß sie als stümpernde Anfänger von ihren geprellten Arbeitgebern sich vier-, fünfmal fortjagen ließen, bis es ihnen gelungen war, die notdürftigen Handgriffe des alltäglichen Bedarfs sich anzueignen.'

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Paepelow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 432. Oldenberg, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Oldenberg, pp. 28-9.

<sup>25</sup> This difference in experience and perspective provoked heated exchanges on the question at bricklayer congresses in the 1880s. See Ch. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 28: 'Eine Verzögerung auf seiten der Maurer, bei Frostwetter oder im Strikefalle, zieht daher nicht sofort, aber sehr bald den Fortgang der Zimmerarbeit in Mitleidenschaft, und umgekehrt.'

Far from causing resentment, in Berlin such interdependence fostered solidarity. The successful carpenters' strike of spring 1869 for the daily wage of 1 *Taler* was followed by that of the city's bricklayers who two months later raised exactly the same demand. The bricklayer masters refused to meet with the journeymen bricklayers as a group, citing legalistic grounds: 'Since, according to the new Industrial Code, a master's title no longer exists in law.'<sup>27</sup> This was a referral to Paragraph 105 of the new law which referred instead to 'selbständigen Gewerbetreibenden' ('independent tradespersons') with whom journeymen, their helpers, and apprentices were to come to free agreement in determining conditions of employment.<sup>28</sup> Naturally, master craftsmen were among those tradespersons the code referred to; the Berlin bricklayer masters were playing for time. After a strike of four weeks, however, they were forced to concede the 1 *Taler* wage and a reduction in daily working times of one hour to eleven hours in summer.<sup>29</sup> Among Berlin's building workers, carpenters had been the first to form a trade union in September 1868 after the same wage demand had been met with indifference by both the established guild journeymen's committee and the carpenter masters.<sup>30</sup> At a meeting of site deputies on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1868, Lübker had proposed that, 'since the old organization of the journeymen carpenters, the guild, is no longer adequate to satisfy the spiritual and material needs of the same, the meeting resolves to establish a union of journeymen carpenters for mutual support'.<sup>31</sup> At a general meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 400 carpenters then joined the new Berlin Association of Journeymen Carpenters (*Berliner Zimmergesellenverein*).<sup>32</sup>

A national trade union, the General German Carpenters Association, was subsequently founded at a carpenters' congress in Brunswick from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> December 1868. The circumstance that Lübker held the position of union president of both this union and

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<sup>27</sup> *Zukunft*, 30th June 1869: 'da nach der neuen Gewerbe-Ordnung eine Meisterschaft rechtlich nicht mehr bestehe'.

<sup>28</sup> *Bundesgesetzblatt des Norddeutschen Bundes*, (26) 1869, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup> Paepow, *Organisationen*, pp. 12-13

<sup>30</sup> Bringmann, *Zimmererbewegung*, Vol. 2, pp. 2-4. The then daily wage of 22½ *Silbergroschen* dated back to a magistrate's decision in 1849. Dirk Müller, op. cit., pp. 18, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Alongside that of Lübker, the early role of Max von Mietzel, who had called the first meeting of carpenter site deputies on 14th August 1868, should not be overlooked. Ibid., pp. 2-4, 6.

that of the bricklayers came about following the decision of Wilhelm Wahl, the nominated first president of a proposed national bricklayers' trade union, to join the liberal trade association movement. The decision to set up a national union had been taken earlier at the Berlin Workers Congress. This, which had been called by the ADAV, had taken place from 26th to 29th September; it had witnessed the presentation of the first two of the statutes highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. It had also set up a Federation of Trade Unions or *Arbeiterschaftsverband* after the model of the ADAV itself, with the same president, Johann Baptist von Schweitzer, and a governing national committee.<sup>33</sup> This decision attracted criticism both from without – Karl Marx in London noted its excessive centralism<sup>34</sup> – and from within, with the Hildesheim delegate, Emil Kirchner, predicting that the premature establishment of a federation would push away other socialist elements.<sup>35</sup> The congress had also resolved to set up national trade unions for those trades represented, such as the bricklayers, for which none yet existed. Wahl had then announced that a national bricklayers' congress would be held in Leipzig on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1868. Because this announcement had been made in the liberal *Berliner Volkszeitung*, Lübker had advised social democratic bricklayers against attending.<sup>36</sup> Those Social Democrats who did so had included Adolf Dammler, a champion of producer co-operatives (*Produktivgenossenschaften*) in Schwerin, and Fritz Hurlemann, who would lead the first bricklayer revolt against trade union centralization nine years later.<sup>37</sup> When their attempts at Leipzig to argue against the adoption of a liberal 'Hirsch-Duncker' (so-called after two theorists of non-confrontational trade unionism, Max Hirsch and Franz Duncker) programme (statute 4,

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<sup>33</sup> The generic term for a group of workers, 'Arbeiterschaft', had been adopted in preference to 'Gewerkschaft', out of fear that the latter contained too many guild connotations. Paepow, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *The First International and After: Political Writings, Vol. 3*, David Fernbach (ed.), London 1992, pp. 156-7.

<sup>35</sup> Ulrich Engelhardt, 'Nur vereinigt sind wir stark'. *Die Anfänge der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung 1862/63 bis 1869/70*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart 1977, p. 647. Kirchner later had to defend himself in print against accusations that he had undermined the ADAV when publicly defending the characters of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel at a public meeting the following year in Hanover. *Zukunft*, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Paepow, *Bauarbeit*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> See Ch. 3.

above) had been silenced, Dammler, Hurlemann, and all other Social Democrat delegates had then walked out.<sup>38</sup>

The General German Bricklayers Association was founded in Berlin two weeks after that of the carpenters' trade union on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1869. Lübker, president of both organizations, oversaw strike action that year by both groups of workers, not just in Berlin but also in Barmen, Breslau, Brunswick, Cologne, Halberstadt, Hanover, Leipzig, Mainz, Schneidemühle, Stettin, Wilhelmshaven, and Worms.<sup>39</sup>

Contemporaneously, the *Vossische Zeitung* reported on a joint meeting of carpenter and bricklayer masters in Berlin on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1869 at which carpenter strikes alone were said to embrace some eighty towns and cities.<sup>40</sup> Collaboration between the two unions, however, ended following a joint congress they held in January 1870 on the eve of the second full congress of the Federation of Trade Unions, for the Federation's presidium around Schweitzer now proposed that its constituent trade unions dissolve themselves in favour of regional trades councils. When this proposal did not meet with the required two thirds majority, it was put to ballots of the trade unions themselves. Whereas two thirds of carpenter trade union members, on the recommendation of Lübker, voted for the proposal (including in Berlin, where opposition was strongest), a similar majority among bricklayers voted against.<sup>41</sup> Exasperation with a failed organization – membership of the re-named 'Arbeiterunterstützungsverband' ('Workers Support Federation') never totalled more than 9,000 – eventually led the Kapell brothers, Otto and August, to re-establish a national carpenters' trade union, the German Carpenters Federation (*Deutscher Zimmererbund*), in 1873.<sup>42</sup> In the meantime, the General

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<sup>38</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 6; Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Heinrich Laufenberg, *Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in Hamburg, Altona und Umgegend*, Vol.1, Hamburg 1911, p. 366. Paepow, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in *Die Zukunft*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1869.

<sup>41</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 47-8. 1,423 carpenters' union members voted for dissolution, 604 against. The contrast between Berlin and Hamburg could not have been greater: whereas Berlin voted in favour by 217 votes to 101, in Hamburg the vote was an overwhelming 194 to 7.

<sup>42</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 13.

German Bricklayers Association found itself in the anomalous position of being the sole trade union still in existence with a formal, if tenuous, allegiance to the ADAV.<sup>43</sup>

Lübker had already announced his intention to emigrate from Germany to the United States before the bricklayers' vote was known, and had resigned from his position as president of both trade unions on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1870.<sup>44</sup> For the bricklayers' union, there then followed a bewildering series of successors: because Lübker's first deputy, the Hamburg bricklayer, Carl Vater, had to serve a term of imprisonment incurred during previous strike action, he was replaced by the second deputy, Hurlemann.<sup>45</sup> When the latter, however, was shortly thereafter arrested in Halberstadt and transported to Magdeburg where he was sentenced to two months imprisonment on a similar charge of transgressing Paragraph 153 of the 1869 Industrial Code (he had called for a boycott), he in turn was succeeded by the Berlin bricklayer and union presidium member, Elias Grändorff. When Grändorff was then conscripted into the army at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in July 1870, another presidium member, Wilhelm Lange, assumed responsibility until Vater was released in October. Hurlemann in the meantime was released after 17 days and likewise conscripted into the army.<sup>46</sup> Finally, at its third annual general meeting in Berlin on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1871, the General German Bricklayers Association elected the Berlin political activist, Paul Grottkau, as union president. Grottkau's collaborator in sustaining the union in Berlin during the hiatus caused by the mass conscription of many members during the war against France, Albert Paul, was elected one of two vice-presidents.<sup>47</sup> Paul would later be a prominent advocate of the

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<sup>43</sup> The relationship between the General German Cigar Workers Association (*Allgemeiner deutscher Zigarrenarbeiterverein*) and the ADAV was a more fractured one, for following the departure from the ADAV in June 1869 of Theodor Yorck and other trade union leaders, the union's president, Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche, had been suspended from his position as *Arbeitschaftsverband* vice-president after he recommended to the union that it withhold contributions to the ADAV in protest at Schweitzer's arbitrary reconciliation with the anti-trade union ADAV-breakaway, the 'Lassallean General German Workers Association'. He resigned from the ADAV but rejoined it in 1872 following Schweitzer's departure.

<sup>44</sup> Lübker was briefly succeeded as carpenters' union president by August Kapell before the union's dissolution. Bringmann, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20, 21-22. The second vice-president was Lange.

centralist side during the organizational disputes of the 1880s and 1890s into the twentieth century. At the third national bricklayers' congress in Dresden in 1886, he argued in support of demands that Berlin's bricklayers should forward the surplus support monies from their recent strike to the national agitation committee in Hamburg; this was powerless to fulfil its mandate 'when delegates don't send it monies as soon as possible'. In the course of the trade union debate at the SPD congress in Cologne in 1893, he argued against Ignaz Auer and August Bebel in favour of Carl Legien.<sup>48</sup>

Grottkau was an outspoken Social Democrat. Addressing the union's membership in 1872 he wrote: 'We are always proud to be Social Democrats. Then stand up and prove that we are worthy of the social democratic movement.'<sup>49</sup> The later Hamburg centralist, Thomas Hartwig, presumably had Grottkau in mind when in 1885 he stated before the second national bricklayers' congress that union centralization had been 'blown apart' ('gesprengt') in 1878 due to the fact that the trade union movement had concerned itself with things which had no place in it; consequently it should not be allowed to adopt any party direction.<sup>50</sup> Grottkau's tenure as union president was not unchallenged at the time. Elected in 1871 only after ratification by a postal vote of union members, two years later he had to face down accusations of acting like a 'dictator' when he proposed the establishment of a union journal and the raising of union dues.<sup>51</sup> Successful on the first point and unsuccessful on the latter, he was nonetheless unanimously re-elected at the fifth annual general meeting of the re-named 'General German Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Union' (*Allgemeiner deutscher Maurer- und Steinhauerverein*).<sup>52</sup> Like

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<sup>48</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden, pp. 62-3; *Protokoll* SPD, 1893 Cologne, p. 203.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Grottkau, 'Manifest', Berlin, June 1872. Cited in Paepflow, op. cit., p. 25: 'Wir schmeicheln uns immer, Sozialdemokraten zu sein. Auf denn! Beweist, daß wir der Sozialdemokratie würdig sind.'

<sup>50</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, pp. 10-11.

<sup>51</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-46. The union's name was amended in 1873 to include stone carvers, 'at the request of South German colleagues'. Paepflow, ibid., p. 31. See also: Heinrich Bürger, *Die Hamburger Gewerkschaften und deren Kämpfe von 1865 bis 1890*, Hamburg 1899, p. 102. There is some disagreement among translators as to how best to render the somewhat antiquated 'Steinhauer' into English. I have chosen 'stone carver' after the definition of the *Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft*. At a time before the use of concrete block construction when that of natural stone was much more fundamental, the 'stone carver' so shaped stones at the quarry that they could be used for the building of walls. See online at <https://www.baufachinformation.de/denkmalpflege.jsp?md=1988067120275>.



Hurlemann, Grottkau at the same time served a series of terms of imprisonment which would eventually impel him, like Lübker before him, and Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche of the cigar workers' trade union afterwards, to emigrate from Germany. From 1873, he was the 'beneficiary' of his own political police file. This recorded various instances of arrest and imprisonment: on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1874 he was sentenced before the Berlin regional court (*Landgericht*) to six months imprisonment for disturbing the public peace ('*Vergehen gegen die öffentliche Ordnung*') during the recent election campaign for the *Reichstag*; three weeks later, on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1874, he was sentenced before the Stettin district court (*Kreisgericht*) to nine months on the same charge following a speech in the city on 18<sup>th</sup> March; and on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1875, the *Berliner Gerichts-Zeitung* noted his arraignment alongside others before the Second Criminal Division of the Court of Justice (*Gerichtshof*), charged with transgressing the Press Law and with tax evasion for not providing the authorities with a copy of an electoral broadsheet, *Die neue Laterne*, prior to publication. On 21<sup>st</sup> November 1877, the *Berliner Freie Presse*, which Grottkau edited, reported that he had been sentenced to one month's imprisonment on the charge of blasphemy ('*Vergehen der öffentlichen Gotteslästerung*') after the *Freie Presse* had published a poem, 'Aus Moabit', which compared the poverty into which Jesus Christ had been born with that of nineteenth century Berlin. Grottkau left the country for the United States, via Hamburg and Liverpool, shortly after this.<sup>53</sup> While his personality looms large in the early socialist histories of both Germany and America, his contribution to early trade union theory in Germany appears for the most part to have been overlooked. His series of agitational letters between 1872 and 1873, sent to union members following an instruction at the bricklayers' union annual general meeting of 1872, represented a significant modification from within the ranks of the ADAV of the prevalent 'Iron Law of Wages'. Before examining the letters in detail, it is apt at this point to say something of the general theory to which they refer.

In 1863, Ferdinand Lassalle, in his famous *Offenes Antwortschreiben* ('Open Letter of Reply'), which preceded the founding of the ADAV in Leipzig in May of that year, had summarised the 'Iron Law of Wages' ('*Das eiserne Lohngesetz*'), 'which under present

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• <sup>53</sup> 'Überwachung des sozialdemokratischen Maurergesellen Paul Grottkau 1873-1890': Landesarchiv zu Berlin (LaB), Bestand A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030 Polizeipräsidium Berlin, No. 10130, pp. 29, 51, 63, 68. Grottkau's prison sentences in 1874, totalling fifteen months, were served together in Stettin. Paepow, op. cit., pp. 48-9.

circumstances determines the working wage governed by supply and demand', thus: that the average workers' wage remained permanently reduced to the necessary level of subsistence customarily ('gewöhnheitsmäßig') required for continued existence and reproduction. The actual daily wage always gravitated around this point, for better wages, leading to easier marriage and more children, would increase the supply of labour which in turn would drag wages back down, whereas a fall in wages, leading to emigration, a fall in reproduction, and greater mortality through poverty, thereby reducing the supply of labour, would cause a rise back to the average.<sup>54</sup> The actual average wage was as a result continually in movement across a centre of gravity to which it must always return, somewhat higher at times of economic prosperity, somewhat lower at times of crisis. It was a 'cruel' ('grausames') law against which no-one could argue.<sup>55</sup> Despite the advance of civilization and rising production, the 'disinherited' remained 'of necessity' ('notwendig') excluded from the increased productivity of their own work: 'For you, always the barest subsistence, for the employer's share, always everything else.'<sup>56</sup> The benefit to the worker, as a consumer, of falling prices disappeared in the long term; while what was 'customary' changed with time as some products became cheaper and came to be commonly regarded as necessities, the barest subsistence in a given epoch remained the average point around which workers' wages gravitated. Such improvement as there was in the course of centuries and across generations was insignificant.<sup>57</sup>

The benefit of hindsight, however, has shown this to be a 'law' which failed to anticipate that employers would recognise that the permanent immiseration of the majority of the population was no way to buy industrial peace or maximise product sales. Grottkau, unlike Lassalle, a committed trade unionist, was not so inflexible. Instead he took his cue from Fritzsche who, speaking before the ADAV's annual general meeting in Hamburg in August 1868, had stated that although strikes were no means to change the basics of capitalist production, they were nonetheless means of

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<sup>54</sup> Ferdinand Lassalle, *Offenes Antwortschreiben an das Central-Comité zur Berufung eines Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitercongresses zu Leipzig*, Zürich 1863, pp. 15-16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

promoting workers' class consciousness, and under the precondition of the right form of organization, of removing especially pressing social grievances, for example excessively long hours and Sunday work.<sup>58</sup> In this spirit, Grottkau set out his own views in a circular to the bricklayers' union membership following its 1872 annual general meeting.<sup>59</sup> While praising the contribution of Lassalle in raising class consciousness, and at the same time downplaying the impact of wage increases, 'for they are soon rendered imperceptible by increases in the price of groceries and other necessities', he added that in contrast, reductions in working time were permanent and also frequently led to wage increases. The greatest achievement of the union in this area had been the introduction of the ten hour working day in Berlin and Hamburg.<sup>60</sup> Grottkau elaborated on this in the second of his twelve agitational letters, arguing that the 'Iron Law' had been widely misinterpreted: if wages were determined by supply and demand, the worker could only win through a reduction in working time.<sup>61</sup> His argument, namely that a reduction in working time would lead to a greater need for workers to meet existing demand, and thereby push up the wage rate, buttressed his conclusion, that workers as a result would enjoy a higher quality of life, with more free time and less torment.<sup>62</sup> On the length of the normal working day, Grottkau answered his own question as to what position the trade unions should take: 'Simple: that of the programme of the "Social Democratic Workers Party"'.<sup>63</sup> This was a reference to the fact that the SDAP had adopted the demand for a ten hour working day at its Dresden congress from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> August 1871, while up to 8,000 Berlin bricklayers, under the leadership of Grottkau and Albert Paul, were on strike at the same time for the same

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<sup>58</sup> Paeplow, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> The fourth annual general meeting of the General German Association of Bricklayers took place in Berlin on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1872.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Grottkau, 'Manifest', op. cit., pp. 24-5.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Grottkau, *Unterhaltendes in 12 Briefen zusammengestellt an die Mitglieder des Allg. deutsch. Maurer- und Steinhauer-Vereins und Solche, die es werden wollen: Verfaßt und hrsg. im Auftr. des Allg. deutschen Maurer-Vereins*, Berlin 1874, pp. 9-10, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.

demand.<sup>64</sup> Grottkau was among the earliest of conciliatory voices calling for socialist unity.<sup>65</sup>

In his first agitational letter, Grottkau had been concerned to emphasise the dehumanising and degrading position of the waged worker as ‘a product ... bought at the labour market, like any other’. To rise up against such an institution was not egotism but a question of justice and love for one’s fellow human being. The liberation of the working class, however, could only be brought about by a fundamental change in the law, that is, on the political level. But the bricklayers’ union was no political association: how, then, would it be possible for it to improve the situation?<sup>66</sup> Trade union organization was necessary, first of all to harmonise workers’ income with increases in the prices of necessities (that is, to counter sinking real incomes). Secondly, as important as political agitation was, it was an idea for which the majority of working people, ‘bogged down’ (‘versumpft’) at the receiving end of centuries of exploitation, could not immediately move themselves. Every serious person had to devise means by which it would be possible to bring this mass back to political agitation. Experience had taught that this was most easily and successfully achieved through trade union organization. Thirdly, the hitherto indifferent worker learned in the trade union to recognise modern Capital as the enemy.<sup>67</sup> At this point, Grottkau turned to the example of previous revolutions where the radical bourgeoisie had welcomed the worker as an ally only so long as agitation remained purely political. Once political freedom had been achieved through the efforts of all, the people had been cheated of it by the possessing classes. It went without saying that the trade union movement educated workers politically, as a result of which they were as radical as any other democrat. The trade unions shared the same enemy as the political movement but they had one enemy more: the radical bourgeoisie. Workers’ political agitation cost this enemy nothing; the trade

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<sup>64</sup> The figure of 8,000 is from Laufenberg who described it as, ‘the most important strike in Germany up to that time’. Laufenberg, p. 477. Paepflow wrote of the end of the strike that 5,000 bricklayers were working to a ten hour day; 3,000 had left the city, leaving only 3-400 still working an eleven hour day. Paepflow, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> Fritzsche is more often mentioned as another such mediating voice. For example, see: Hermann Müller, *Geschichte der deutschen Gewerkschaften bis zum Jahre 1878*, Berlin 1918, p. 166.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Grottkau, ‘Erster Brief’, Berlin 1872. Cited in Paepflow, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 689-90.

<sup>67</sup> Paepflow, *ibid.*, p. 691.

union movement on the other hand was dangerous to it for two immediate reasons. Higher wages hit it in the wallet and a reduction in working time gave workers more time to think. Trade union organization weakened Capital; it strengthened the workers. As a result of it, the rule of Capital over Work became ever more difficult to exercise until finally, with the help of political agitation, it would become impossible. The trade union movement readied working people for the future confrontation with their enemy.<sup>68</sup>

For Grottkau, it was its economic organization in trade unions which therefore differentiated the working class from the radical bourgeoisie. Grottkau's organizational formula of two movements represented a break with one of the core ideas of the man he so admired, for Lassalle had written that, 'the means by which, and alone by which ... that iron and cruel law which determines the working wage can be overcome is to make the working class its own employer'.<sup>69</sup> For Lassalle, there was no immediate palliative; producer co-operatives could only be established by the state. The immediate priority therefore was to campaign for universal (male) suffrage. In his seventh letter, Grottkau did indeed highlight the issue of the 'Iron Law' as 'above all, the most important' ('der allerwichtigste').<sup>70</sup> Trade union organization, however, was a product of its age; to dismiss it out of hand was laughable. Before the 'radical cure' could happen, as much as possible of existing circumstances had to be changed and this was best done through the trade union movement. At the same time, it was necessary that this movement was socialist in character, socialist-led, and that it always kept its focus on political agitation while accepting all whatever their political belief.<sup>71</sup> Lassalle would have found it hard to accept such a formulation without re-thinking much of the political programme associated with him, while Schweitzer by his dithering over their organizational form demonstrably believed the trade unions to be secondary. Grottkau's third and subsequent letters up to his eleventh were thematic rather than programmatic and therefore less contentious. In them, two imaginary protagonists, *Herrn Schulze* and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 691-2.

<sup>69</sup> Lassalle, op. cit., pp. 22-3.

<sup>70</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 696.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 693.

Kernich, argued respectively against and for a socialist transformation of society, concerning themselves with themes which included: the transferability of the products of modern production in favour of the stronger (third letter); individual freedom, inequality, and the subjugation of the weak (fourth letter); the origin of the misery and poverty of working people in the domination of Labour by Capital under modern methods of production (fifth and sixth letters); the self-defeating effect on production of restricting workers' consumption (eight letter); the origins of capital accumulation in trade between the countryside and towns (ninth letter); the inability of a worker to accumulate capital through his or her own work (tenth letter); and a refutation of the common press slur that socialists wished to divide everything (eleventh letter).<sup>72</sup>

In his twelfth letter, Grottkau stated that while the permanent eradication of an unjust system of production was possible only through legislation, and that workers therefore must strive to gain control of this by means of the 'general, direct, and equal right to vote', they should not in the meantime neglect to promote their economic interests, for continual wage increases resulted in a raising of needs. Wages increases as a result were, in part, of lasting benefit.<sup>73</sup> Grottkau then described a series of scenarios, first of all contrasting the example of an individual employer who raised their workers' pay, an action which competitors would not suffer, with that of a complete organization of all workers belonging to one trade, putting their demands to their respective employers as a whole, and in a position to enforce their demands. Such an advantage, however, was only temporary for capitalists and employers were able to import labour from other towns and provinces. Regional organization was therefore not sufficient; only national trade unions could stop the importation of outside labour and preserve what had been achieved.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, while capitalists and factory owners would think long and hard over the transfer of fixed capital, for example of a factory building, whose location had been precisely chosen for the easiest transport of raw materials and availability of experienced labour, they would do so if cheaper goods imported from another country forced them to sell their own at a price lower than they had cost to produce. In this

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 694-8.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 698.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 698-9.

situation, capital would be transferred to those lands where labour was cheaper. International co-operation between workers was therefore also necessary, in particular in machine-based industry, in order to be able to introduce the same working conditions and to remove from employers the reason to invest their capital elsewhere.<sup>75</sup> In likewise fashion and for similar reasons, capital could be and was moved from one branch of industry, which promised fewer dividends, to another where a higher profit appeared possible. To counter the threat of worker unemployment in such a situation, Grottkau believed that workers across the whole of national production should strive for 'equal or equally favourable terms and conditions' ('gleiche oder gleich günstige Bedingungen'). In practice this meant that bricklayers, tailors, and shoemakers, for example, should support machine builders when on strike, and vice versa.<sup>76</sup>

Grottkau was right to exclude building workers, and others such as bakers, butchers, and servants, who met local demand, from his 'flight of capital' scenarios as described, but his observation in the same breath that, 'In these branches of work a national organization is sufficient, since an importation of labour is not to be feared ... so far as language and customs allow this', is puzzling on first reading, for Czechs and Italians did work on German building sites.<sup>77</sup> The use of the latter as strike breakers, however, appears to have been a later phenomenon, for example during the Hamburg building workers' strike of 1890 when a contemporary noted that, 'Working alongside one another were Czechs, Poles, Danes, Italians and Germans, who all subsequently asserted that they had not known they were to carry out strike-breaking work.'<sup>78</sup> Grottkau's organizational model sat comfortably neither with the ADAV, nor with the 'political neutrality' of Theodor Yorck, nor with the later localists. Unlike each of the three aforementioned, its programme never saw the light of day except perhaps in the later imagination of the GDR historian Wolfgang Schröder, for whom following the centralist 'victory' at Halberstadt in 1892, 'political agitation and propaganda were to a

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 699-701.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 700.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 701; Oldenberg, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Bürger, p. 500.

large extent the basis for the advance of the central unions'.<sup>79</sup> Grottkau's model was never realized, in part because it was overshadowed, at the time and in the historical record, by that of Yorck, but also because unlike the later localists, the true inheritors of his 'political trade unionism', it did not enjoy the benefit of the hindsight that such trade unionism organized on a *national* basis was ripe for prosecution under the laws of association, above all that in Prussia, then extant across Germany. And this was duly what now happened to his bricklayers' union.

Before 1874, efforts by employers, citing recent strike action, to have picketing declared an abuse of the right of combination had proven unsuccessful. For example, attempts made at the behest of employers by the national government in both 1873 and 1874 to force through a doubling of the term of imprisonment, from three to six months, applicable for infringements of Paragraph 153 of the 1869 Industrial Code, had been rejected by a committee of the *Reichstag* on the grounds that making punishable for one part of the population that which was not for another would not lift the danger to society.<sup>80</sup> The personal harassment of Grottkau after this date coincided with a change of direction by the state authorities in Prussia, who, breaking with the reticence which they had shown since the enactment of the 1869 Industrial Code, now chose to prosecute both social democratic parties and the trade unions allied to them. The legal tool which they deployed to do this was the Prussian Law of Association of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1850. Paragraph 8, Section (b.), of this stated that organizations whose purpose was the discussion of political matters in meetings were not allowed to combine for common purpose with other organizations of the same type, in particular through committees, 'central institutions' ('Centralorgane') or by exchange of letter. Where they breached this, the police authorities were empowered to provisionally close down such organizations pending a final judicial decision. Paragraph 16 of the law laid down terms of imprisonment of between eight days and three months in the event of a successful prosecution, or fines of between 15 and 150 Marks. The presiding judge then had the

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<sup>79</sup> Schröder, *Klassenkämpfe*, pp. 294-5.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Siegfried Nestriepke, *Das Koalitionsrecht in Deutschland: Gesetze und Praxis: Im Auftrag der Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands*, Berlin 1914, pp. 230-1: 'Man werde die soziale Gefahr sicherlich nicht dadurch heben, daß man für einen Teil der Bevölkerung für strafbar erkläre, was für einen anderen straflos bleibe.'



power to order the permanent banning of the organization. In addition, Paragraph 1 required that the police be given 24 hours' notice of any meeting at which public affairs (*öffentliche Angelegenheiten*) was to be discussed. Under paragraphs 4 and 5, the local police were empowered with supervisory powers over such meetings and could close them down whenever proposals were raised which incited actions liable to prosecution.<sup>81</sup> In the case of trade unions this meant that their meetings could be immediately ended once the discussion was deemed to have strayed onto political terrain.

Born of the aftermath of the failed revolution of 1848, the law of 1850 had been concerned in the first instance with the suppression of that revolution's perceived political supporters, among them the Berlin People's Party, the *Handwerkerverein* ('Association of Artisans'), and the Berlin branch of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverbrüderung* ('General German Workers Brotherhood'), all banned in June of that year. Later, the law had also been used against independent workers' mutual funds, such as the Association for Health Care (*Gesundheitspflegeverein*), banned in April 1853.<sup>82</sup> Its use, however, had been in abeyance since the liberal election victory in Prussia in 1859 and it had not been used against the new trade unions. The authorities in Saxony, where the Law of Association of 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1850 was more draconian, requiring official permission for association where 'public affairs' ('*öffentliche Angelegenheiten*') were discussed, and with no right of appeal when this was refused, were less reticent and banned the ADAV in Saxony on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1868. In November 1871, coinciding with the national trial of Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, and Adolf Hepner, accused of treason following the Brunswick Manifesto of the SDAP of September 1870 which had called for an honourable peace with France following German victory at the battle of Sedan, they declared the 'International' trade unions of the SDAP to be political associations and banned all Saxon branches of the manufacturing and woodworker trade unions. At this point, the SDAP stole a march on the later localists, with whom after 1890 the Social Democratic Party would share an organizational model, by recommending that the banned union branches re-constitute

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<sup>81</sup> Hans Delius, *Das preußische Vereins- und Versammlungsrecht unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Gesetzes vom 11. März 1850*, Berlin 1891, pp. 6, 19, 22, 28-9, 46-7.

<sup>82</sup> Rüdiger Hachtmann, *Berlin 1848: Eine Politik- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte der Revolution*, Bonn 1997, pp. 845-6; Todt, op. cit., pp. 72-5.

themselves as craft unions (a recommendation which remained in force until 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1898, when the Saxon *Landtag* finally conceded the right to political association).

The intensification of political prosecutions in Prussia began with the arrival in Berlin at the end of 1873 of Hermann Tessen­dorf, Bismarck's appointee to the post of Chief Public Prosecutor (*Erster Staatsanwalt*). Tessen­dorf had 'form', having been public prosecutor in Magdeburg when Hurlemann and Otto Kapell, one of Lüb­kert's earliest carpenter collaborators, had been imprisoned, the latter on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1870 for three months for likewise transgressing the 1869 Industrial Code.<sup>83</sup> On arriving in Berlin, Tessen­dorf wrote to the Berlin police president, Guido von Madai, expressing New Year's Greetings for 1874 before adding, of the 'barbarous excesses' among the 'lower classes', that the strongest measures were justified and called for: 'to these ... belong, in addition to the speediest and most forceful punishment, the immediate arrest of the culprit'.<sup>84</sup> He proved true to his word and for contemporary and subsequent German labour historians the following five years in Prussia as far as the socialist parties and the trade unions were concerned lent themselves to one simple description: *Die Ära Tessen­dorf*. That the prosecutions centred on the ADAV and its affiliate trade unions was due to their geographic strength, above all in Berlin, but Tessen­dorf did not neglect to use the penal code to prosecute members of the SDAP. Among the latter was the *Reichstag* deputy, Johann Most, sentenced to 1 year and 7 months imprisonment for incitement following a speech on the Paris Commune which he gave in Berlin on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1874.<sup>85</sup> Grottkau's arraignment in both Berlin and Stettin on similar charges was followed by that of Hurlemann who, fresh from two weeks imprisonment in Halberstadt in 1873 for libel, was now sentenced before the Berlin municipal court on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1874 to six months imprisonment, once more following a speech.<sup>86</sup> By the end of July 1874,

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<sup>83</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>84</sup> Paep­low, *Organisationen*, p. 48. See also: Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>85</sup> Rudolf Rucker, *Johann Most: Das Leben eines Rebellen*, Berlin 1924, pp. 41-44.

<sup>86</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 252.

‘not counting those fined’,<sup>87</sup> 87 members of the ADAV alone had received total terms of imprisonment amounting to 211 months and three days.<sup>88</sup>

Tessendorf next resorted to the Prussian Law of Association. His use of it against the ADAV and its trade union supporters embraced three phases. First of all, the respective presidents of the Workers Support Federation, the Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Union, the Carpenters Federation, and of the General German Shoemakers Association (*Allgemeiner Schuhmacherverein*), each received notice of small fines in January 1874 for failure to provide the Berlin police authorities with a list of their members within three days of their foundation, in accordance with Paragraph 2 of the said law.<sup>89</sup>

Anticipating further legal recourse, Wilhelm Hasenclever, Schweitzer’s successor as president of the ADAV, transferred the headquarters of the party to Bremen on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1874, hoping to minimise the risk to the wider organization. Hasenclever’s foresight was proved correct. Two weeks later, on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1874, the ADAV was provisionally banned across Prussia. The banning of the bricklayers’ trade union, and of the *Berliner Putzerklub* (‘plasterers’ club’) associated with it, followed on 6<sup>th</sup> July; that of the carpenters’ union and of the Berlin branch of the Leipzig-based SDAP on 5<sup>th</sup> August; and that of the shoemakers’ union on 20<sup>th</sup> August. Although the long-moribund Workers Support Federation finally dissolved itself on 8th September 1874, its president and vice-president, Hasenclever and Otto Kapell respectively, nonetheless found themselves arraigned on retrospective charges of ‘acting contrary to the law of association’ when the trial to confirm the permanency of the banning orders – Tessendorf’s ‘third phase’ – opened in Berlin on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1875.<sup>90</sup> Tessendorf’s retort to ‘Hasenclever und Genossen’ at this trial summarises the reasoning behind the whole process:

You wish to be significant; in this way, then you must certainly centralize and that is against the law. But without centralization and organization Social

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 91: ‘ungerechnet die mit Geldstrafen erledigten Sachen’.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-1. Hermann Müller writes of ‘104 Prozesse’: ‘Dabei wurden insgesamt 17 Jahre, 7 Monate, 3 Wochen Gefängnisstrafen verhängt.’ Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>89</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 89. See also: Albrecht, p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 263

Democracy is dead, the social democratic movement has then no more significance.<sup>91</sup>

Among Hasenclever's eleven fellow accused were Otto Kapell's brother and Carpenters Federation secretary, August, and Hurlemann, who had been acting president of the bricklayers' union in Grottkau's absence prior to his own imprisonment, as well as Max Carl Derossi, ADAV secretary.<sup>92</sup> Tessendorf did not get everything he wanted: five of the accused - namely Hasenclever, Hurlemann, Otto Kapell, Friedrich Ecks, and Georg Reimer – received fines when the Berlin municipal court passed sentence on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1875. The remainder were freed of all charges. The court confirmed the total ban across Prussia on the carpenters' trade union, citing the evidence of two police officers in attendance at its founding conference on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1873, where 'the establishment of worker parliaments and the advancement of social and political freedom had been explicitly proclaimed as the second aim of the union'.<sup>93</sup> The ADAV and the Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Union fared better: only their Berlin branches remained closed.<sup>94</sup> The contemporary historian Hermann Müller speculated that this may have been due to the failure to bring charges against the still imprisoned Grottkau.<sup>95</sup> In fact, neither organization was headquartered any longer in Prussia. At its annual general meeting in Hanover in June 1874, the bricklayers' union, with Grottkau and Hurlemann both in prison, had decided to transfer its seat to the relative safety of Hamburg under the temporary leadership of Hans Schöning.<sup>96</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1874 at a mass meeting of

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<sup>91</sup> 'Herr Tessendorf und die deutsche Social-Demokratie: Sozialisten-Prozeß, verhandelt am 16. u. 18. März vor d. Stadtgericht zu Berlin', Stenograph, Berlin 1875, p. 43. Cited in Albrecht, p. 198: 'Sie wollen eine Bedeutung haben; da müssen Sie freilich in dieser Weise zentralisieren und das ist gegen das Gesetz. Ohne Zentralisation und Organisation aber ist die Sozialdemokratie tot, die sozialdemokratische Bewegung hat dann keine Bedeutung mehr.'

<sup>92</sup> The remaining accused were (with occupations): Hartwig Walther, Johann Buchholz (bricklayers); Johann Sievert (plasterer); Ferdinand Grüwel (publisher); Karl Finn (carpenter); Friedrich Ecks, Georg Reimer (cigar workers). Walther had been cashier for the General German Bricklayers Association since its first annual general meeting in 1869.

<sup>93</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 283-4.

<sup>94</sup> The court lifted the ban on the *Putzerklub* which was found to be 'non-political'. At a second judgement before the royal court of appeal (*königliches Kammergericht*) on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1875, the court rejected Tessendorf's request that the plasterers' union be permanently closed, pointing out that its chair, Sievert, had not been convicted. Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>95</sup> Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>96</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 49. According to Paepow, the minutes of this meeting were 'lost'.

Hamburg bricklayers, the union decided to change its name once more to the ‘General German Federation of Bricklayers and Stone Carvers’ (*Allgemeiner deutscher Maurer- und Steinhauerbund*). Two subsequent members of this union drew differing conclusions from the Tessendorf prosecutions which they took with them into the organizational debates of the 1880s: for Albert Paul, ‘political neutrality’ best defended centrally organized trade unions from prosecution; for Heinrich Rieke, political campaigning came first.<sup>97</sup> The union’s subsequent history, with Hamburg as its backdrop, up to the hiatus of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1878, is the subject of Chapter 3 of this study. Before this, Chapter 2 examines the political milieu in which the smaller of the two socialist bricklayer trade unions, the International Trade Union for Bricklayers and Carpenters, found itself, that of the SDAP, and in particular the theories of trade union centralization associated with it.

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<sup>97</sup> See Ch. 5.

## CHAPTER TWO:

*August Bebel, Theodor Yorck, Carl Hillmann: theories of trade union centralization and political neutrality, 1868-1875*

Paul Grottkau and the General German Bricklayers Association were not the sole trade union dissidents to emerge from within the ADAV. Others, among them the leaders of the woodworkers' (Theodor Yorck) and tailors' (Heinrich Schob) trade unions, had already actually gone one step further and broken with the ADAV completely. This had occurred in June 1869 after Schweitzer had unilaterally effected a reconciliation with the 'purist', anti-trade union, 'Lassallean General German Workers Association' (LADAV – *Lassallescher Allgemeiner deutscher Arbeiterverein*), of Sophie von Hatzfeldt and Fritz Mende.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, in August 1869, Yorck, Schob, and other ADAV dissidents such as Wilhelm Backe and August Geib, participated in the founding of the SDAP at Eisenach. The subsequent development of the 'International' trade unions, supportive of the SDAP, with which the former ADAV trade union dissidents now allied themselves, coincided with the emergence of more well-known (in contrast with that of Grottkau) 'centralist' theories of trade union organization. As these theories, above all that of Yorck, provided the model on which the centralist opponents of trade union localism in 1880s Germany based their arguments, it is appropriate at this point to turn to these theories, which predate those of the localists. These theories, too, had their prehistory, and attention is drawn first of all to a political and economic theorist less well-known for his views on the trade union question.

Speaking before the General Council of the International in London in 1865, Karl Marx had said of trade union activity, that

Trades Unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail

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<sup>1</sup> Fritzsche, and the General German Cigar Workers Association, at that time (June 1869), the biggest trade union in Germany with 9-10,000 members, were not among their number. Up to 1875, the Cigar Workers Association, that of the print workers, and some smaller unions, such as those of weavers, joiners and shoemakers, maintained a position of neutrality towards the social democratic movement and refused to align their organizations with either political party. Cigar Workers Association membership figures from *Der Social-Democrat*, 28<sup>th</sup> May/6<sup>th</sup> June 1869. Cited in Albrecht, p. 45, note 26.

generally from limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using the organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system.<sup>2</sup>

One year later, in his *Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress*, under the heading, 'Trade Unions. Their Past, Present and Future', Marx turned to the history of trade unions hitherto:

The immediate object of trade unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities, to expedencies for the obstruction of the incessant encroachments of capital, in one word, to questions of wages and time of labour. This activity of the trade unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary. It cannot be dispensed with so long as the present system of production lasts. On the contrary, it must be generalised by the formation and the combination of trade unions throughout all countries.<sup>3</sup>

Marx, whose main collaborators on the General Council in London were British trade unionists, did not know, in the 1860s, that British trade unionism would later seek a political alliance with the Liberal Party, nor that it would exhibit an increasingly narrow nationalist outlook and even flirt with Conservative Party politicians in campaigning for anti-“alien” legislation directed against Russian Jewish refugees.<sup>4</sup> Marx’s optimism regarding the revolutionary potential of trade unions (‘the organized forces as a lever’) derived in part from his high regard for those British trade unionists he knew personally and in part from what he then saw as British trade unionism’s increasing interest in political questions. In 1866 he was still able to write, ‘Of late, however, they seem to awaken to some sense of their great historical mission, as appears, for instance, from their participation, in England, in the recent political movement.’<sup>5</sup> Misplaced optimism to one side, what also distinguished Marx’s outlook, the outlook of the International, from that of ADAV leaders such as Lasalle and Schweitzer was that Marx and the

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Wages, Price and Profit*, Moscow 1970, p. 55. This pamphlet consists of an address delivered by Marx on June 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 1865, at two sittings of the General Council of the International in London.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress’: Karl Marx, *The First International and After*, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> William Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914*, London 1975, pp. 76-88.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, ‘Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress’, pp. 91-2.

International recognised the necessity of trade unions as economic organizations *in their own right*, that their activity around questions of wages and hours of work was legitimate, and that it could not be dispensed with so long as capitalism existed.<sup>6</sup> While Marx's famous statement that, 'the general tendency of capitalist production is not to raise, but to sink the average standard of wages, or to push the *value of labour* more or less to its *minimum limit*',<sup>7</sup> flew as much in the face of subsequent employer behaviour as did Lassalle's 'Iron Law', he qualified this by adding such variables to this value as the length of the working day and differing 'traditional' standards of life between regions and countries.<sup>8</sup> He therefore anticipated such modifiers of the 'Iron Law' as Grottkau and Yorck, for whom the small improvements variety allowed were worth fighting for.<sup>9</sup> They were not 'insignificant'.<sup>10</sup> For the working class to abandon the occasional chances the system allowed it for temporary improvement was tantamount to cowardice and by so doing workers, 'would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement'.<sup>11</sup>

While Marx clearly admired trade unionists, he had little to say on trade union organization as such, with one exception. In November 1869, the SDAP's newspaper, *Der Volksstaat*, reprinted the advice which Marx had reportedly given to the metalworkers' union treasurer, J. Hamann, during a rare return visit to Germany earlier that year.<sup>12</sup> According to Hamann, who admitted that his report contained only the highlights of the interview while he emphasised its truthfulness, Marx had told him that, 'trade unions must never be allowed to combine with a political association if they are to fulfil their duties; were this to happen, it would be their deathblow'. At the same

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.91

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Wages, Price and Profit*, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-1.

<sup>9</sup> For Grottkau, see Ch.1; for Yorck, see below.

<sup>10</sup> For Lassalle and the Iron Law of Wages, see Ch. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Wages, Price and Profit*, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> 'Marx über Gewerksgenossenschaften', *Der Volksstaat*, 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1869. See also: Bringmann, *Zimmererbewegung*, Vol. 1, pp. 303-4. For an English translation of the first part of this interview, see: Moses, pp. 36-7.



time, the unions were ‘schools for socialism’.<sup>13</sup> The curiosity of Hamann, and that of the four other trade unionists present, and Marx’s ready acquiescence to give his advice, were fired by the confusion engendered in the wake of the decision at the previous year’s fifth national meeting of the Congress of German Workers’ Clubs (VDAV) to affiliate to the principles of the International. This had been the culmination of a gradual process by which those politicised workers who had declined to join the ADAV at its foundation in 1863 had weaned themselves away from support for the Progressive Liberal Party.<sup>14</sup> The wording of the affiliation proposal adopted by the VDAV majority at Nuremberg in 1868 has been the focus of attention among both contemporary and modern historians.<sup>15</sup> Whereas in the International’s General Rules it had been stated that, ‘the economic emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means’,<sup>16</sup> the affiliation proposal stated that, ‘political freedom is the indispensable precondition for the economic emancipation of the working classes. The social question is consequently inseparable from the political, its solution conditional on this and only possible in a democratic state.’<sup>17</sup> Writing in 1909, August Bringmann maintained that the proposal as adopted at Nuremberg had contradicted the General Rules of the International; that it had, in fact, turned these on their head.<sup>18</sup> Bringmann drew attention to the Hamann interview which had hinted in public at dissatisfaction with the Nuremberg affiliation resolution. In private, Marx had been less circumspect, referring to it as ‘confused drivél’ (‘konfuses Wischiwaschi’) and as a ‘completely useless ... act of stupidity’.<sup>19</sup> The fact that a German trade unionist had felt compelled to turn to him for advice

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<sup>13</sup> Bringmann, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht had first of all founded the Saxon People’s Party (SVP - *Sächsische Volkspartei*) in Chemnitz in 1866 before this merged into the SDAP. The minority at Nuremberg went on to establish the ‘Hirsch-Duncker’ *Gewerkvereine* in alliance with the Progressive Liberals.

<sup>15</sup> For example: Hermann Müller, op. cit., pp. 53-4; Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 15-18; Dirk Müller, op. cit., pp. 118-22; Shlomo Na’aman, *Von der Arbeiterbewegung zur Arbeiterpartei: Der Fünfte Vereinstag der Deutschen Arbeitervereine zu Nürnberg im Jahre 1868: Eine Dokumentation*, Berlin 1976, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, ‘Provisional Rules of the International’, October 1864, in: Marx, *The First International and After*, p. 82. Bringmann, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Bringmann, *ibid.*; Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Bringmann, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Marx, ‘Brief an Engels’, 16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1868, in: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 32, p. 151.

highlighted the failure of the new Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP), founded at the final, sixth, national meeting of the VDAV in Eisenach from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> August 1869, to address the confusion which Nuremberg had caused.

The SDAP at its founding congress had not debated a proposal from Johann Phillip Becker, a veteran of the 1849 Baden uprising, that the new party adopt a structure mirroring that of the International, whereby those workers' clubs and trade unions which subscribed to the International's General Rules would jointly comprise the party's organizational basis.<sup>20</sup> This followed a frantic exchange of letters between August Bebel, VDAV president, and Marx and Engels, with which Bebel sought, and received, reassurance that the latter were not the originators of Becker's proposal.<sup>21</sup> Citing the laws of association, the new party instead adopted a membership structure within which many of the workers' clubs did indeed become party branches but which formally excluded the trade unions. The party instead stated that it considered it to be the duty of party members to work for unification of the trade unions and it recommended the [continued] founding of *Gewerksgenossenschaften* on the basis of affiliation to the International.<sup>22</sup> At the following year's first full congress of the SDAP

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<sup>20</sup> Marx, 'Brief an Engels', 27<sup>th</sup> July 1869; *Werke*, Vol. 32, p. 250. Engels, 'Brief an Marx', 30<sup>th</sup> July 1869; *Werke*, op. cit., p. 353. Bebel, 'Brief an Marx', 30<sup>th</sup> July 1869, in: Werner Blumenberg, *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, The Hague 1965, pp. 12-13. Becker's organizational proposal is cited in full in the minutes of the Eisenach Congress. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Allgemeinen Deutschen sozial-demokratischen Arbeiterkongresses zu Eisenach am 7., 8. und 9. August 1869*, Leipzig 1869, pp. 19-21.

<sup>21</sup> Johann Phillip Becker, president of the Central Committee of the German-speaking section of the International based in Geneva, from where he had published the journal *Der Vorbote* ('The Herald'), was widely perceived as Marx's emissary due to his role in disseminating the International's work and ideas across the German-speaking states. It was in this context that Bebel had first heard of him being active in the Frankfurt-am-Main area around 1862/3 and this explains Bebel's desire for confirmation that Marx and Engels were not the originators of Becker's organizational proposal. Bebel, *Aus Meinem Leben*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart 1914, pp. 82-3. See also: David Fernbach, 'Introduction', in Marx, *The First International and After*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Gewerksgenossenschaft* is a word not found in modern German dictionaries. Contemporaneously, the 'Gewerksgenossenschaften' were synonymous with the 'International' trade unions and I have translated them as such. If the usual translation of 'Genossenschaft' ('cooperative') is borne in mind, its use as a suffix clearly distinguished these trade unions at the time from the trade association '*Gewerkvereine*' of the Progressive Liberals although, confusingly, both the ADAV and SDAP woodworkers' trade unions before 1870 carried the names '*Gewerkverein der deutschen Holzarbeiter*' and '*Gewerkverein der Holzarbeiter*' respectively. For the most part, the ADAV trade unions just used 'Verein', for example 'Allgemeiner deutscher Maurerverein', after the example of the ADAV itself. The abbreviation familiar today, *Gewerkschaft*, was already beginning to be used by the 'International' trade unions before 1875 and replaced *Gewerksgenossenschaft* shortly thereafter.

in Stuttgart, the question of trade union affiliation to the party itself surfaced once more in the form of a proposal from the Nuremberg party branch that trade unions be allowed voting rights against a yearly contribution to party funds;<sup>23</sup> this was withdrawn following the intervention of the Cologne delegate Moritz Rittinghausen, who argued that too many trade union members still held anti-socialist opinions.<sup>24</sup>

Among the 'International' trade unions themselves, and their successors after 1875, debate centred less on their relationship to the party and more on the question of their own self-organization. Chapter 1 has already looked at the neglected contribution of Paul Grottkau to this debate. Grottkau's intervention, however, was not the first. In November 1868, Bebel had published his 'Model Statutes for German Trade Unions'.<sup>25</sup> Bebel had had less to do with the drawing up of the contentious IWA affiliation proposal at Nuremberg than former members of the ADAV such as Wilhelm Liebknecht and, in particular, Julius Vahlteich.<sup>26</sup> The more immediate background to the drawing up of the model statutes had been the establishment by the ADAV in September 1868 of the Federation of Trade Unions, ostensibly as an umbrella organization for all social democratic trade unions.<sup>27</sup> Bebel, at this time still president of the VDAV, had reacted to this by circulating a letter to the affiliated workers' clubs on behalf of the VDAV's standing committee in Leipzig. In this, the committee stated that it could neither support nor endorse the Federation because of the way in which control had been left concentrated in the hands of 'particular individuals' ('um einzelnen Personen'). Citing the alternative model of the English trade unions, affiliates were warned against being captivated by talk of 'democratic centralization'.<sup>28</sup> Following

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<sup>23</sup> Ironically, given the high esteem in which British trade unions were held in Germany at this early time, this was later the basis on which the British Labour Party was founded.

<sup>24</sup> *Protokoll über den ersten Congreß der social-demokratischen Arbeiterpartei zu Stuttgart am 4., 5., 6. und 7. Juni 1870*, Leipzig 1870 [henceforth: *Protokoll SDAP*, 1870 Stuttgart], pp. 46-8.

<sup>25</sup> See also: Ch. 1.

<sup>26</sup> The similarity in the emphasis on the central role of the democratic state in both the Nuremberg affiliation resolution and in Vahlteich's earlier proposal to a regional conference of Saxon workers' clubs at Frankenberg in 1867 is striking. Bebel, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-9. The abridged English language translation of Bebel's autobiography does not mention the Frankenberg conference nor mention Vahlteich by name in its account of Nuremberg. Bebel, *My Life*, London 1912, pp. 108-18.

<sup>27</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

Schweitzer's rejection, for the ADAV and the Federation, of a letter of reconciliation from a delegate meeting of various Leipzig trades, Bebel published his model statutes on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1868.

The 'Model Statutes' took up Vahlteich's call at the Nuremberg congress for the combination of workers into centralised trade unions.<sup>29</sup> Such a specific call represented a clear step beyond that of Marx 'to form trade unions'. Bebel's model, however, was hardly new and it drew on the early practice of the established national print workers' trade union: local craft unions would federate with one another to form a national union governed ultimately by yearly congresses which elected its president and vice-president. While this was in marked contrast with the ADAV model of national union first, local union later, it could hardly be described as 'syndicalist': to assist the elected union leaders, a central committee sharing the same locality – after the example of the VDAV – would run the union between congresses and decide over strike action involving more than half of a local union's membership.<sup>30</sup> This, in effect, given the small numbers of union members at this time, gave the central committee of the union a veto over local industrial action. The model statutes therefore laid down a marker at this early stage for the later battles between trade union centralists and localists for control of strikes.<sup>31</sup> To avoid industrial action, Bebel proposed that disputes be referred to local courts of arbitration (*Schiedsgerichte*) but unlike the no-strike trade associations of the Progressive Liberals, strike action was not ruled out if the employers' side did not accept the arbitration decision.<sup>32</sup> Bebel, with the ADAV in view, was not unaware of the possibility of abuse of power available to a central committee with control of union funds and his model envisaged the setting up of a parallel supervisory committee (*Aufsichtsrat*) with the power to subpoena all union documentation and suspend part or

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Angela Vogel sees Bebel's 'model statutes' as containing within them the seeds of the later localist, and later still anarcho-syndicalist, emphasis on local autonomy, and firmly places them (the model statutes) on the side of democratic principle against an encroaching centralism. Vogel, pp. 29, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 69.

all of the central committee; his model also proposed this structure at local union branch level.<sup>33</sup>

Bebel's model statutes were conceived as trade unionism in Germany was being born. Consequently, although Bebel assumed that the creation of a confederation of trade unions (*Dachverband*) would follow on from centralization of the individual 'International' trade unions, the process whereby this was to happen was left unstated. Even following his declaration of open opposition to the top-down model of the ADAV, hopes remained of reconciliation with the ADAV trade unions, hopes which would finally be shattered in 1869 with the exodus of Yorck and other leading trade union figures from the ADAV. It was from the ranks of the latter that the first serious attempt at the establishment of an independent confederation would come. The possibility of reconciliation at local level with the trade associations of the Progressive Liberals, however, remained. At the 1870 Stuttgart congress of the SDAP, referring to a recent seven-week long strike in Waldenburg by trade association forestry workers, Bebel urged an avoidance of personal attacks and instead advocated struggle on the grounds of principle against the 'Hirsch-Duncker' programme. Unlike Hirsch and Duncker, Bebel, despite the cautious attitude towards industrial action which permeated his model statutes, saw value in strikes in that they destroyed the illusion of 'harmony' between Capital and Labour and showed workers that only the political way would realize their aims. Pointing to personal contacts among the Waldenburg strikers, he cautioned against precipitate action by Social Democrats, to the point of recommending to the congress his practice hitherto of having encouraged the establishment only of new workers' clubs where a Hirsch-Duncker union was already in existence, to avoid alienating that union's members while at the same time giving them the opportunity, via the workers' clubs, of gradually imbibing the 'poison' (*Gift*) of Social Democracy.<sup>34</sup> Of greater long-term significance, however, than Bebel's intervention at Stuttgart was the lengthy trade union debate, over several days, which provided the platform from which Yorck, president of the International Woodworkers Trade Union (*Internationale*

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>34</sup> *Protokoll SDAP*, 1870 Stuttgart, p. 13.

*Gewerkschaft der Holzarbeiter*), was able to present his developing views on trade union organization.

Yorck did not share Bebel's background in the Congress of German Workers' Clubs, having left the ADAV as recently as June 1869. Yorck's protest at reconciliation with the anti-trade union LADAV had been followed by his removal from his position as president of the ADAV woodworkers' trade union, the *Gewerkverein der deutschen Holzarbeiter*. He had subsequently been re-elected. When the Hamburg branch of the union, however, continued to call for the election of a new union president, the practical effect had been to split the union, for the union's national committee at this point took Hamburg's side. A second woodworkers' trade union under Yorck's presidency had been the immediate outcome. It came as no surprise when at the beginning of the debate at Stuttgart he summarised the ADAV thus: 'Ein Haupt beschließt, die Masse folgt' ('One head decides, the mass follows').<sup>35</sup> Yorck's concept of trade union organization therefore emerged, at least in part, from opposition to the ADAV model born of personal experience but as his support for the proposal for a 'union of unions' (*Gewerkschaftsunion*) at Stuttgart was to show, his views were developing beyond disdain for Schweitzer's authoritarian methods.<sup>36</sup> The 'union of unions', as proposed by the Brunswick delegate and later metalworkers union general secretary Louis Söhler, was conceived as a practical response to the question of which union organization the isolated worker in a community too small to sustain a craft union branch should join. This question had been raised by several contributors to the debate at Stuttgart, but above all by the delegate for Breslau, Max Neisser, who had cited animosity between

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> For others, disdain at what they saw as ADAV failure extended to the SDAP itself. For example, writing some months later in the *Volksstaat*, Julius Scheil from Breslau expressed the opinion, which 'no honest party comrade could dispute', that unrealistic promises of support made since 1868 had been followed by a 'fiasco' whereby most workers had made premature use of their rights without pausing to think that the funds were not available to be able to undertake industrial action. In his view, those who maintained that the trade unions had been the means of delivering a heavy blow to the social democratic movement were not completely wrong. In addition, 'If the great majority of workers are socially and politically literate, then there is no need for a trade union to successfully carry through a strike': *Volksstaat*, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1871. For Yorck's rejection of the last point and defence of his plans for trade union re-organization, see: *Volksstaat*, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1871. In his reply to Yorck, Scheil conceded that if the next party congress decided against purely political agitation (which he considered to be most important), the party would then have to establish trade unions with the greatest possible reach, tightly organized and with strike regulation as their aim. *Volksstaat*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1871.

the mineworker and porcelain worker trade unions in Silesia when putting forward a proposal to fully amalgamate the various trade unions into one single general union. In Neisser's view, this would both overcome caste distinctions and present the isolated worker with a union to join.<sup>37</sup> For Yorck, such a proposal only recommended itself if the union body which emerged was to take on the role of political agitation alone but this would have the reprehensible result of causing skilled workers to turn back to the guilds.<sup>38</sup> Yorck argued that Neisser's experiences were local in nature and not general.<sup>39</sup> Against the rigidity of full amalgamation, he recommended the freedom and flexibility of the English [*sic*] and American trade unions.<sup>40</sup> Turning to the recently announced amalgamation of the ADAV trade unions, he foresaw splits.<sup>41</sup>

Yorck's final resolution at Stuttgart, which he presented alongside the delegates August-Otto Walster and Karl Hirsch, from Dresden and Munich respectively, addressed the general concern for the isolated worker by proposing the setting up of mixed ('gemischte') unions in smaller localities where the setting up of craft unions was numerically not possible. In contrast with Neisser's proposal, these 'mixed unions' would combine *among themselves* nationally to form their own national federation; this would then combine with those based on traditional craft demarcations to form one single confederation (or, 'Union') for all trade union members.<sup>42</sup> One interpretation, that of the Australian labour historian John A. Moses, of Yorck's championing of mixed unions, uniting, for example, all who worked with one material, is that this anticipated later industrial unionism in Germany.<sup>43</sup> At a time of low and scattered trade union membership, however, 'mixed unions' in practice needed to be open to all. There was no better example of this than the strongest branch of Yorck's own Woodworkers Trade

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<sup>37</sup> *Protokoll SDAP*, 1870 Stuttgart, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Moses, p. 52.

Union, that in Erfurt, which had welcomed all other local trades.<sup>44</sup> It was the ‘Union’ idea as it applied to existing trade union reality which would provide Yorck with the cause for which he would be most remembered.<sup>45</sup>

Yorck laid down some of the views which would subsequently guide his organizing drive both in opening the debate at Stuttgart, and in later contributions. Against the sectional limitations of the guilds, from which the craft unions had emerged, Yorck contrasted the role of the trade unions in awakening feelings of solidarity and to ready workers for the struggle (‘sie zum Kampf mächtig zu machen’).<sup>46</sup> This struggle was one ‘against the whole modern state’.<sup>47</sup> Like Bebel, Yorck was not opposed to all strikes and referred to industrial action as the ‘schooling of the worker in Socialism’. He cautioned against its over-use, going so far as to propose no support for strikes, other than those forced on workers, which had been undertaken without sufficient preparation.<sup>48</sup> Yorck cited the example of the fight to reduce working hours in illustrating the merits and limitations of industrial action. In common with Grottkau, he presented a modified ‘Iron Law of Wages’ argument when he stated that striking solely for higher wages was less useful in the long run than to do so for a reduction in working hours, as the latter would lead to a need for more workers and higher wages to attract them. But legislation would be a quicker way to introduce an eight hour-working-day and it was the role of the unions to make this clear.<sup>49</sup> For Yorck, the state had the upper hand – he was not immune to the lingering influence of Lassalle’s Iron Law, and he concluded his opening speech at Stuttgart with a call for the Lassallean palliative of state-funded producer co-operatives - but if the trade unions, in addition to their educative role, were to defend

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<sup>44</sup> Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>45</sup> Yorck, between 1871 and 1873 also SDAP General Secretary, died on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1875 at the age of 44.

<sup>46</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Marx later strongly criticised this emphasis on the state by German Social Democracy in his ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ which he put down to the persistent influence of Lassalle. Karl Marx, ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, May 1875, in: Marx, *The First International and After*, pp. 353-4, 357. See also: Ch. 3, note 35.

<sup>48</sup> *Protokoll* SDAP, Stuttgart 1870, p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



their members, with or without strike action, they would do so more effectively with tighter organization.<sup>50</sup>

The intervening period of the Franco-Prussian War meant that Yorck, whose union was badly depleted as a result of conscription, was in no position to make any further contribution to the trade union organizational debate before April 1871, when in the *Volksstaat* he called for the implementation of the Stuttgart 'union of unions' resolution.<sup>51</sup> At Stuttgart, Yorck had suggested the issuing of exchangeable union cards as a practical measure to facilitate mutual support for travelling journeymen where a branch of their own union did not exist but now he stated that such 'cartel agreements' (*Kartellverträge*) between unions were as equally insufficient as it would be to throw all trade unions into the one pot after the manner of Schweitzer's 'Gewerkschaftsbrei' ('trade union mash'), a reference to the metamorphosing of the ADAV's Federation of Trade Unions into the Workers' Support Federation.<sup>52</sup> He proposed that the executive committee of each trade union select one person from their number to meet at the next SDAP party congress to both debate the ways and means whereby the union confederation would best be established and to commit themselves to work for its realization.<sup>53</sup> Yorck's call did not go unopposed but whereas previously, ambiguity towards the unions had taken the form of resolutions calling on the SDAP to dissociate itself from support for strikes, now the pages of the *Volksstaat* contained views antagonistic to trade unions themselves, summarised by those of Gustav Grünrock for the Ronsdorf party branch who stated that party members should dedicate all their energies to the party and in particular to its local branches, whose aim was to enlighten the 'unconscious' ('unbewusst') worker on intellectual and social matters.<sup>54</sup> Yorck's appeal nonetheless met with wide support and the trade union conference duly took place on the final day of the SDAP's 1871 congress in Dresden from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> August. Following Bebel's resolution at this conference, that the trade union

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> 'An die Vorstände und Mitglieder der internationalen Gewerkschaften', *Volksstaat*, 19<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1871. Reprinted in Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 210-11.

<sup>52</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Volksstaat*, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> *Volksstaat*, 2nd Sept. 1871. See note 36 above for Julius Scheil's more nuanced criticism.

representatives present constitute a commission to draw up a blueprint for the new union confederation to be then put to a ballot of union members, Yorck was entrusted with carrying this out.

Yorck was initially in no physical position to fulfil this task, having been elected SDAP party secretary at Dresden. That he had been entrusted to do so points on the one hand to the respect which he enjoyed among the ‘pro-union’ majority of the party; on the other hand, however, it was also a reflection on the numerical weakness of the ‘International’ trade unions in Germany at this time that no-one else could initially be found to do the job. By the end of 1873, these unions would organize approximately 7,900 workers; Yorck’s woodworkers’ union, and that of the metalworkers, the International Metalworkers Trade Union (*Internationale Metallarbeitserschaft*), made up more than half of this figure, with 2,400 and 1,500 members respectively.<sup>55</sup> From such small figures, one can understand the dilemma of overwork with which trade union organizers who doubled as party functionaries were constantly faced and also the impulse towards cartel agreements and the pooling of resources. Following the Dresden party congress, the SDAP was heavily pre-occupied with the treason trial against Bebel and Liebknecht which dated back to December 1870 during the war against France.<sup>56</sup> In Yorck’s absence, others now took the initiative. In Fürth and Cologne, local mixed unions were set up after the example of Erfurt, while a regional conference of the SDAP in Saxony in January 1872 repeated Yorck’s earlier argument that it was difficult to form demarcated trade unions in small localities, and called for a committee to be appointed to draw up a provisional programme for the ‘union of unions’, to be followed by a general trade union congress. On cost grounds, it recommended that this congress be held concurrently with the next SDAP congress in Mainz. It was noted with regret that the deliberations at Dresden remained hitherto without result and the Chemnitz delegation was entrusted with contacting Yorck to rectify this.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Albrecht, pp. 531-3. See also: Ch.1, note 2.

<sup>56</sup> In December 1870, Bebel, Liebknecht, and another party member, Adolf Hepner, had been arrested and charged with high treason for publicly opposing the continuation of the war against France. On 26<sup>th</sup> March 1872, Bebel and Liebknecht were each sentenced to two years imprisonment before the Court of Assizes in Leipzig. Hepner, a worker on the *Volksstaat*, was acquitted.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Die Lehre des Chemnitzer Strikes’, *Volksstaat*, 18<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1871. For Fürth, see: *Volksstaat*, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. /28<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1872; for Cologne: Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 364-7. For the Chemnitz conference of the Saxon SDAP, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1872, see: *Volksstaat*, 10<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1872. While the editor of the *Chemnitzer Freie*

In April 1872, Yorck finally responded in the *Volksstaat*. He rejected the idea of holding the party and trade union congresses simultaneously, on the grounds that ‘one or several’ trade unions would not be able to alter the timing of their own congresses to accommodate this.<sup>58</sup> Replying to a further appeal from the Erfurt ‘mixed branch’ of the woodworkers’ union,<sup>59</sup> and pointing to the impracticability of holding ballots to match the proposed ‘Union’ statutes with those of the individual unions, Yorck in a second letter, dated 21<sup>st</sup> April, called for an extraordinary congress of trade unions to take place over the Whitsun holiday.<sup>60</sup> He proposed this date in part because the metalworkers were holding their national congress at that time, and he urged others to do the same, ‘not just to save on double travel costs, but much more so that individual trade unions would be able to effect (‘bewerkstelligen’) any necessary changes to their statutes at the same time’.<sup>61</sup>

The congress duly took place, not in Mainz but in Erfurt, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> June 1872. This first congress of the ‘International’ trade unions assumes significance in the future history of the German trade union movement when one highlights those points on which it differed from the less divisive second such congress at Magdeburg two years later. Firstly, it witnessed a public disagreement between Bebel and Yorck on the question of a common union journal. For Yorck, who was now proposing this, such a journal had long been a necessity in view of the disappearance of several monthly circulars previously produced by unions now too weak to do so. The proposed journal would provide a means for unions to publicise their activities and with which to reinforce their

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*Presse*, Johann Most, regarded the establishment of a ‘union of unions’ to be urgent, Julius Motteler, for the manufacturing workers’ trade union, expressed a sceptical view at the regional conference, arguing that at a time when the trade unions were under attack (in Saxony), it was more important to promote and to protect them than discuss their reorganization. *Volksstaat*, 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1872.

<sup>58</sup> *Volksstaat*, 13<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1872. Yorck appeared to concede the weakness of this argument when he added that, ‘right from the beginning’, he had been against holding the two congresses simultaneously, ‘admittedly on different, other grounds, than those already mentioned’. He did not, however, clarify what these were, saying only that, ‘after mature reflection’, grounds of cost and the question of competence came to the fore, as did others’. Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Volksstaat*, 17<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1872.

<sup>60</sup> *Volksstaat*, 24<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1872. See also: H. Müller, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>61</sup> *Volksstaat*, op. cit.

principles.<sup>62</sup> Bebel, writing before the congress (which, on the eve of serving his high treason sentence, he did not attend), expressed his broad support for the ‘Union’ project which he believed was necessary to carry out much needed systematic agitational work. On the craft union basis of the proposed umbrella organization he was however markedly more insistent than Yorck when he stated that, ‘In addition to general needs, however, each trade possesses those which are particular and specific to it, and which can never ever (‘*nie und nimmer*’) be taken into account in a general mishmash. The mass of people – and among these, workers are *no* exception – first of all see that which is most familiar, for blood, to them, is thicker than water (‘*ihr ist das Hemd näher als der Rock*’).’<sup>63</sup> While he accepted the reasoning for mixed unions where small numbers rendered craft organization impossible, the ‘Union’ presidium was to direct the dues of each member every three months to the appropriate national craft union.<sup>64</sup> Bebel cited cost reasons for rejecting Yorck’s proposed union journal; he admitted that the *Volksstaat* could have done more for the union cause in the past and proposed as a remedy to this a weekly supplement to the party paper.<sup>65</sup> In Bebel’s absence, Vahlteich and Johann Most represented his position at the Erfurt congress and Yorck’s proposal was defeated.

Yorck suffered a second defeat on the question of those local craft unions unaffiliated to any national union. Opposition to him came this time not from a leading party figure but from the former vice-president of his own Woodworkers Trade Union, Anton Zierfass. This opposition carried with it similarities with that of the later localists, in that the Mainz branch, which Zierfass had represented, had as far back as April 1870 championed greater independence of action for local union branches and local retention of union funds.<sup>66</sup> Following the decimation of the Mainz branch as a direct result of the Franco-Prussian War, Zierfass had helped to rebuild woodworker organization in the city, without re-affiliation to the national union, to such an extent that with 500

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<sup>62</sup> H. Müller, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> *Volksstaat*, 8th June 1872. See also: August Bebel, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. 1: 1863-1878, Berlin 1970, pp. 203-9.

<sup>64</sup> *Volksstaat*, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> At the Woodworkers Union second congress in Mainz. Albrecht, p. 71.

members the Mainz craft union outnumbered the largest local branch (Erfurt) of the Woodworkers Trade Union itself.<sup>67</sup> At the Erfurt congress, Yorck recommended that the local craft unions and ‘free associations’ (*Freie Vereinigungen*) - the combined membership of which represented at Erfurt was 5,206 as against 6,152 for the national unions – should affiliate to the relevant national union where such existed, and that only national unions and local ‘mixed’ union branches should affiliate directly to the proposed *Union*. The congress, however, rejected this in favour of an alteration to the proposed statutes which added local craft unions to the list of affiliates.<sup>68</sup> Zierfass’s quasi-localist rebellion ended when he rejoined the national union but Yorck ensured that what he considered to have been a great mistake was not repeated: when the lists were sent out for the second congress of ‘International’ trade unions at Magdeburg in 1874, local craft unions were not invited.

On a third point, in opposing a proposal from the Buckau (Magdeburg) delegate Wilhelm Klees, which resurrected Neisser’s old demand that all existing unions be dissolved in favour of one general union, Yorck was able to carry the day but only after a compromise negotiated by the president of the Manufacturing Workers Union, Julius Motteler.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, those unions which wished to dissolve themselves in favour of direct affiliation to the new ‘Union’ were to discuss the practical and financial arrangements with the proposed confederation’s leadership.<sup>70</sup> Yorck had thus far been defeated by leading Social Democratic Party figures on the question of a single *Union* journal, and had had to compromise both with the quasi-localist champions of the craft unions, and with the proposers of one general union, but of greater importance for the future of German trade unionism was the unanimous acceptance by the delegates at

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<sup>67</sup> Albrecht, pp. 71-2, 131, 142.

<sup>68</sup> Figures cited in H. Müller, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>69</sup> Julius Motteler, a cloth-maker by trade, had like Bebel come to Social Democracy via the Progressive Liberals and the VDAV. The ‘International’ Trade Union for Manufacturing, Factory and Manual Workers’ (*Gewerksgenossenschaft der Manufaktur-, Fabrik- und Handarbeiter*) had been notable at its founding in 1869 for its relatively high percentage of women members, some 1,000 of a total membership of 6-7,000. For this reason, despite decline following both the Franco-Prussian War and legal persecution by the Saxon authorities, the total membership figure for the union of 685 given by Motteler to the Erfurt congress is possibly an underestimate. Bebel, *Aus Meinem Leben*, Vol. 1, p. 81. See also: Albrecht, pp. 60-1, 140-1, 144.

<sup>70</sup> H. Müller, op. cit., p.142; Albrecht, pp. 141-2.

Erfurt of Yorck's proposal on the political neutrality of the trade unions. Yorck had indicated at the very beginning of his speech to the Stuttgart party congress in 1870 the blame which he attached to the three-way division of German trade unionism along party-political lines for undermining union strength. As with much of Bebel's model statutes, Yorck's concept of political neutrality was not an original one. In this instance, it repeated the advice which Marx had reportedly given to J. Hamann in 1869. Yorck's proposal to the Erfurt congress was ostensibly similar but more defensive in tone:

In consideration that the power of Capital oppresses and exploits all workers regardless of whether they are conservative, progressive liberal or Social Democrats, the congress declares it to be the sacred duty of workers to put aside all party disputes in order to create on the neutral basis of a unified trade union organization the precondition for a successful, strong resistance, to secure our threatened existence and to strive for an improvement in our class situation.<sup>71</sup>

For Yorck, the unions might thereby strive for an improvement in the situation of the working class, but the Social Democratic Party, of which he was secretary at this time, was in the best position to deliver this on a lasting basis, through legislation.<sup>72</sup> While Marx had also opposed party affiliation, he had not asked that workers themselves massage party differences within a 'neutral' organization. This 'internal' interpretation of 'neutrality' contained within it seeds of the future gagging of 'political' trade unionism both by reactionaries, for example the Federation of German Carpenters under the leadership of the monarchist Wilhelm Schönstein in the 1880s, and by the General Commission after 1890 whose constituent union leaders were themselves Social Democrats.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, to talk of political neutrality in 1872 was clearly ahead of its time when only a handful of trade unions, most notably those of the printers and cigar workers, were not formally aligned to either of the social democratic parties or to the Progressive Liberals. A further marker, however, in addition to that of strike control, had now been lain down around which trade union centralisers and localists, and in time the party too, would conduct their future battles.

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<sup>71</sup> Hermann Müller, *Geschichte*, pp. 142-3. English translation: Moses, pp. 54-5.

<sup>72</sup> See note 49 above.

<sup>73</sup> See Chs. 6 and 8.

The final 'Union' statutes as agreed at Erfurt envisaged a confederal structure around a central committee, control commission, and yearly congress, in essence Bebel's model statutes for individual trade unions writ large. There was, however, no confederal president. The central committee would exercise a strike support regimen along lines already laid down by Bebel, with an additional stipulation that if strikers receiving support returned to work unilaterally, they would be liable to pay that support back.<sup>74</sup> But the first task of the central committee, to be based in Leipzig, was to register the confederation statutes with a Saxon police regime which in its early resort to legal measures against both the ADAV, which it had banned, and the 'International' trade union movement, above all against the Manufacturing Workers Union in its Saxon textile industry base, had a head start on its Prussian equivalent.<sup>75</sup> Its rejection of the *Union* statutes on July 15<sup>th</sup> 1872 as being contrary to the Saxon Law of Association, citing a proposed branch membership model, could therefore have been predicted. Yorck, two months later, barely expressed any concern: the statutes could 'very easily be replaced by new ones'.<sup>76</sup> Writing two years later in the *Volksstaat*, he as good as admitted that this apparent indifference had been due to the ground conceded to the local craft unions at Erfurt. If the congress decisions had been carried out, they would have choked the central unions. It was for him all the same, whether the organization had been crushed by the Leipzig police or if it had drowned later of its own efforts.<sup>77</sup> The fact that Leipzig had been chosen as the central committee seat pointed also to the geographical, in addition to numerical, weakness of the 'International' trade unions: when Yorck suggested Berlin, stronghold of the ADAV and of its dissident bricklayers' union, as an alternative it received short shrift at a meeting at the end of the SDAP congress in Mainz in September 1872, where of 51 trade union delegates, only two were from the German capital.<sup>78</sup> Instead, the over-worked Yorck, from his Harburg base near Hamburg, agreed with Motteler to oversee the re-constitution of the 'Union' idea as a

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<sup>74</sup> Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>75</sup> See Ch. 1 above.

<sup>76</sup> *Protocoll über den 3. Congreß der social-demokratischen Arbeiter-Partei, abgehalten zu Mainz am 7., 8., 9., 10. Und 11. September 1872*, Brunswick 1872, p. 54.

<sup>77</sup> *Volksstaat*, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1874.

<sup>78</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 55-6.

mutual insurance society less susceptible to legal prosecution.<sup>79</sup> When nothing came of this, Yorck fell back on bilateral agreements between his own union and those of the metalworkers and shoemakers to facilitate reciprocal support for travelling journeymen, which led to the setting up of the Central Administration of the Trade Unions (*Zentralverwaltung der Gewerkschaften*) in January 1874.<sup>80</sup>

It was in the name of the Central Administration that Yorck called for a second congress of trade unions.<sup>81</sup> This duly took place in Magdeburg, from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June 1874. In the absence of the craft unions, this second congress witnessed little argument and it adopted Yorck's revised membership model over that of Erfurt whereby craft unions could now only affiliate to the proposed 'Union' in the absence of an affiliated national union for the same trade.<sup>82</sup> With a degree of far-sightedness as to the future development of trade unionism in both its reformist and syndicalist varieties, the congress also recommended, in addition to the compilation of statistics, the setting up of labour exchanges.<sup>83</sup> With the exception of the strike support regimen from Erfurt, which was dropped, to be decided on at a later date, the Magdeburg congress rubber-stamped the remainder of Yorck's earlier organizational structure and adopted *Die Union*, the journal of Yorck's own woodworkers' union, as its own. There was no resurrection of previous demands for one general union. Yorck was defeated on only one point, a new proposal which would have granted the central committee and control commission the power to act together in an emergency, without reference to past congress decisions or to the 'Union' statutes (for example, if faced with state repression of the type by which the Saxon authorities had frustrated the implementation of the decisions of the Erfurt congress). The recent example of the role of Schweitzer in the ADAV was cited in opposition.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-4.

<sup>80</sup> The setting up of the 'Zentralverwaltung' followed a conference of representatives of the three trade unions in Brunswick on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September 1873. This had also been attended by a representative of the 'International' Bricklayers and Carpenters Union.

<sup>81</sup> *Volksstaat*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Apr. 1874.

<sup>82</sup> Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-6.

<sup>84</sup> *Protokoll des Congresses behufs Gründung einer Gewerkschafts-Union am 23., 24. und 25. Mai zu Magdeburg*, Leipzig 1874, p. 8. Cited in Albrecht, pp. 155-6, notes 225, 226.



Yorck's relative success at the Magdeburg congress was, however, only nominal. Some of the reasons why Yorck had up to that point been unable to carry through the 'Union' proposal, as first enunciated at the 1870 Stuttgart congress of the SDAP, to fruition have been indicated: the intervention of the Franco-Prussian War and concomitant conscription; the low membership of the SDAP unions and the comparative strength of the unaffiliated craft unions among them; and the intervention of the state, in the form of the Saxon Law of Association. He was ahead of his time in calling for political neutrality while the social democratic trade unions themselves remained divided on ideological lines; at the same time, much of the organizational programme he developed drew on Bebel's model statutes. His significance, however, was that as an active trade unionist himself, he carried the theories of Marx and of Bebel to a much wider audience and in so doing developed them further: rather than reaching out to the liberal trade unions, as Bebel had sought to do, Yorck sought instead to broaden the base of the existing social democratic trade unions. 'Political neutrality' was his means for doing so. Where Marx had expressed no preference, Yorck's centralising programme for the 'International' trade unions was the precursor for those that followed. At the same time, deriving from a Lassallean emphasis on the state, the trade unions were ultimately dependent on parliamentary legislation to render reductions in working time, for example, permanent. Yorck's legacy lends itself both to an idealistic interpretation when advocating the political neutrality of the trade unions, and to a pessimistic view of the relative strengths of the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party (in favour of the latter). As a result of the latter, this legacy cannot be so easily ascribed in its totality to the centralist trade unions who after 1890 claimed it. Yorck's successors, unencumbered with the Iron Law as real wages clearly rose, possessed a confidence in the relative strength of their own organizations which Yorck, living in a different time, did not. While Yorck absolutely rejected the idea of the trade unions as cheerleaders for the Social Democratic Party, his centralist successors sought a role for themselves greater than that of a mutual insurance society and independent pressure group, satisfied with short-term gains. In so doing, they broke with both the 'Iron Law' and with Marx's 'sinking average wage levels' (so-called 'immiseration theory', a term Marx never used) in achieving real and sustained wage increases for their members.

One other theorist, a contemporary of Yorck's, came closest to foreseeing such a development while at the same time being seen later as a herald for revolutionary trade unionism. In the intervening period between the Erfurt and Magdeburg congresses, the baton of theoretical innovation had, in fact, passed from Yorck to the typesetter and later newspaper editor Carl Hillmann.<sup>85</sup> As previously indicated, Hillmann has been interpreted as championing either 'centralist' (for example, Moses) or 'syndicalist' (Vogel, Rübner) trade unionism.<sup>86</sup> While Yorck's legacy was never forgotten, that of Hillmann appears to have been appreciated first of all by the centralist side: in 1896, *Das Correspondenzblatt*, journal of the General Commission, noted Hillmann's remark from 1875 that any government would have to accede to the demand for an eight hour working day when faced with 'thirty to forty worker representatives in the *Reichstag*, a party political organization of 50,000 members and one million trade unionists'.<sup>87</sup> Hillmann's legacy was later claimed by Rudolf Rocker thirty one years after this in 1927, that is, *after* the period during which localist trade union opposition to 'political neutrality' had developed of its own accord.<sup>88</sup> The unknown Hillmann was, therefore, in no position to have influenced the organizational debates of the 1880s and 1890s. The inference drawn by later anarcho-syndicalists and some academics is that Hillmann was nonetheless a precursor to the later localists, even if they had never heard of him. But was this really the case? It is in the interests of clarification, therefore, that Hillmann is examined at the point in the historical narrative at which his contribution to the trade union debate was made.

It has already been noted that Hillmann's oft-cited dictum, that because the activities of the trade unions brought ideas of working-class emancipation to maturity, they had to hold a position equal to that of purely political agitation, makes no mention of

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<sup>85</sup> For a short biography of Hillmann, see online at [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl\\_Hillmann](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Hillmann). See also: Bringmann, op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>86</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>87</sup> *Correspondenzblatt*, 27th Apr. 1896.

<sup>88</sup> Rudolf Rocker, 'Zwei Pioniere. Ein Beitrag zum 30 jährigen Bestehen der FAUD', *Der Syndikalist*, 18th June 1927. Fritz Kater, speaking before the Berlin *Arbeiter-Börse* ('labour exchange') on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1921 on the early history of the German trade union movement, made no mention of Hillmann. Fritz Kater, *Die Entwicklung der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung*, Berlin 1921.

organizational form.<sup>89</sup> In fact, Hillmann was a centralist who made this clear in a series of articles which appeared first of all in the *Volksstaat* in May 1873 and later that year, unedited, in book-form in *Praktische Emanzipationswinke: Ein Wort zur Förderung der Gewerksgenossenschaften* ('Practical Suggestions for Emancipation: A Word in Promotion of the Trade Unions'). A follow-up book, *Die Organisation der Massen*, which he wrote from prison in Württemberg in 1875, re-iterated his centralist position.<sup>90</sup> Hillmann supported the greater part of Yorck's 'Union' programme. In 1873 he wrote that, 'the unified organization of individual trades is but the precondition and basis for the realization of a unified overall organization, as is, for example, already the case in England [*sic*]'.<sup>91</sup> This, however, could not be achieved 'by storm' but would develop naturally: international trade union organization was unthinkable without it.<sup>92</sup> First of all, local journeymen's associations (that is, craft unions) had to be re-organized on a democratic basis: limited power would reside not with the union chair but with its executive committee. After the earlier example of Bebel, a further, supervisory committee would function as a vehicle for complaints. Secondly, prior to national trade organization, care had to be taken to ensure the greatest possible homogeneity of local union statutes. When such preconditions were fulfilled, one could build further on solid ground: 'a congress or conference of representatives of the various local unions can unite the individual parts by means of a common statute, *to which all unions have to submit*'.<sup>93</sup> Following similar reasoning, Hillmann welcomed the decision of the Erfurt trade union congress in 1872 to reject Yorck's recommendation that a central journal be established for all trade unions. This would happen once all trades had their own journal, 'as via the local the national, and via the national the international, organization is formed'.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>90</sup> Carl Hillmann, *Die Organisation der Massen. Ein Wort zur Klärung und Befestigung. Eine Gefängnißarbeit, den deutschen Gewerksgenossenschaften gewidmet*, Leipzig 1875.

<sup>91</sup> Hillmann, *Praktische Emanzipationswinke*, p. 16: 'die einheitliche Organisation der einzelnen Gewerke ist aber die Vorbedingung und Grundlage zur Verwirklichung einer einheitlichen Gesamtorganisation, wie z. B. dies in England schon der Fall ist'.

<sup>92</sup> Hillmann, *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-4. *My italics.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

Hillmann did, however, applaud the decision at Erfurt to champion trade union independence of the political parties, a position which once more places him completely at odds with that of the localist trade unionists before their turn to syndicalism after 1904.<sup>95</sup> For Hillmann, the most advanced trade unions were not those whose title bore the word ‘international’, ‘a little word (‘Wörtchen’) which repeatedly offers politicians and policemen the opportunity to test the viability of the trade union movement’ (presumably a reference, before Tessendorf’s intervention in Berlin, to the banning by the Saxon authorities in November 1871 of the ‘International’ woodworkers’ and manufacturing workers’ trade unions), but rather those which externally belonged to no political party and whose statutes were characterised by reciprocity with respect to rights and duties. Uninitiated workers were mistrustful of politically sounding names.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, those who combined to protect and to pursue their interests were in any case acting politically; no rigid paragraph – for example, one banning discussion of religion and party politics – could exclude this. As local trade unions combined at the national level, this political tendency would come more to the fore as unions concerned themselves with laws over such as shorter working time, people’s education (‘Volksunterricht’), and women’s, children’s, and prison labour. It would be following state persecution and vilification in the press that trade union members would come to identify their own efforts with those of the Social Democrats.<sup>97</sup> Much of Hillmann’s immediate ire was directed at the decision of the ADAV in 1872 to extend its resolution of 1870, which had dissolved its constituent national trade unions, to local unions having ADAV members:

It is an outrage, in the name of the dogma of ‘universal suffrage’, to wish to dismantle organizations which have grown out of purely natural and real circumstances, and to take decisions, as did the last annual general meeting of the General German Workers Association in Berlin, which extend so far as the dissolution of the trade unions as soon as possible into purely political associations. May workers keep watch!<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 17, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 13: ‘Es ist ein Frevel, die rein natürlichen und den thatsächlichen Verhältnissen entwachsenen Organisationen im Namen des Dogmas “allgemeines gleiches und direktes Wahlrecht” niederreißen zu wollen, und wie die letzte Generalversammlung des Allg. Deutschen Arbeitervereins zu Berlin

The SDAP too, however, was not free of ‘negating and destructive elements’ and Hillmann regarded it as his duty to make clear the importance of the trade unions and to defend them from ‘fanatical dogmatists’.<sup>99</sup>

It is clear from the above that to argue a line of continuity beginning with Hillmann through the social democratic localists to the later anarcho-syndicalists is simply wrong. If, however, one removes the earlier localists from the picture then the predisposition for German anarcho-syndicalists to claim Hillmann as ‘one of their own’ becomes more understandable, for Hillmann was optimistic regarding the future potential of trade union action to a far greater extent than either his contemporary Yorck or the localists of the 1880s and 1890s. One aspect of this optimism in particular came close to later anarcho-syndicalism. Citing Marx and the German national economist Lujo Brentano, and noting how the guilds of the Middle Ages had, without them knowing it, been agents for the emancipation of bourgeois society, Hillmann added that,

today’s trade unions are the means for the emancipation of the working class. It likewise follows, that just as the feudal state had to bring itself to acknowledge the organization of the guilds and to apply their rules and regulations to its municipal, state, and police systems, that in the long run trade union organization will have to be acknowledged by the state; and not only acknowledged but that the form of trade union organization will have to be applied by the state to the whole of state and municipal life.<sup>100</sup>

There is here, however, an acknowledgement of the role of the state in this process and with particular reference to the party programme of the SDAP, namely that, ‘the

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Beschlüsse zu fassen, die darauf hinausgehen, die Gewerkschaften sobald wie möglich in rein politische Vereine aufzulösen. Mögen die Arbeiter die Augen auf behalten!’

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15: ‘wie in gleicher Weise die Handwerker-gilden des Mittelalters unbewußt das Mittel zur Emanzipation der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft waren, so sind auch die heutigen Gewerks-genossenschaften das Mittel zur Emanzipation der Arbeiterklasse. Folglich wird ganz ebenso, wie sich der feudale Staat dazu bequemen mußte, die Organisation der Zünfte anzuerkennen und deren Gesetze und Bestimmungen auf das Gemeinde-, Staats- und Polizeiregime auszudehnen, auch die Organisation der Gewerkvereine oder Gewerks-genossenschaften vom Staat über kurz oder lang anerkannt werden müssen; anerkannt nicht allein nur, sondern auch die Form der Organisation der Gewerkschaften wird vom Staate auf das ganze Staats- und Gemeindeleben ausgedehnt werden müssen.’

solution of the social question is only possible within a democratic state', Hillmann championed trade unions as 'such a quintessential people's (democratic) organization as could not be better conceived'.<sup>101</sup> Its administrative bodies were equipped with executive, but not legislative, powers; its only authority was the will of all. Legislative power lay with general meetings and congresses and in exceptional cases with committees and a ballot of the membership. Such features constituted the basis on which direct law-making by the people could be exercised and developed.<sup>102</sup>

Hillmann's 'syndicalist' model was one for the future; it was not, however, due to this that his theories were later rediscovered. Hillmann's optimism had another side to it, one which helps to make understandable his distancing of himself from Social Democracy after his expulsion from Hamburg under the Anti-Socialist Law in 1881. For Hillmann was also optimistic as to the more *immediate* prospects of trade union action. Perhaps not surprisingly, Eduard Bernstein drew attention to this side of Hillmann's trade unionism when he wrote in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1900 that in giving to the Iron Law 'a highly liberal meaning', Hillmann had not only thrown Lassalle's theory into disarray but had also strongly shaken that of Marx.<sup>103</sup> In 1875 Hillmann had written that workers in Germany, such as printers, cigar workers, bricklayers, and carpenters, and in England [*sic*], among them machine builders, building workers, and joiners, had, in influencing the level of their wages and the hours they worked, 'altered' the Iron Law, the law of supply and demand; they had adjusted it in their favour.<sup>104</sup> For Bernstein, Hillmann remained a Marxist, 'albeit of Hamburg-Harburg colour' (a possible reference to Yorck, who had lived in Harburg).<sup>105</sup> There was, however, little that was fatalistic in Hillmann's formulation of the tasks of the trade unions. That which is italicised in the passage below reads, contrary to Bernstein's interpretation, not as a recapitulation of Marx but rather as a rejection of him:

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Eduard Bernstein, 'Geschichtliches zur Gewerkschaftsfrage. Ein Beitrag zum Thema: Gewerkschaft und Partei', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 7 (1900), 376-88 (p. 381).

<sup>104</sup> Hillmann, *Organisation der Massen*, p. 47.

<sup>105</sup> Bernstein, op. cit.

With the trade union it is a case not of deceptive phrases; they [*sic*] are a solid fortification and defensive wall against the yet further decline and degradation of the working class. Not only must they fulfil this task right away but they can also drive up wages at least to the level by which it becomes possible to broaden and to increase needs, and since wages according to the Iron Law of Wages are determined by customary needs, nothing can therefore be more obvious than to broaden these. Through broadening needs one is working not only against typhus and hunger, the worker learns also to value the usefulness of shorter working hours. Not only does he give a higher value to his work, *he is protecting himself much more still from overproduction and trade crises*; by so doing he augments his social-political and economic development and is not alienated from family life but rather led closer to it.<sup>106</sup>

There is a limit to the ability of workers to protect themselves from the effects of economic recession: real rising wages – ‘to the level at which it becomes possible to broaden and to increase needs’ – have not to this day protected workers from ‘overproduction and trade crises’. Real wages, *in the future*, would, however, rise along the lines predicted by Hillmann (and social liberals such as Brentano), contradicting the pessimism of Lassalle and Marx.<sup>107</sup> But his immediate environment, that of economic

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<sup>106</sup> Hillmann, *Praktische Emanzipationswinke*, p. 11: ‘Es handelt sich bei der Gewerksgenossenschaft nicht um trügerische Phrasen, sondern sie sind eine feste Ringmauer und ein Wall der Vertheidigung gegen noch weitere Verschlechterungen und Entwürdigungen des Arbeiterstandes. Diese Aufgabe haben sie nicht nur zu allernächst zu erfüllen, sondern sie könnten auch den Lohn wenigstens auf die Höhe hinaufschrauben, durch welchen es möglich wird, die Bedürfnisse zu erweitern und zu vergrößern, und da sich der Lohn dem ehernen Lohngesetz zufolge nach den gewohnheitsmäßigen Bedürfnissen eines Volkes richtet, so kann nichts näher liegen, als die gewohnheitsmäßigen Bedürfnisse zu erweitern. Durch die Erweiterung der Bedürfnisse arbeitet man nicht nur den Hungertyphus entgegen, sondern der Arbeiter lernt auch die Nützlichkeit der kurzen Arbeitszeit schätzen. Er giebt der Arbeitskraft nicht nur einen höheren Werth, vielmehr noch schützt er sich vor Ueberproduction und Handelskrisen, er vermehrt damit seine sozialpolitische und ökonomische Bildung und wird dem Familienleben nicht entfremdet, sondern demselben näher geführt.’

<sup>107</sup> Brentano expressed his ‘optimism’ most famously in 1872 when he accused Marx of ‘lying, both in form and content’ for having misquoted a House of Commons speech in 1863 by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone. Brentano, writing in the periodical *Concordia*, pointed out that Gladstone, reporting on increasing income tax yields, had *not* commented, as quoted by Marx, that, ‘This intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power is entirely confined to classes of property.’ In Brentano’s opinion such a claim, which Marx had made during his Initial Address to the International in 1864, had no basis in fact as only persons with an annual income of over £150 paid income tax; on the contrary, ‘if we look to the average condition of the British labourer, whether peasant, or miner, or operative, or artisan, we know from varied and indubitable evidence that during the last twenty years such an addition has been made to his means of subsistence as we may almost pronounce to be without example in the history of any country and of any age’. Lujo Brentano, ‘How Karl Marx quotes’, *Concordia: Zeitschrift für die Arbeiterfrage*, 7<sup>th</sup> Mar. 1872. See also: Lujo Brentano, *Die Arbeitergilden der Gegenwart, Erster Band: Zur Geschichte der englischen Gewerkvereine*, Leipzig 1871; Lujo Brentano, *Die Arbeitergilden der Gegenwart, Zweiter Band: Zur Kritik der englischen Gewerkvereine*, Leipzig 1872.

recession from 1873 onwards, appeared to render Hillmann's optimism illusory. His own warnings of the political repression of the trade unions appeared more apt and he himself was imprisoned in 1875 on charges of breaching press law while briefly editing the *Süddeutsche Volkszeitung*. From his prison cell, he observed the unification of the two socialist parties and noted that thereby the 'intellectual precondition' had been created to show the divided trade unions the way to their own unification in the near future.<sup>108</sup> Hillmann played no part in this process; following his release from prison he returned to Hamburg to edit the *Hamburg-Altonaer Volksblatt*. Instead, the attempts in the following years up to 1878 to unify and then to centralise the social democratic trade unions would be made, and opposed, on the basis of Yorck's theories. Such attempts would pit the Hamburg-based national carpenter and bricklayer trade unions against one another.

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<sup>108</sup> Hillmann, *Organisation der Massen*, pp. 44-5.



### CHAPTER THREE:

#### *Hamburg as refuge: trade union unification and the roles of the bricklayers' and carpenters' trade unions, 1875-78*

As previously indicated, the rigorous application of the Prussian Law of Association of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1850 following the intervention after 1873 of the new Public Prosecutor, Hermann Tessendorf, had prompted the larger of the two social democratic bricklayers' unions, the Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Union, to transfer its seat from Berlin to Hamburg in June 1874.<sup>1</sup> In Hamburg, on first reading, the equivalent law of association, that of 30<sup>th</sup> June 1851, was even more draconian, with no rights of appeal: its first paragraph simply stated, 'Associations and gatherings, the aims or activities of which are contrary to the laws of the state or to social order, as well as all associations and gatherings of members of the military or of the citizen militia the purpose of which is the discussion of official or public affairs, are banned.'<sup>2</sup> Its second paragraph dropped any onus on the state to produce evidence all together: 'If the police authority considers it necessary on grounds of urgent danger to public order or security, it is authorised to ban a public meeting as well as the meeting of an association, the purpose of which is the discussion of public affairs.'<sup>3</sup> Hamburg's law of association, however, did not preclude local 'political' organizations combining with others. It had nothing to say on regional or national organization. In part this was for practical, geographical reasons – Hamburg was a powerful, but single, city-state whose jurisdiction outside its famous gates did not extend beyond its docks area – but it also reflected the trading outlook of a ruling merchant class with one eye on the wider world which historically involved itself as little as possible with internal German affairs. Hamburg had been no exception after 1848 in wishing to restore the pre-revolutionary status quo but it had done it in its own way. The city authorities certainly did make use of their own laws against organized

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<sup>1</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 'Revidirte Verordnung zur Verhütung des Mißbrauchs des Versammlungs- und Vereinigungs-Rechts', Paragraph 1, in J.M. Lappenberg, *Sammlung der Verordnungen der freien Hanse-Stadt Hamburg, seit 1814. Zwei und zwanzigster Band. Verordnungen vom 1851 und 1852, nebst Register über den zehnten bis zwei und zwanzigsten Band*, Hamburg 1853, p. 182. See also: Laufenberg, pp. 156, 448-9; Gustav Kessler, *Kurze Geschichte der deutschen Maurer-Bewegung*, Berlin 1895, pp. 23, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Lappenberg, *ibid.*

labour. When in June 1870, separate strikes of stone carvers and carpenters coalesced into an all-out strike of 3,000 building workers, including the city's bricklayers, for the ten hour working day and a fixed daily wage, the Hamburg government, the *Senat* responded by declaring street demonstrations with singing, music, and the carrying of flags to be incompatible with public order. In the course of twenty four hours (29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June) which witnessed violent clashes between strikers and police on the *Heiligengeist* field and in front of the city hall, strike committee members were arrested and a police ban placed on its future meetings, citing Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the 1851 law.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the city authorities did not always close their eyes to events in Prussia when it was in their own interest not to do so. When a year later, permission was sought by Hamburg's bricklayers to hold meetings in solidarity with their striking Berlin colleagues, this was refused, almost certainly with memories of the previous year's strike in mind.<sup>5</sup>

Hamburg's electoral regime was likewise in some aspects even less inclusive and participatory than its Prussian, three-class franchise, equivalent. Under the Constitution of 28<sup>th</sup> September 1860, which followed the election victory of the liberals the previous year, only 84 of 192 members of the city parliament, the *Bürgerschaft*, were directly elected, on a restricted franchise of men over 25 years of age and with 600 Marks yearly income. This extended the vote to small businessmen but excluded skilled journeymen.<sup>6</sup> In 1869, almost ten years later, in drawing up their wage demands prior to the industrial action of the following year,<sup>7</sup> a joint committee of bricklayers and carpenters estimated average yearly earnings for bricklayers and carpenters respectively to be 543 Marks, 12 Shillings and 551 Marks, 4 Shillings.<sup>8</sup> Hamburg had long been a city of harsh social contrasts, greater than almost any other in Germany at the time, as Heinrich Laufenberg, perhaps the most well-known historian of Hamburg's labour movement, wrote, when describing the city of 1800. This he put down to increased immigration into the city of

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<sup>4</sup> Laufenberg, pp. 425-6, 428-30, 563; Bürger, pp. 54, 57-62.

<sup>5</sup> The meetings were held instead in Altona – in Prussia. Laufenberg, p. 478.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 185-6.

<sup>7</sup> See above.

<sup>8</sup> Laufenberg, p. 425. For the bricklayers, Bürger has an alternative yearly wage of 553 Marks, 4 Shillings. Bürger, p. 54.

people with no means at a time when guild manufactory was increasingly unable to meet the needs of an increasing population, leading to a growth in demand for unlicensed labour.<sup>9</sup> The ‘ministerial regulations’ (*Ämterreglement*) of 1835 had been, in part, one response by the city authorities to these developments: at the same time as buttressing the power of guild masters over their journeymen, for example by criminalising the holding of journeymen’s meetings without the presence and authorisation of a master, other clauses laid down how long immigrant potters, barbers, bakers, and bricklayers could remain in the city without work (generally, one week).<sup>10</sup> Such measures were ineffective on both counts, for they did not halt the demand for outside labour which for the building industry in particular hardly needed the extra boost it received following the Great Fire of May 1842.<sup>11</sup> Nor did they prevent journeymen from organizing.

The aftermath of the Great Fire witnessed the beginnings of a long campaign by Hamburg’s carpenters to reduce their long working day of twelve and a half hours (5 a.m. to 8 p.m., minus two and a half hours for breaks). This was followed in 1860 by a joint strike of indigenous and immigrant carpenters in response to an offer from the guild masters to pay part of a demanded wage increase to indigenous workers only.<sup>12</sup> To foil the police, the strike was proclaimed when one journeyman stood on a chair in the midst of a crowd of fellow carpenters and announced it. After six days, the masters offered an improved increase across the board.<sup>13</sup> Among bricklayers, the Society for Foreign Bricklayer Journeymen (*Verein fremder Maurergesellen*) went back to the 1820s; with branches across the Russian Baltic provinces, Denmark, and northern Germany, it mirrored Hamburg’s lingering hanseatic links. Its aspect of secret rituals of recognition was highlighted by masters at the time, but its main purpose was the

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<sup>9</sup> Laufenberg, pp. 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-2, 74-5.

<sup>11</sup> The ‘Great Fire’ (*Großer Brand*) in Hamburg, from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> May 1842, resulted in extensive damage to 4,219 structures, including such institutions as the town hall, state archives, stock exchange, city prison, and workhouse, as well as sixty schools. Carl H. Schleiden, *Versuch einer Geschichte des großen Brandes in Hamburg vom 5. bis 8. Mai 1842*, Hamburg 1843. Cited in Laufenberg, pp. 63-6.

<sup>12</sup> By the early 1850s, the working day for carpenters in Hamburg ended at 7 p.m. Bürger, pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> 1,200 carpenters took part in the strike. Bürger, p. 3.

regulation of wages and hours, and it exercised the ultimate sanction that foreign journeymen should not work for any master found to be disreputable.<sup>14</sup> In 1840, it famously intervened following clashes in Hamburg the previous year between indigenous and immigrant bricklayers, and fined the Hamburg bricklayers for forcing the immigrant workers to leave the city.<sup>15</sup> As late as 1854, Laufenberg records bricklayers being sentenced to two months imprisonment for boycott and membership of the Society; this followed an attempt of the previous year by bricklayers in the city centre St. Georg district to enforce a closed shop. Those involved had been imprisoned, and foreign journeymen had been expelled from the city with a remark in their 'journey record' (*Wanderbuch*).<sup>16</sup> The first records of joint organizing by carpenters and bricklayers precede this date. In 1853 successful joint action by bricklayers and carpenters for a daily wage of 2 Marks, was followed by a strike of Altona bricklayers and the pattern was established of reciprocation between building workers in Hamburg with their colleagues in Altona (until 1864 under Danish, from then until 1938 under Prussian, jurisdiction) which would re-occur over the succeeding decades.<sup>17</sup> Another pattern, albeit one with long provenance, and this time in common with Berlin, would continue to be that of journeymen leaving the city en masse when in dispute with their employers. In 1865, 400 Hamburg carpenters did precisely that when their demand for a new reduced working day of 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. was rejected.<sup>18</sup> Again in common with Berlin, greater freedom to organize coincided with the capitalisation of the building industry as private entrepreneurs moved in to meet increased demand and guild masters became just one group of employers in a chain, often more than one step removed from the actual final contractor,<sup>19</sup> but paternal relations in general between guild masters and journeymen in Hamburg were already breaking down by the middle of the eighteenth

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<sup>14</sup> Laufenberg, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Der Freischütz: Politik, Unterhaltung, Lokal-Zeitung*, 72 (1853). Cited in Laufenberg, p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> Laufenberg, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Bürger, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> See Ch. 1.

century when Laufenberg cites instances where non-guild journeymen, in particular tailors and shoemakers working privately, actually took the guilds to court.<sup>20</sup>

The 1870 Hamburg building workers' strike was called off at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, having achieved a wage increase but no agreement from the employers on a fixed daily wage or minimum rate. The Hamburg authorities did not reciprocate the King of Prussia's amnesty for Law of Association and Industrial Code violations, and those strikers still held on remand received additional two week sentences.<sup>21</sup> Two years later, the city's employers displayed no reticence in calling for national restrictions on freedom of speech, association, combination, and assembly, following the narrow failure of Wilhelm Hasenclever to be elected to the *Reichstag* for the ADAV in May 1872.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, because the Hamburg Law of Association, harsh as it was at local level, contained no equivalent of the Prussian law's Paragraph 8, that is, it did not ban national trade unions because they talked about politics at their meetings, Hamburg became the refuge of choice for the national social democratic building worker unions once the Prussian government chose to attack the ADAV and its affiliated trade unions. It had already been home since 1871 to the central committee of the other social democratic party, the SDAP, which had moved there by decision of its Dresden congress at a time when the treason prosecutions against its leaders, Bebel and Liebknecht, remained pending.<sup>23</sup> Hamburg henceforth came to assume a central importance in the early history both of Social Democracy and of trade unionism in Germany and provided the base from which the unification of the two parties and their respective affiliated trade unions would proceed.

Attempts at unifying parts of the social democratic trade union movement had occurred prior to Theodor Yorck's unexpected death on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1875. For the 'International' trade unions which supported the SDAP, the most serious attempt had been made in 1871 when weavers from Meerane in Saxony had called for a national congress of

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<sup>20</sup> Laufenberg, pp. 13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Laufenberg, pp. 431-2. See also: Bürger, pp. 63-4.

<sup>22</sup> Laufenberg, op. cit., pp. 470-1.

<sup>23</sup> Ch. 1.

weavers' trade unions in nearby Glauchau following the failure of their own recent strike.<sup>24</sup> This congress had duly taken place between 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May 1871, with 151 delegates from 77 locations attending.<sup>25</sup> Although Bebel (coincidentally, *Reichstag* deputy for the Glauchau-Meerane constituency), who stood in for the absent Manufacturing Workers Union president Julius Motteler, was opposed by ADAV supporters when he proposed that all those present join Motteler's 'International' union, the Glauchau congress had been followed by a second in Berlin in May 1872 at which the General German Weavers and Manufacturing Workers Federation (*Allgemeiner deutscher Weber- und Manufaktur-Arbeiter Bund*) had been set up to serve as an umbrella organization for the constituent textile industry trade unions.<sup>26</sup> At the time, the SDAP newspaper, the *Volksstaat*, had celebrated this as an example to the future in overcoming the split in the social democratic workers' movement, but the new union federation, with little funding, actually had no more writ than the Glauchau-Meerane committee which had overseen the organizing of the Berlin congress.<sup>27</sup> Based as it was in areas of existing Manufacturing Workers Union strength – many of whose Saxon branches had had to transform themselves into local craft unions after November 1871 when the Saxon Law of Association had been invoked to declare them political associations – it had little contact with the ADAV and did not survive the economic crisis from 1873.

A corresponding attempt by the ADAV, on the other hand, to bring other social democratic trade unions under its 'Workers Support Federation' umbrella, had been confined to Berlin with the establishment in November 1871 of the Berlin Workers Federation (the 'Arbeiterbund'). In contrast with the 'industrial' model of the Saxon textile workers, this had been an attempt at centralization of *all* local trades in the wake of the successful strike by Berlin bricklayers for the ten hour day and its initiators had

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<sup>24</sup> 'An die Manufaktur-Weber Deutschlands!', *Volksstaat*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1871.

<sup>25</sup> *Volksstaat*, 3<sup>rd</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> June 1871.

<sup>26</sup> For Bebel: *Volksstaat*, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1871. For the second national congress of weaver trade unions: *Volksstaat*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1872.

<sup>27</sup> 'Zwei Arbeiterkongresse in Berlin', *Volksstaat*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1872.

cited the importance of reducing working time as well as raising wages.<sup>28</sup> Grottkau and the Bricklayers Association, however, accorded it little interest; while Albert Paul did sit on its management committee, the bricklayers' union as the only ADAV national trade union still in existence, and one which moreover represented 3,000 members in the capital city, decided to hold its national funds close to its chest.<sup>29</sup> Bebel's description of the *Arbeiterbund* as a 'totgeborenes Kind' ('a stillborn child'), while sectarian, did hit the mark: as a talking shop trades council, it accepted individual membership at the suggestion of the editor of the ADAV's *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, Wilhelm Hasselmann, and was a passive observer of continuing building worker struggles in Berlin before falling apart after June 1873 when ADAV carpenters once more set up their own national trade union.<sup>30</sup>

Of longer-term significance is the fact that the cashier of the *Arbeiterbund* was none other than the carpenters' leader, August Kapell, later driver, with August Geib, of centralization of the unified social democratic trade unions after 1875. Geib, a bookseller by trade and a co-founder of the SDAP at Eisenach in 1869, had signalled early support for the trade unions in a series of articles he had written for the *Volksstaat* in May 1871 over the 'Normalarbeitstag' ('normal working day'). His subsequent role around the failure in 1874 of a third unification initiative, this time from non-aligned social democratic trade unionists in Hamburg, to create a single metalworkers' trade union, more accurately his attitude to this failure, brought him once more to national prominence. When Richard Wolf, the secretary of the non-aligned Metalworkers Trade Union (*Metallarbeiter Gewerksgenossenschaft*), wrote to the *Volksstaat* and expressed enthusiasm for the project following a subsequent metalworkers' congress,<sup>31</sup> a commentary from the SDAP central committee, of which Geib was a member, warned

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<sup>28</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Die Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiter-Bewegung. Ein Kapitel zur Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, Erster Teil: Vom Jahre 1848 bis zum Erlaß des Sozialistengesetzes*, Berlin 1907 [henceforth: Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 1], pp. 235-6.

<sup>29</sup> Its Berlin members did, however, agree to pay an additional *Silbergroschen* each month, one half to the ADAV for social democratic publications, one half for agitation in the Berlin district. Paeplow, *Organisationen*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 1, pp. 236-7. Paeplow, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> The 'iron and metalworkers' congress took place in Hanover from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> April 1874. This had agreed on the establishment of a unified 'Federation of Metalworkers' (*Allgemeiner Metallarbeiterverband*).

against unification of the unions before that of the socialist parties.<sup>32</sup> The Leipzig branch of Wolf's own union, which at the same time functioned as its control commission, seconded the SDAP's position and requested that all members of the union reject unification as, with statutes which resembled its own, the proposed 'Federation of Metalworkers' would offer nothing better but demand more money sacrifices of its members.<sup>33</sup> At the Metalworkers Trade Union annual general meeting, which took place in Magdeburg on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1874, Wolf and his supporters were outvoted by those of the Leipzig branch. The meeting voted instead to affiliate to Yorck's 'Union', a solely SDAP project.<sup>34</sup> When Wolf then proposed, at the SDAP's annual congress at Coburg in July, that the party executive desist from interfering in union affairs, Geib publicly sided with those who had prompted Wolf's supporters, principally Julius Scheil from Königsberg and Carl Ulrich from Brunswick, to withdraw the proposal 'for the sake of peace and quiet' ('um des lieben Friedens willen').<sup>35</sup> In an uproarious debate, Yorck, who had raised the banner of the political neutrality of the trade unions at the Erfurt trade union congress of June 1872, opposed Wolf: the party executive had been completely justified in mistrusting unification along such lines, for it was known that the 'anderseitigen Unternehmer' (here, the 'other party' – a reference to the ADAV) had wished to portray themselves as 'representatives of thousands' with the outcome that the real majority would be outvoted by an 'inflated' ('großgekünstelte') minority. Given such circumstances, the executive had only carried out its duty.<sup>36</sup> For its part, the ADAV showed little interest in the Federation after this point. When the Hamburg initiators of the project wrote an open letter to both social democratic party newspapers, in which they asked when the planned national congress of the Federation would be taking place, the response of Albert Bähke, provisional president of both the Federation and of the Berlin Union of Machine Manufacturing Workers (*Berliner Verein der Maschinenbauarbeiter*), was to request that these 'non-members' first of all

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<sup>32</sup> 'Erklärung', *Volksstaat*, 1st May 1874.

<sup>33</sup> *Volksstaat*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1874.

<sup>34</sup> *Protokoll der am 25. und 26. Mai 1874 zu Magdeburg stattgehabten Generalversammlung der Metallarbeitergewerksgenossenschaft*, Brunswick 1874, pp. 13-14. Cited in Albrecht, p. 189, notes 283-4.

<sup>35</sup> *Protokoll über den sechsten Congress der sozial-demokratischen Arbeiterpartei abgehalten zu Coburg, am 18., 19., 20. und 21. Juli 1874*, Leipzig 1874, pp. 58-60.

<sup>36</sup> *Protokoll*, *ibid.*, pp. 58-9.



forward their union dues.<sup>37</sup> He then resigned in November 1874.<sup>38</sup> The first national congress of the Federation of Metalworkers never took place.

With the sole exception of the ‘non-aligned’ Cigar Workers Association, which following the dissolution of the ADAV’s Workers Support Federation in September 1874 merged with the latter’s tobacco worker sections, including the largest in Hamburg and Altona, party unification proceeded first. The Coburg congress of the SDAP had entrusted its central committee and parliamentary deputies with drawing up proposals for such and following this, the ADAV and SDAP *Reichstag* factions commenced formal unification negotiations in December 1874.<sup>39</sup> Both parties were heavily represented at Yorck’s funeral in Hamburg, a public display of the setting aside of old animosities which for Marx in England would be bought later that year at Gotha with too many compromises by the SDAP.<sup>40</sup> For the trade union side, on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1874 the first issue of *Der Pionier*, journal of the ADAV carpenters’ trade union, the Carpenters Federation, subtitled itself the ‘Journal for Organized Labour’.<sup>41</sup> While the merger of individual trade unions with one another would for the near future take precedence over Yorck’s more ambitious ‘Union’ idea, the ADAV carpenters’ trade union was laying down a marker through its journal at this early date that it sympathised with at least one part of Yorck’s programme of centralization, namely that of the single trade union journal. In the immediate term, local trade union officials in Hamburg met with representatives of some of the national unions and with representatives of the two social democratic parties on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1875 to call for the convening of a trade union

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<sup>37</sup> *Volksstaat*, 6<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1874; *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1874.

<sup>38</sup> *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1874. For B  thke’s resignation, see: Albrecht, pp. 191-2, notes 302, 306.

<sup>39</sup> *Protokoll SDAP*, 1874 Coburg, pp. 11, 89-92 (90). The ADAV and SDAP *Reichstag* groupings had been co-operating informally following the general election of January 1874. Franz Mehring, *Geschichte der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1898, pp. 347-8.

<sup>40</sup> Marx, ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, *The First International and After*, pp. 339-59. Marx’s attribution of the inclusion in the preamble of the programme of the new party, the Socialist Workers Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* – SAPD), of the aim of ‘the abolition of the wage system together with the iron law of wages’ (*Marx’s emphasis*), to the predominant influence of the ADAV (‘the Lassallean sect has come out on top’) does not, however, take account of the fact that the ‘Iron Law’ was not a point of dispute between the ADAV and the SDAP. Marx, ‘Critique’, p. 351.

<sup>41</sup> Hermann M  ller, *Die Organisationen der Lithographen, Steindrucker und verwandten Berufe*, Vol. 1, Berlin 1917, p. 395; Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 49.

conference. This was to decide, at the suggestion of August Kapell's brother, Otto, on the unification of individual trades (*Berufsklassen*) around a common statute; on a blueprint for a single organization of all trade unions; and on a date for a general congress of trade unions.<sup>42</sup> Geib and Ignaz Auer, SDAP Party Secretary, represented the SDAP's central committee; Georg Wilhelm Hartmann performed the same role for the ADAV. Apart from Otto Kapell, Karl Finn represented the carpenters' trade union, and Hans Schöning from Hamburg the ADAV bricklayers' union. Other occupational groups represented included ships' carpenters, dock workers, and metalworkers. A three person committee was delegated to organize the conference; alongside Otto Kapell, for the ADAV unions, and Heinrich Grosz, president of the non-aligned General German Ship Carpenters Association (*Allgemeiner deutscher Schiffszimmererverein*), Heinrich Rieke, secretary of the International Trade Union for Bricklayers and Carpenters, represented the SDAP unions.<sup>43</sup>

Rieke's presence at the above meeting marks the first point of personal continuity with the later localist trade union movement, for following the expulsions of Gustav Kessler and Fritz Wilke from Berlin in 1886, the Brunswick-based Rieke was one of the triumvirate leadership, with Kessler and Wilke, of the localist bricklayers after this point. Rieke, a bricklayer by trade, had been elected President of the joint Trade Union for Bricklayers and Carpenters at its annual conference in Chemnitz in June 1873 following a disagreement within the union over the role of two producer co-operatives in Dresden and Chemnitz. This had led to the Dresden branch resigning its position as union seat. The later carpenter historian, August Bringmann, records Rieke as having the help at this time of Auer, a saddler by trade, in exercising great effort in establishing firm links between the union's membership and its headquarters. At the same time, however, a proposal from Rieke's Brunswick party colleague Wilhelm Bracke to anchor the necessity for trade union organization in the party's programme was withdrawn at the SDAP's Eisenach congress of August 1873, citing the forthcoming national

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<sup>42</sup> Hermann Müller, *Lithographien*, p. 379; Hermann Müller, *Geschichte*, p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> 'An die Vorstände sämtlicher deutschen Gewerkschaften sowie die verschiedenen lokalen Fachvereine!', *Volksstaat*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1875. Reprinted in Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 225-6. See also: Albrecht, p. 213, note 6.

election.<sup>44</sup> On the suggestions of Geib and Yorck, such programme changes were to be left to a dedicated committee.<sup>45</sup> Rieke is recorded after this as attending the Magdeburg congress of 'International' trade unions in May 1874.<sup>46</sup> At the next congress of his own union which took place in Coburg one month later, criticism from the Nuremberg branch over Rieke's monthly salary of 72 Marks, not all of which Rieke drew on, led to the intervention of the SDAP executive via the *Volksstaat*. This stated in general terms that, with reference to the English [*sic*] trade unions,

the trade union movement thrives when competent officials are so provided for, that they can devote their full energies to the union and are appropriately paid ... the most competent and willing party comrade who is able only to devote a part of the day or of their free time to the union is not in the position to sufficiently promote the interests of the union, where due, to carry out its business.<sup>47</sup>

Rieke clearly enjoyed the support and confidence of the SDAP party hierarchy.

The unification conference of the social democratic trade unions duly took place at Gotha from 28<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> May 1875 as an adjunct to that of the political parties. Rieke, a participant, recorded by Bringmann as having been an eager proponent who had contributed to the preparatory work, took a back seat at this to Fritz Hurlemann of the Federation of Bricklayers and Stone Carvers.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, Rieke worked with representatives of the latter and with those of the German Carpenters Association (*Deutscher Zimmererverein* – successor organization to the banned Carpenters Federation) in winding up his own union and merging its constituent bricklayer and carpenter parts with the two ADAV unions. Rieke signalled at a joint conference of his

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<sup>44</sup> Bringmann, *Zimmererbewegung*, Vol.2, p. 115. Auer's apparent role as trade union trouble-shooter – with Geib, he stood in temporarily to lead the Wood Workers Trade Union after Yorck's death – highlighted one problem which faced early trade unionism in Germany: a lack of capable representatives. See also: Ch. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Protokoll über den 4. Congreß der sozial-demokratischen Arbeiterpartei abgehalten zu Eisenach am 23., 24., 25., 26. und 27. August 1873*, Leipzig 1873, pp. 2-3, 58-60.

<sup>46</sup> Bringmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118: 'Rieke war ein eifriger Befürworter derselben gewesen und hatte auch die Vorarbeiten dazu mitgemacht.'

union with that of ADAV bricklayers' union in Hamburg, 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> July 1875, that he agreed with separation on trade lines because long experience had proven often enough that the separated trades in the north had been more capable of resistance than those joined together in the south. He was opposed by the Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz, and Nuremberg branches of his own union who voted against unification, citing the non-attendance of the Carpenters Association, which was holding its first national congress at the same time.<sup>49</sup> The Bricklayers and Carpenters Trade Union was finally wound down on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1875 following a majority postal vote by union members. This followed a proposal from Otto Kapell that bricklayers and carpenters respectively join the Bricklayers Federation and Carpenters Association as automatic full members, as put to a joint conference of the three presidents of the affected trade unions, namely Rieke, Kapell, and Hans Schöning (for the Bricklayers Federation), with the disaffected bricklayer union branches, which had been held in Chemnitz on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1875.<sup>50</sup>

Rieke, at this early juncture in his long political career,<sup>51</sup> appears to have played no national role in the merged bricklayers' union, other than being the probable originator of a notice in its journal, the *Grundstein*, on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1878, detailing where to continue to send union contributions to.<sup>52</sup> The former Carpenters Federation had already signalled its sympathy with the aim – centralization - and one means - a single trade union journal - of Yorck's programme, and the constitution of its successor after 6<sup>th</sup> June 1875, the 'Association', now also stated that politics and public affairs were not to be discussed at its meetings. Given that the union's seat remained in Berlin despite the banning of its predecessor, this was of practical import; it also matched Yorck's tactic of day-to-day political neutrality. The ideological reasoning behind this tactic had earlier been given most forceful expression by the unanimous adoption at the Gotha trade union conference of a resolution from Fritzsche, for the Cigar Workers

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<sup>49</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 68.

<sup>50</sup> *Der Pionier*, 18<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1875. Cited in Bringmann, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>51</sup> Rieke, born 10<sup>th</sup> June 1843 in Teichhütte, Lower Saxony, was a Social Democrat city councillor in Brunswick from 1878 until his death in 1922. He was a member of the Brunswick *Landtag* from 1918 to 1920, and of the *Reichstag* from 1920 where he was Father of the House (*Alterspräsident*). Wilhelm Heinz Schröder, *Sozialdemokratische Parlamentarier in den deutschen Reichs- und Landtagen: 1867-1933*, Düsseldorf 1995, p. 677.

<sup>52</sup> The national union by this point was effectively dead. See Ch. 4.

Association: this stated that it was the duty of trade unionists to keep politics out of their organizations and to instead join the Socialist Workers Party of Germany (SAPD – *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, as the new, unified, party was now known) because only this was able to fully raise the political and economic position of the worker to that worthy of a human being.<sup>53</sup>

With its president Grottkau in prison, the Federation of Bricklayers and Stone Carvers had been represented at Gotha by Hurlemann, one of two conference minute takers.<sup>54</sup> The acceptance at this conference of another resolution from Fritzsche, namely that special joint congresses be held for trades where various national and local craft unions existed, confirmed that unification would precede centralization; preparations for a full congress of all trade unions to create a single centralised 'Union' were as a result delegated to a five-person committee elected for the express purpose of organizing a congress once the process of unification of the individual unions was completed. This committee was comprised of Fritzsche, Hurlemann, Otto Kapell, Wilhelm Schweckendieck, for the General Union of Joiners (*Allgemeiner Tischlerverein*), and August Baumann, for the Print Workers Federation (*Buchdruckerverband*). Baumann was the only supporter of the former SDAP.<sup>55</sup> The predominance of building workers was indicative of the comparative strength of the ADAV building worker unions against those of the SDAP prior to this point.

While unification, or rather amalgamation, of the individual unions went ahead, in some instances more smoothly, in others less so, than that already outlined for the bricklayers' and carpenters' unions, the preparatory work of the congress committee stalled.<sup>56</sup> On

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<sup>53</sup> *Volksstaat*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1875; *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1875.

<sup>54</sup> Auer, representing the Woodworkers Trade Union, had been the second minute taker. *Volksstaat* op. cit.; *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> *Volksstaat*, op. cit.; *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> In June 1875, the General Union of Joiners voted for amalgamation but only with joiner members of the Woodworkers Trade Union. The opposition within the woodworkers' union was first overcome one year later following a 'general joiners' congress' where the proviso was adopted that, 'all non-joiners and non-woodworkers who have up to now enjoyed rights in the above named organizations are accepted in the new federation until they leave of their free will to join the corporation for their own trade'. *Protokoll der Verhandlungen der Generalversammlung des Allgemeinen Tischler (Schreiner-) Vereins, abgehalten am 13., 14. und 15. Juni zu Berlin*, Berlin 1875, pp. 9-21. Cited in Albrecht, pp. 226-7; 'Auszug aus dem

23<sup>rd</sup> July 1875, it issued a circular, requesting progress reports on the unification process among the individual unions.<sup>57</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> October, Fritzsche in a second circular proposed the setting up of joint union journeymen's hostels, in part to counter the hostile propaganda of the existing guild and Christian networks. He also proposed the establishment of local job exchanges to encourage more rational regulation of the labour market.<sup>58</sup> Writing later, the Social Democratic Party historian, Hermann Müller, speculated that the failure of the committee to do more than this owed much to the disillusioning effect which the experience of the Workers Support Federation had had on the former ADAV trade unionists: 'of all their trade union leaders, none were for reunification according to the old model'.<sup>59</sup> Given that in addition to the bricklayers' outright defiance of Schweitzer's strictures, the carpenters had eventually found it necessary to re-establish their own trade union, it was not surprising that this stuck in the memory of those personally involved, such as the Kapell brothers and Hurlemann.<sup>60</sup> For Müller, the joy which the former Lassallean trade unions felt at achieving independence was not to be discounted.<sup>61</sup> But as an explanation for the inactivity of the congress committee after 1875, the Lassallean experience was an unsatisfactory one, for Fritzsche and the Kapell brothers clearly did not reject Yorck's centralization model. Much more demonstrable is that the process of amalgamation of the individual unions diverted both the energy and resources of its participants, and that it lasted longer than anticipated.

Müller acknowledged the role of the state authorities as a partial explanation.<sup>62</sup> Even before it was banned, the ADAV bricklayers' union had transferred its seat to Hamburg. Hurlemann, with three prison terms behind him by this time, followed suit after his

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Protokoll des allgemeinen Tischler-Congresses vom 25-29. Juni d. J. in Frankfurt a. M.', *Volksstaat*, 12th July 1876.

<sup>57</sup> *Volksstaat*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1875; *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1875.

<sup>58</sup> *Volksstaat*, 24<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1875.

<sup>59</sup> Hermann Müller, *Geschichte*, p. 174: 'von all ihren Gewerkschaftsführern war keiner für die Wiedervereinigung nach dem alten Muster'.

<sup>60</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Hermann Müller, *Lithographien*, p. 394.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

appointment as national union agitator at the second national congress of the re-named 'Federation' in July 1876.<sup>63</sup> For the carpenters, August Kapell had moved to Hamburg one month earlier following the banning of the 'Association' in Prussia on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1876; the union was promptly re-established for a third time in three years as the Carpenters Trade Union (*Zimmerergewerk*). Fritzsche remained in Berlin where the Cigar Workers Association remained in existence but at the mercy of prosecutions of individual members and branches for personal infringements of the law of association. Facing such a charge himself, Fritzsche played no part in the centralization debate ignited by the publication in *Vorwärts*, party newspaper of the SDAP, on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1877 of Geib's article, 'Our Trade Union Press', in which Geib called for a single journal for all trade unions.<sup>64</sup>

Geib's call had been preceded by the merger of the carpenters' union journal, the *Pionier*, with that of the Federation of Joiners and Allied Trades, *Der Bund*. The *Pionier* had been re-launched subsequently, on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1877, with a new masthead, 'Central organ of the trade unions of Germany and registered sickness and burial funds'.<sup>65</sup> In his article in *Vorwärts*, Geib referred to individual union journals as 'not newspaper, not circular, neither fish nor fowl', and accused them of appealing to the limited outlook of their readers, happy with paltry reading matter because this was what they were used to; instead of putting an end to this, they cosied up to it and patted the cheeks of its offspring, prejudice. A central journal would break through such habitualness; it would concentrate trade union efforts at one central point and convince trade union members that the workers' question could only be solved once members of the different worker groups acquired an insight into the whole movement.<sup>66</sup> The existing trade union press was not up to the tasks it set itself, for in division it lacked the necessary powers. The small and medium-sized trade unions were especially affected by this. The *Pionier*, with a total already of 8,000 subscribers, provided a good example of what needed to be

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<sup>63</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> 'Unsere gewerkschaftliche Presse', *Vorwärts*, 10th Aug. 1877.

<sup>65</sup> *Der Pionier. Zentralorgan der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands und der eingeschriebenen Hilfskranken- und Sterbekassen*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1877. Cited in Eduard Bernstein, *Die Schneiderbewegung in Deutschland: Ihre Organisationen und Kämpfe*, Vol.1, Berlin 1913, p. 210; Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 396.

<sup>66</sup> *Vorwärts*, op. cit.

done. If a few more trade unions were to adopt it, then it could name itself with pride, that which at present it only did in modesty: as central organ.<sup>67</sup>

Geib, and August Kapell for the carpenters' trade union, had publicly placed themselves on one side of the centralization debate although it was actually the General German Tailors Association (*Allgemeiner deutscher Schneiderverein*) which at its annual conference at Hanau from 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> August 1877 had been the first to propose a new trade union conference, or general congress, to discuss the issue of press centralization.<sup>68</sup> Geib and Kapell attracted immediate support from 'the united trade unionists of Hanover' for whom a central journal was a precursor to a general centralization of all trade unions;<sup>69</sup> the support of the tailors' union, however, was tempered with worries that higher union dues would hamper its recruitment work.<sup>70</sup> More clear cut in opposing the proposal were the bricklayers', shoemakers', and print workers' trade unions: for the shoemakers' union (*Gewerkschaft der Schuhmacher*), its president Wilhelm Bock feared that a single, expensive, bulky, union journal would displace the political papers and actually cause the level of political ignorance to rise.<sup>71</sup> Geib and Kappell's main base of support was among local trade unionists in Hamburg and following a large public meeting before a crowd of 2,000 on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1877 around the theme of 'The trade union movement and its press',<sup>72</sup> notice was given in both *Vorwärts* and the *Pionier* of a forthcoming trade union conference for 11<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>73</sup> This was subsequently postponed to February 1878.

Heinrich Laufenberg subsequently singled out Hurlemann as being most satisfied at the failure of the conference, which took place in Gotha from 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> February 1878, to

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Bernstein, *Schneiderbewegung*, pp. 209-11.

<sup>69</sup> *Vorwärts*, 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1877.

<sup>70</sup> Bernstein, op. cit., p. 211. The secretary of the tailors' union, Balthasar Klerx, finally voted against press centralization at the Erfurt conference in February 1878. 'Protokoll über die am 24. und 25. Februar 1878 zu Gotha stattgefundene Gewerkschaftskonferenz', *Der Pionier*, 13<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1878. Reprinted in Bringmann, *Zimmererbewegung*, Vol.1, pp. 385-405 (p. 392).

<sup>71</sup> Hermann Müller, op. cit., p. 397.

<sup>72</sup> *Vorwärts*, 5th Oct. 1877. *Der Pionier*, 6th Oct. 1877. The latter cited in Albrecht, p. 236, note 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Vorwärts*, 12<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1877.



agree to a central journal.<sup>74</sup> This opinion appears to be based on a report in the *Hamburg-Altonaer Volksblatt* of a follow-up meeting of Hamburg trade union representatives on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1878 at which Hurlemann was verbally attacked and outvoted by the majority of those present who declared themselves dissatisfied with the results of the Gotha conference, specifically because this had refrained from accepting the central trade union journal.<sup>75</sup> It is clear from the conference minutes, however, that several delegates at Gotha had put forward various arguments against the proposal for a central journal, not all of which were do with anti-centralist ideology, as indeed had Bebel when he opposed the idea on cost grounds at the Erfurt congress of SDAP trade unions in 1872.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps most tellingly, the joint chair (alongside August Kapell) at Gotha in 1878, Ferdinand Weidemann, President of the Federation of Joiners, whose own union had adopted the *Pionier* as its journal the previous year, echoed Bebel's earlier cost argument, and the fears of the tailors' union, when he argued against a single central journal, cautioning that such would need to attract the paid editorship of an academic.<sup>77</sup> The tailor delegate Franz Fahrenkamm from Erfurt argued in addition that strong unions were needed before there could be any thought of centralization; for the metalworker A. Bremer from Berlin, prior centralization of the trade unions was necessary to arouse the common bond of all workers, only then would a central journal be feasible.<sup>78</sup>

In his opening speech to the Gotha conference, August Kapell referred to the earlier failure to set up a joint union journal with the bricklayers.<sup>79</sup> This had been suggested at the Erfurt trade union conference in 1875 as the bricklayers at that time had had no journal of their own. However, shortly afterwards a joint conference of the two social democratic bricklayer trade unions in Hamburg in August 1875 agreed to launch such a

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<sup>74</sup> Laufenberg, p. 630.

<sup>75</sup> *Hamburger-Altonaer Volksblatt*, 21<sup>st</sup> Mar. 1878. The report makes it clear, however, that this vote was taken after midnight by the 'unfortunately no longer large number of those present' ('der leider nicht mehr großen Zahl der Anwesenden').

<sup>76</sup> See Ch. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 391.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 389, 391.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

union journal, named, after Hurlemann's suggestion, *Der Grundstein* <sup>80</sup> This duly appeared from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1875.<sup>81</sup> The idea of merging this journal with that of the carpenters was briefly raised at the following, acrimonious, national congress of the 'Federation' (the 'new' union retained the old name) in Hamburg on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1876. At this, both the union secretary Schöning, at a time of lost strikes and falling union membership, and Grottkau, who had remained in Berlin following release from his most recent imprisonment to edit both the *Berliner Freie Presse* and the *Grundstein*, were respectively accused of incompetence and dictatorship. Feeling at the congress against Grottkau had in fact been so great that he had initially been denied entry.<sup>82</sup> The decision to consolidate all aspects of editing, despatch, publication and printing in Hamburg was followed by a full proposal at the union's next national congress in Leipzig on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July 1877 to merge the journal with that of the carpenters. This, however, met with no support ('fand keine Gegenliebe'). At the same conference, Hurlemann encountered some criticism that the cost of his employment was not in harmony with the success it brought but he was re-elected as national union agitator.<sup>83</sup> Following publication of Geib and Kapell's single all-union journal proposal, the opposition of the bricklayers' union was made clear in several articles in the *Grundstein*;<sup>84</sup> at a meeting in Hamburg on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1877, the bricklayers' union publicly stated its opposition both to the proposal and to the forthcoming Gotha conference.<sup>85</sup>

Hurlemann was later described as continuing to adopt this 'hostile position' at Gotha by Fritz Paepflow, the later President of the Central Union of German Bricklayers (*Zentralverband der deutschen Maurer*).<sup>86</sup> There is some evidence that the hostility was mutual on the part of August Kapell, both from his opening conference remarks directed at the bricklayers' union, and from his later failure, when asked by Heinrich Bürger to

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<sup>80</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> '*Grundstein. Organ der Maurer, Steinhauer und verwandten Berufsgenossen in Deutschland*'. Paepflow, op. cit., pp. 69-70. A pilot issue (*Probenummer*) appeared on 15th Sept. 1875.

<sup>82</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 90; Hermann Müller, op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> Laufenberg, op. cit.

<sup>86</sup> Paepflow, op.cit.

proof read the latter's history of the Hamburg trade unions up to 1890, to correct the author's omission of Hurlemann's temporary leadership of the ADAV bricklayers' union in 1870.<sup>87</sup> Kapell himself seems to have attracted the personal hostility of the print workers' union president Richard Härtel, who commented acidly at Gotha that he would concede centralization of the press if the performance of the editors of the *Pionier* was to match that of the individual journals.<sup>88</sup> Hurlemann for his part countered Kapell's opening criticism of the bricklayers' trade union and of himself by stating that he was for centralization but not in the sense of the draft proposal; he was completely against a central journal. In common with several other conference delegates, he defended individual union journals against the claim that they fuelled sectionalism. On the contrary they worked at eradicating this. He warned against haste and believed general centralization to be premature.<sup>89</sup> Hurlemann had clearly not needed to stir up opposition to a central journal, for this was duly voted against by 15 votes to 8.<sup>90</sup>

After the model of the loose cartel which had developed among Hamburg trade union branches since 1873,<sup>91</sup> Geib and Kapell also proposed the establishment at a national level of a *Kartellkommission* ('cartel committee'), the tasks of which were summarised thus: to advise and decide over all cartel agreement matters; to direct agitation; to supervise the press; to arbitrate disputes between respective union leaderships; to supervise and audit the accounts.<sup>92</sup> At Gotha, Härtel cautioned against the proposed committee becoming a dictatorship.<sup>93</sup> Ferdinand Böttger, the president of the Manufacturing Workers Union, opposed the committee being able to decide when strikes took place or not. For the bricklayers' union, Hurlemann echoed this: he was against the committee having ultimate power over strikes as it would not know the conditions on the ground. He also opposed the committee being able to raise extra

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<sup>87</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 387; Bürger, p. 99.

<sup>88</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 391.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>91</sup> Bürger, pp. 125-7.

<sup>92</sup> Bringmann, op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

contributions from union members, and suggested instead that individual unions should be allowed to make public appeals in favour of workers in dispute. He regretted the absence in the proposal of any clause that the committee should include all unions and requested more information regarding its monitoring of the trade union press, agreeing with Adolf Päckel, president of the Association of Bookbinders, that the committee's thoroughness would mean that it would control all journals of unions belonging to the cartel.<sup>94</sup> The cartel committee proposal was, however, accepted, as a result of which Hurlemann's name became associated instead with that of the single journal proposal which had failed, even though his criticisms of a single journal were clearly far more widely and deeply held than the majority of Hamburg trade unionists who attacked him afterwards seemed to acknowledge.

Of greater longer-term significance for the subsequent development of both the localist and centralist trade union movements (individual union journals never were replaced) were Hurlemann's criticisms of the proposed cartel committee on the questions of its control over strike support and press monitoring, for the future dispute over these very issues among bricklayers themselves would give birth to localist trade unionism and define its centralist opposition. The banning of a full trade union congress, planned for Magdeburg later that year, which was to enact the proposals accepted at Gotha, and the imposition of the Anti-Socialist Law shortly afterwards, postponed this rupture.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 395, 402.

<sup>95</sup> The Magdeburg congress had been planned for the Whitsun weekend beginning 10<sup>th</sup> June 1878. Following the second of two assassination attempts on the German emperor, that of Karl Nobiling on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, the congress organizers were informed it could no longer take place. Permission to relocate it was refused by the Hamburg authorities. Bernstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-17.

## PART TWO

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### *Union re-organization in Berlin: the Anti-Socialist Law and the Bricklayers' Strike of 1885*

Fritz Hurlemann's appearance before the meeting of Hamburg trade unionists on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1878 followed the emigration of Paul Grottkau to the United States at the turn of the year.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Grottkau's subsequent political activity is well documented and he continued to be of interest to the Prussian political police up to his death in 1898, Hurlemann disappeared from the historical record.<sup>2</sup> He is not listed among the expelled in Ignaz Auer's contemporaneous account of the Anti-Socialist Law period, *Nach zehn Jahren* ('After Ten Years'), nor in a more recent study of the period by Heinzpeter Thümmeler; nor does Grottkau's obituary in *Vorwärts* in 1898 refer to any subsequent collaboration with his erstwhile bricklayers' union colleague in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Fritz Paepow, in his introduction to *Die Organisationen der Maurer Deutschlands von 1869 bis 1899*, states that it had not been easy to procure the necessary documentation for his study of early bricklayer trade unionism because those colleagues who had played a leading role in the 1870s had either died, emigrated, or become fully disconnected from the workers' movement.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the Kapell brothers, however, Hurlemann is not recorded as receiving an amnesty in return for promising to desist from social

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<sup>1</sup> See Ch. 1. Kessler and Paepow both date Grottkau as having left Germany in February 1878. This is almost certainly too late: a cutting in Grottkau's police file from the *Berliner Freie Presse* of 17<sup>th</sup> March 1878, contains a letter from him dated 21<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1878, in which he writes that he landed in Philadelphia, via Hamburg and Liverpool, on 14<sup>th</sup> February. Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, p. 15; Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 91; LaB, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Vorwärts*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1898; LaB, op. cit., p. 104. In the early 1880s, Grottkau was active as an independent Social Democrat in Chicago alongside the later executed anarchists, August Spies and Albert Parsons. See: Rocker, *Johann Most*, pp. 141, 145.

<sup>3</sup> Auer, *Nach zehn Jahren*, Vols. 1 & 2; Thümmeler, *Sozialistengesetz*. Whereas Grottkau's police file is listed separately in the catalogue of Berlin political police files now held by the *Landesarchiv zu Berlin* and is therefore easy to locate, no such listing exists for Hurlemann. This does not mean a separate file does not exist but I was unable to find it on two visits to the LaB in 2005 and 2007.

<sup>4</sup> 'Vorwort', in Paepow, op. cit. Hartwig Walther, former cashier of the Bricklayers Association (before 1873), Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Union (until 1874), and Bricklayers Federation (until 1878), died in 1890s Berlin 'shortly before the plan to write down a history had come to fruition'. Paepow, *ibid*. Paepow did, however, have access to the complete print run of the *Grundstein*, of which Walther had been nominal editor, and which Walther had stored. Walther is not recorded as playing any part in the movement of the 1880s other than as the recipient of correspondence between Kessler and Robert Conrad

democratic activities.<sup>5</sup> If he was by this time disillusioned, one can say that it is not unusual, then or now, for former activists to just disappear. Hurlemann would not have been alone: of the leading bricklayer trade unionists from the 1870s, only the names of Heinrich Rieke and Albert Paul re-appear with regularity in the minutes of national bricklayer congresses after 1884, together with that of the hitherto lesser-known local activist from Hamburg, Thomas Hartwig, an earlier critic of Grottkau's.<sup>6</sup> Hurlemann's disappearance is particularly symbolic for it was followed by the almost equally sudden disappearance of the Federation of Bricklayers and Stone Carvers. The two events are probably not unrelated for Hurlemann had been the union's national agitator. The bricklayers' trade union was never proscribed because by the time the Anti-Socialist Law took effect at the end of October 1878, it had ceased to exist.<sup>7</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> May, the union's national committee in Hamburg had announced an annual general meeting for 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> July in Rieke's Brunswick base; on 1<sup>st</sup> July, the committee announced the postponement of this meeting, 'until further notice'.<sup>8</sup> Given that this postponement followed that in Magdeburg of the general congress of trade unions, the 'obstacles which have arisen', alluded to in the national committee announcement, may indicate that the bricklayers' planned conference had likewise fallen victim to the initial police clampdown which followed the attempted assassination attempts by non-Social Democrats on the German Emperor in May and June. Rieke is probably the originator of a notice from Brunswick in the union journal on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1878 giving details of to whom to send donations; a similar funding appeal from Hamburg was published on 1<sup>st</sup> October.<sup>9</sup> Fritz Paepflow commented, 'It appears then as if these branches wanted to keep the organization alive by their own initiative. Apart from this, however, there is no

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from 1884, extracts from which he then presented to the bureau at the third national bricklayers' congress in Dresden in 1886. Ibid., p. 70; Paepflow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 310.

<sup>5</sup> August and Otto Kapell were expelled from Hamburg on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1880. They returned to Hamburg two years later. Thümmeler, pp. 59, 202.

<sup>6</sup> Hartwig had been among those delegates who had expressed fear of a Grottkau 'dictatorship' at the 1873 annual general meeting of the General German Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Union. Paepflow, op. cit., pp. 45-6. See also: Ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ironically, a central illness and mortality fund for bricklayers, *Grundstein zur Einigkeit* ('Foundation for Unity'), was finally launched under the auspices of Altona bricklayers on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1878. Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 91; Kessler, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Grundstein*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1878. Cited in Paepflow, op. cit., p. 93. See also: Kessler, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Paepflow, op. cit.

further word on the organization in the journal.<sup>10</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> October an editorial in the *Grundstein* expressed its fear of being banned and contemplated transforming itself into a purely trade journal. It announced its final issue on 1<sup>st</sup> December.<sup>11</sup>

For one historian, Hermann Müller, Germany's bricklayers nonetheless remained 'ready for the fight' ('kampf froh').<sup>12</sup> Given the circumstances of the collapse of their union, for the first two years of the Anti-Socialist Law period this assertion appeared to be based more on reputation than reality. The merging of the former ADAV and SDAP trade unions had coincided both with increased state repression in Prussia and Saxony, and with an economic downturn which increased the supply of available labour drawn to the building projects in the big cities at a time when some subcontractors were less scrupulous about journeymen qualifications than an all-powerful guild would have been.<sup>13</sup> Wages fell and hours of work increased as a result. Gustav Kessler, writing later, describes a period of decline following the 1875 merger of the bricklayer trade unions, during which the only notable successful industrial action was that of bricklayers in Altona in early 1877.<sup>14</sup> Paepow's later, more detailed, narrative for the period concurs: only the publication of the *Grundstein*, from October 1875, and the establishment of a national sickness and bereavement fund, strike additional positive notes.<sup>15</sup> A failed attempt to remove Hurlemann from his union post at the final 'Federation' annual general meeting in July 1877 was prompted by the failure to increase the union's membership.<sup>16</sup> Kessler describes bricklayers in Hamburg, the union's stronghold in the repressive climate, as being disillusioned with repeated calls for extra financial support.<sup>17</sup> It is notable that the localist (Kessler) and centralist (Paepow) historians of early bricklayer trade unionism in Germany agree in their analysis of the immediate

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 19. Paepow, however, cites a subsequent final issue appearing on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1878, 'without announcing this with a single word'. Paepow, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> Hermann Müller, *Geschichte*, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup> Oldenberg, pp. 5, 7, 24. See Ch. 1 above.

<sup>14</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 15. See also: Bürger, pp. 105-6.

<sup>15</sup> Paepow, op. cit., pp. 69-70, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 18.



years prior to the promulgation of the Anti-Socialist Law: bricklayer militancy had been ground down and, in common with those workers, including their close colleagues, the carpenters, whose unions had been forcibly closed down, it would take time before they were again, 'ready for the fight'. In this, Kessler and Paeplow were certainly right and Hermann Müller wrong.

When it came two years later, the rebirth of social democratic trade unionism in Germany coincided with a relaxation, as far as trade unionism was concerned, in the initial severity of application of the Anti-Socialist Law. This followed a declaration of intent from the imperial government in Berlin, namely the emperor's message to the *Reichstag* on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1881, to introduce workplace, health, and old age insurance. One reason for this was almost certainly as a response to the electoral success of Social Democracy despite its political party being banned. As early as April 1880, a Social Democrat, Georg Wilhelm Hartmann, won a *Reichstag* by-election in Hamburg. But other cynical motives were almost certainly at play: in Berlin, the later national and Prussian interior minister, Robert von Puttkamer, appeared to be happy to allow 'workers' candidates to stand in local city elections in an attempt to split the anti-conservative vote to the detriment of the Progressive Liberals.<sup>18</sup> The period from 1881 was characterised at the time as that of the 'milde Praxis' ('mild practice'); it had, however, been preceded by the extension of Paragraph 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law, which provided for expulsions of individuals and the application of a 'minor state of siege' (*kleine Belagerungszustand*), to the city of Hamburg in October 1880.<sup>19</sup> This period ended with Puttkamer's strike decree in April 1886 and a renewed wave of expulsions and union closures, at the heart of which bricklayers in Berlin in particular were to find themselves.

'Mildness of practice' was relative and arbitrary. In fact, the Berlin bricklayers' craft union attracted the attention of the state authorities right from its foundation in 1881. Writing on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1882, the then Berlin police president, Guido von Madai, had

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<sup>18</sup> December 1873, speech before *Reichstag*. Cited in Auer, Vol. 1, p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> Auer, *ibid.*, pp. 81-2. Paragraph 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law also banned meetings not receiving police consent. In Hamburg, however, the local police already possessed this power under the local law of association. See Ch. 3 above.

singled out it and other Berlin building industry craft unions, namely those of the carpenters, plasterers and joiners, as being among those new unions which, owing to their numerous Social Democrat members, demanded the closest surveillance.<sup>20</sup> A year later, he was more explicit: ‘Up to now, neither in Berlin nor, as far as is known, in other places, has there been cause to intervene against these trade unionist associations on the basis of the Anti-Socialist Law, however *it is surely only a matter of time.*’<sup>21</sup>

Within weeks of Madai’s penning of these words, charges had been brought under the Prussian Law of Association against 30 individual members of various Berlin craft unions for their involvement in the 1882 *Petitionsbewegung* (‘petition movement’). For the greater part based in the building industry, the accused included three members of the Berlin bricklayers’ craft union, including its chair, Robert Conrad.<sup>22</sup> The petition movement, which aimed at the introduction by the *Reichstag* of social protection legislation somewhat tougher than that proposed by the national government, and at the centre of which was a demand for a normal working day of nine hours, had originated among mineworkers in Essen at the end of 1881 and had been supported in Berlin by both the anti-Semitic Christian Social Party and by the Social Democrats. Increasingly however, with exceptions such as Conrad and the gilder Ferdinand Ewald, a Lassallean Social Democrat whose repeated emphasis on the non-party political nature of the movement drew approving comments from the Christian Social, National Liberal, and even conservative press,<sup>23</sup> Social Democrat support for the petition in Berlin coalesced for the most part around the public position of the *Reichstag* deputy Wilhelm

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<sup>20</sup> *Polizeipräsident* Guido von Madai, ‘Allgemeine Übersicht über die Lage der sozialdemokratischen und revolutionären Bewegung’, Berlin, 12th January 1882. Reprinted in Dieter Fricke & Rudolf Knaack, *Dokumente aus geheimen Archiven: Übersichten der Berliner politischen Polizei über die allgemeine Lage der sozialdemokratischen und anarchistischen Bewegung 1878-1913, Bd.1. 1878-1889*, Weimar 1983 [henceforth: Fricke/Knaack], pp. 109-33 (p. 116).

<sup>21</sup> Madai, ‘Allgemeine Übersicht über die Lage der sozialdemokratischen und revolutionären Bewegung’, Berlin, 30th January 1883. Reprinted in Fricke/Knaack, pp. 156-86 (p. 162): ‘indes ist das wohl nur eine Frage der Zeit.’ *My italics in quotation in text.*

<sup>22</sup> Of the 30 accused, 18 represented building trades, if the 4 *Klempner* (‘plumbers’) are included. *Der Monstre-Prozess gegen die Vorstände der Berliner Gewerkschaften: Nach dem Original-Berichte der “Süddeutschen Post”*, Munich 1883, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Christlich-soziales Blatt*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1882. Cited in Josef Schmöle, *Die sozialdemokratischen Gewerkschaften in Deutschland seit dem Erlasse des Sozialisten-Gesetzes, Erster Teil: Vorbereitender Teil*, Jena 1896 [henceforth: Schmöle, Vol. 1], p. 83; *Nationalzeitung*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1882: Schmöle, *ibid.*, pp. 82-3; *Deutsches Tageblatt*, 19th Sept. 1882: Schmöle, *ibid.*, p. 86.

Hasenclever. Speaking before a public meeting of Berlin trade unions on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1882, Hasenclever had stated that he was for the petition's content (which in addition contained demands for the ending of industrial work on Sundays, the exclusion of married women and children under fourteen from industrial work, and a ban on prison-produced goods) but not for it being addressed to the *Reichstag*, as the majority of parliamentary deputies were opposed to a maximum normal working day.<sup>24</sup> Among Berlin trade unionists, Hasenclever's position was most forcefully represented by the machine maker Max Sendig, a member of the Social Democrats' central committee for Berlin, and, following Sendig's expulsion from Berlin on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1882, by the machine fitter, Fritz Görcki. At a metalworkers' meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1882, Görcki publicly accused Ewald of dithering, ambiguity, and of misleading workers to the benefit of conservative opinion.<sup>25</sup> A desire to distance itself from Ewald's singling-out of the Progressive Liberals for attack – the latter opposed a legal maximum normal working day but were also principled opponents of anti-Semitism – led the underground Social Democratic Party in Berlin to repeat Görcki's criticism of Ewald in the pages of *Der Sozialdemokrat* on 14<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>26</sup> It also refused to support the Berlin trade union newspaper, the *Berliner Arbeiter-Zeitung*, of which Ewald was publisher.<sup>27</sup> This folded after barely a month at the end of January 1883.

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<sup>24</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Die Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiter-Bewegung. Ein Kapitel zur Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, Zweiter Teil: Die Geschichte des Sozialistengesetzes in Berlin*, Berlin 1907 [henceforth: Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 2], p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Bernstein, *ibid.*, p. 89. Sendig and fellow expellee, the fitter Hermann Malchert, were both sacked shortly afterwards from employment found at the 'Hohenzollern' locomotive manufacturing works in Düsseldorf, after they had refused to sign an undertaking renouncing Social Democracy. Both were later active on the radical wing of the divided Social Democratic Party in Magdeburg. Bernstein, *ibid.*, p. 94. For Magdeburg, see online at <http://www.anarchismus.at/geschichte-des-anarchismus/deutschland/628-antiautoritaerer-sozialismus-in-magdeburg>.

<sup>26</sup> Schmöle, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-8.

<sup>27</sup> Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 99. Following this, before a meeting of plumber trade unionists in Berlin on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1883, Ewald repudiated what he saw as a misinterpretation of his position and strongly criticised the Conservative Party. At the same time, he acknowledged the past services of liberals in support of the workers' question (*Arbeitsache*), and praised the contribution of Lassalle as 'the single true progressive, the most maligned friend of the workers' ('des einzigen wirklich freisinnigen Mannes, des einzigen bestverleumdeten Freundes der Arbeiter'). Schmöle, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9. Conrad had earlier publicly stated his own opposition to Stöcker and the Christian Social Party at a meeting in Berlin on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1883 called in protest at a Conservative Party proposal for the introduction of compulsory work record cards (*Arbeitsbücher*). *Berliner Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 16<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1883. Cited in Bernstein, *op. cit.*

It was at this point that the Berlin public prosecutor's office, on whose behalf police officers in attendance had previously closed down petition movement meetings addressed by Hasenclever and Conrad respectively on 14<sup>th</sup> May and 25<sup>th</sup> June 1882, now proceeded to enact Madai's prophecy.<sup>28</sup> Following a police presidium ban on further joint meetings of the Berlin craft union committees after 14<sup>th</sup> November 1882, on the grounds that some (later, all) unions were pursuing political aims, 30 named local craft union representatives found themselves charged on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1883 with having constituted a political association in 1882 contrary to Paragraph 8 of the law of association.<sup>29</sup> The basis for this charge was that the four members of the committee which had drawn up the *Reichstag* petition had signed themselves off on completion of this work as the 'central committee of the combined trade unions and corporations of Berlin'.<sup>30</sup> Aside from this petition committee, however, and a later press committee (*Presskommission*) from which the *Berliner Arbeiter-Zeitung* emerged, no formal organization of Berlin craft unions could be proved to have existed. In fact, at the very meeting of Berlin craft union committees on 7<sup>th</sup> September at which the press body had been set up, a proposal for a local federation had been rejected.<sup>31</sup> The Berlin craft unions subsequently rejected even joint fund-raising for the proposed newspaper (which contributed, with the Social Democrat boycott, to its collapse).<sup>32</sup> The demand of the public prosecutor's office that the named unions be closed down was subsequently thrown out and temporary bans on the craft unions of the plasterers and gold plate gilders were lifted on appeal in August 1883. Eight of the accused received minimal fines. However, the warning was heeded and no further attempt was made by workers in Berlin to organize regionally across trade barriers before 1890.

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<sup>28</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 84; Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 2, pp. 91, 93. On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1882, the Berlin *Landgericht* had previously also sentenced eight people arrested at the Anhalter Bahnhof train station during clashes with police on 15<sup>th</sup> July (on the occasion of the departure into exile of seven of ten expelled Social Democrats) to terms of imprisonment varying from one to five months. Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 2, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> *Monstre-Prozess*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7. Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 2, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> *Monstre-Prozess*, p. 7. Bernstein, *ibid.*

Following the failure of this first attempt at curbing the burgeoning unionization movement in the German capital, the authorities in Berlin for the most part stayed their hand for the next three years during a period which saw Social Democrats, among them Ewald, elected to the Berlin city council.<sup>33</sup> Puttkamer's strike decree of 11<sup>th</sup> April 1886 represents the definite ending of the period of state restraint. Kessler, a participant in the events, described the period after this as, 'a chapter characterised by the struggle of the guild with police help against the gagged workers'.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the familiar house searches and individual arrests, it would be a period marked by a wave of expulsions, organizational bans, and newspaper confiscations after the earlier model of 1878/9. Bricklayer meetings in Berlin would be banned for two years. Such state actions were not unique to bricklayers nor to the city of Berlin, but the key agitational role played by some Berlin building industry employers following the 1885 bricklayers' strike when they petitioned Puttkamer to expel the strike's alleged leaders, the speed with which this request was met following promulgation of the decree, and the earlier prominence of bricklayer trade unionists in the vizier of former Berlin police president Madai (he was succeeded from 1885 by Bernhard von Richthofen), as previously noted, point to the fact that the 1885 strike was a significant contributory factor behind Puttkamer's decree of the following year.<sup>35</sup> Auer, writing in 1888, that is two years later and with the Anti-Socialist Law still in force, was quite insistent that there was a direct link between strike and decree and that the latter's promulgation followed the presentation to Puttkamer, from a deputation of guild masters, of a list of strike 'ringleaders' to be expelled, coupled with a request to close down the Berlin bricklayers' union: 'The strike decree was thereupon born, the bricklayers' and other craft unions closed down, and the leaders of the bricklayers' movement, Behrend, Wilke, and Kessler, who had never played a role in the political workers' movement, expelled from Berlin under Paragraph 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law.'<sup>36</sup> From a legal perspective, the Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885 was clearly an important event in the history of the relationship between trade unions and the state in Germany. Even without the localist dimension, it is surprising that it has

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<sup>33</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>34</sup> Gustav Kessler, 'An die Bauhandwerker Berlins!', *Volks-Tribüne*, 9th June 1888.

<sup>35</sup> Auer, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

not hitherto attracted closer study, for the strike, its background, and its outcome, contain within them many elements which portray the interplay for this period between the state, on the one hand, and the trade union movement, on the other, more typically than the much more well-known *Ruhr* miners' strike of 1889 where state intervention was famously fractured between a 'sympathetic' emperor and 'hard-line' Bismarck.

For localist trade unionists themselves, the memory of the 1885 strike formed a central pillar in the historiography of their movement as written down later by Kessler but it was also accorded importance for the centralist side by Fritz Paepflow.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Eduard Bernstein in his *Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiter-Bewegung* ('History of the Berlin Workers' Movement') barely mentioned it, noting only that during the course of the strike the bricklayers' wage demand was raised from 45 to 50 *Pfennig* per hour, and that a member of the strike committee, Heinrich Fassel, died in July 1885 following an attack on him by a strike breaker.<sup>38</sup> Writing more recently, Dirk Müller dates the split in the German bricklayers' movement from the strike, 'in the course of which the Berlin craft union, which led this strike movement, twice contravened the rules of the control committee, as it pursued it unannounced and in addition at a time when nearby – in Rathenow – a strike was fully under way.'<sup>39</sup> This, and the fact that the Berlin strike committee raised and spent its own strike funds, would be the subject of extensive debate at the following, third, national bricklayers' congress in Dresden in March 1886. Within the decentralised national network of bricklayers' organizations of which both the Berlin craft union and Hamburg 'control committee' (*Kontrollkommission*) were now part, however, the issue of the 1885 strike was a symptom rather than the cause of differences between the two union centres, for draft proposals from Hamburg for a centralised union had already been rejected before the strike at national bricklayer congresses in 1884 and 1885.<sup>40</sup> Paepflow even writes that the strike in Berlin (and that in Rathenow) actually had the effect of temporarily delaying the open outbreak of

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<sup>37</sup> Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, pp. 35-40; Paepflow, op. cit., pp. 119-122.

<sup>38</sup> Bernstein, op. cit., pp. 158-60. Bernstein did not, however, have access to the secret police files.

<sup>39</sup> Dirk Müller, op. cit., p. 37. See Ch. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., pp. 104-7, 113-116.

hostilities although the congress minutes from 1886 contain hostility enough.<sup>41</sup> Instead, it would be state intervention against the Berlin movement in the wake of the 1885 strike, rather than the strike itself, which would precipitate the national split on the one issue which had increasingly come to symbolise the differences of outlook at national bricklayer congresses up to this point: that of control of the bricklayers' trade journal.

The split in the German bricklayers' movement will be studied in detail later, alongside those among carpenters and pottery workers.<sup>42</sup> Excluding the legal dimension, the further significance of the 1885 Berlin bricklayers' strike is that rather than being the event which caused the first organizational break among German trade unionists along localist and centralist lines, which it did not, it represented the first public assertion of itself of Berlin's burgeoning localist bricklayer movement. Utilising established organizational tactics, such as the open public meeting and the wage committee, it did so not as an adjunct to national organization but to that of the local craft union which eschewed such organization in favour of political education. The 1885 strike was the first illustration before a wider public of localist organizing in practice. In this context, the eventual rehabilitation to which the strike contributed between the localist movement's later leading ideologue, Kessler, and the Berlin bricklayers, the relationship between whom had previously been acrimonious, was crucial, for it would be Kessler who one year later would draw on the strike's organizational practice when crystallising what came hitherto to be seen as the theoretical basis of the localist movement in a series of journal articles published between November 1886 and March 1887.<sup>43</sup> Whereas Dirk Müller over-estimated the strike's contribution, to the detriment of other reasons, towards the split between German bricklayer trade unionists which followed in its wake, German labour histories which have focussed on anarcho-syndicalism, the eventual successor to the localist trade union movement in Germany, have ignored it entirely.<sup>44</sup> This latter omission is all the more surprising when one finds mention of the strike in modern general histories of the city of Berlin, for example in David Clay

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 116; *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1886 Dresden.

<sup>42</sup> Part Three.

<sup>43</sup> See Ch. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Bock, op. cit.; Vogel, op. cit.; Rübner, op. cit.

Large's *Berlin*.<sup>45</sup> Neither Angela Vogel nor Hartmut Rübner, in their considerations of localism, drew attention to the 1885 strike, and barely to the organizational tactics which underpinned Kessler's theory. For Vogel, who compounded the earlier error of the social scientist Josef Schmöle in attributing Kessler's article series of 1886-7 to the banned *Bauhandwerker* ('The Building Worker'), Kessler's 'Organisationsplan' consisted simply of the combination of centralist and localist forms of organization with one another so as to allow the laws of association no pretext for dissolution. This would make possible the 'pooling of proletarian forces' and the 'union of the political and economic struggle'.<sup>46</sup> It is my contention that without the conjuncture of the Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885 with the rehabilitation of Kessler, the subsequent development of the localist movement, possibly without its leading ideologue, would probably have been a very different one, for the social democratic course which Kessler had steered for the movement diverted dramatically following his death. The 1885 strike represented the starting point of these developments and its narrative is included at this point for that reason also.

By 30<sup>th</sup> June 1879, of those trade unions represented at the Gotha trade union conference in February 1878, only that of the printers had managed to rescue its organization hitherto by transforming itself into a friendly society, the 'Support Association for German Print Workers' (*Unterstützungsverein Deutscher Buchdrucker*). This, with a new headquarters in less illiberal Stuttgart, was nonetheless place under close police supervision.<sup>47</sup> Berlin, subject from October 1878 to a 'minor state of siege' under Paragraph 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law, witnessed a large initial wave of expulsions of trade union activists, including Grottkau's old collaborator in the cause of party unification, Fritzsche. For bricklayers in Berlin, a lack of experienced agitators and organizers initially held back reorganization: 'the old leaders had either been expelled or stood to one side'.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, from 1881 Berlin's building workers were at the forefront of the new unionization drive in the capital city which preceded the

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<sup>45</sup> David Clay Large, *Berlin: A Modern History*, London 1992, p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> Vogel, p. 45; Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 118-19.

<sup>47</sup> Auer, op. cit., p. 107; Hermann Müller, op. cit., pp. 180-1.

<sup>48</sup> Paepelow, op. cit., p. 101.



German emperor's social legislation announcement on 17<sup>th</sup> November but gathered momentum after it: whereas at the beginning of 1882, there were 18 craft unions in Berlin, by January 1884 these numbered 'no less than fifty'.<sup>49</sup>

Bricklayers' reorganization in Berlin commenced with a public meeting of some 500 bricklayers on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1881. This called for the re-introduction of the 10 Hour Working Day first won by the strike of 1871.<sup>50</sup> The meeting also resolved to establish a local craft union. This duly took place, following registration of the proposed statutes with the police, at a further public meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1881.<sup>51</sup> Conrad emerged as the first chair of the new union, the *Verein zur Wahrung der Interessen der Maurer Berlins und Umgegend* ('Association for the Protection of the Interests of Bricklayers in Berlin and District'), and represented unionized bricklayers in the 'petition movement' of 1882. Although, as previously indicated above, he was supportive of Ferdinand Ewald's 'broad church' approach, he is also recorded as 'one of the most notorious and incendiary Social Democrat speakers' at this time.<sup>52</sup> Expelled from Berlin in October 1884 under the Anti-Socialist Law following his arrest for libelling an official (*Beamtenbeleidigung*) during a speech in which he criticised the local health insurance fund after it had struck off bricklayers in arrears, Conrad played no role in the 1885 strike.<sup>53</sup> The strike's immediate cause lay in the intransigent attitude of Berlin's building guild masters towards a wage demand from the city's bricklayers for an hourly rate of 45 *Pfennig*. The previous rate of 40 *Pfennig*, achieved along with the 10 Hour Working Day in 1883 following partial strikes,<sup>54</sup> was generally considered too low for the capital city – Paepelow wrote that an annual average bricklayer's earnings of 950 Marks were in no way sufficient to maintain a family household.<sup>55</sup> While he criticised the raising of the

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<sup>49</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> See Ch. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Paepelow, op. cit., pp. 101-2.

<sup>52</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 84-5.

<sup>53</sup> Conrad had been arrested on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1884 and settled at first in Halle. For his subsequent role in the national bricklayers' movement, see Ch. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Paepelow refers more generally to a 'Kleinkrieg'. Paepelow, op. cit., p. 120. See also: *Berliner Volksblatt* [henceforth: BV], 28<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>55</sup> Paepelow, op. cit.

wage demand to 50 *Pfennig* on the eve of the all-out strike as a tactical ruse designed to ensure that those bricklayers whose non-guild employers had conceded 45 *Pfennig* were kept on board, Paepflow admitted that there was no lack of voices in favour of a ‘radical increase’ (‘gründliche Aufbesserung’), that is, to 50 *Pfennig*.<sup>56</sup> Because of dissatisfaction with the journeymen’s wage committee which had accepted a staggered settlement to the strikes in 1883, in 1885 it was subject to re-election.<sup>57</sup> Carl Behrend, the 1885 strike’s ‘public face’, who had succeeded Conrad as chair of the bricklayers’ craft union in Berlin, was elected onto the committee at a meeting of some 2,000 bricklayers in the Berlin “Tonhalle” on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1885.<sup>58</sup> Subsequently, a letter from the wage committee to the building industry guild for Berlin, presenting the initial 45 *Pfennig* demand, was ignored.<sup>59</sup> A further mass meeting of Berlin bricklayers on 7<sup>th</sup> June then decided that the demand would be enforced from the next day, by partial strikes where necessary.<sup>60</sup>

On 9th June, Behrend reported that 4-5,000 bricklayers had stopped work.<sup>61</sup> At this stage, the call for an all-out strike was rejected. The wage committee, however, felt itself compelled to put the issue of a complete stoppage of work to an open mass meeting of Berlin’s bricklayers after the guild masters, in their mouthpiece journal, the *Baugewerks-Zeitung*, called for all striking workers to be sacked.<sup>62</sup> Both Behrend and Kessler, the latter in his capacity as editor of the *Bauhandwerker*,<sup>63</sup> were reported as cautioning against an all-out stoppage of work at a subsequent meeting of 5,000 Berlin

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 120-21.

<sup>57</sup> *BV*, 28th June 1885.

<sup>58</sup> *BV*, 4th June 1885.

<sup>59</sup> *BV*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>60</sup> *BV*, *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *BV*, 11th June 1885.

<sup>62</sup> *Baugewerks-Zeitung*, 10th June 1885. Cited in *BV*, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>63</sup> Shortly after his appointment as ‘technical advisor’ to the Federation of German Carpenters, Kessler had been introduced to the Berlin bricklayers’ craft union by Robert Conrad. He was then engaged as editor of the *Bauhandwerker* following the first national bricklayers’ congress in April 1884. Paepflow, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

bricklayers on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1885.<sup>64</sup> A threat from the guild masters that they had drawn up a blacklist (*Schwarze Liste*) of journeymen strikers, combined both with the guild's continued refusal to negotiate with the wage committee, and with the pressure which the guild exerted on independent masters and contractors to withdraw local settlements of 45 *Pfennig*, was followed by a hardening of bricklayer attitudes. At a public meeting on the following day, the wage committee now proposed to raise the wage demand to 50 *Pfennig* per hour.<sup>65</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> June, before 5,000 bricklayers, with 2-3,000 reported as having to wait outside, at a meeting in the "Philharmonie" described by the social democratic *Berliner Volksblatt* as, 'the largest and most impressive mass meeting of Berlin bricklayers since the great strike movement of 1871', Behrend now conceded that partial strikes were unlikely to achieve a wage demand considered insufficient by the majority of journeymen bricklayers.<sup>66</sup> An unstoppable conviction had now grown among Berlin's bricklayers that only a general stoppage of work would achieve a satisfactory result for all, as testified by the Berlin delegate to the following national bricklayers' congress in March 1886, F. Grothmann, who had continued to argue at this meeting against an all-out strike.<sup>67</sup> The final resolution put to the meeting noted in addition the frustration with the refusal of the guild masters to negotiate. Containing two demands, firstly for an hourly wage of 50 *Pfennig* and secondly, for the establishment of a commission of equal numbers of masters and journeymen to determine annual pay rates, it was accepted with just 16 votes against.<sup>68</sup>

The all-out strike began with a mass leafleting of building sites before 5 a.m. on the next morning, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1885.<sup>69</sup> In line with established practice, unmarried bricklayers and others originating from outside of Berlin were requested to leave the city for the

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<sup>64</sup> *BV*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1885. The reticence exhibited by both Behrend and Kessler in these reports in the Berlin social democratic newspaper contrasts sharply with Paepow's later implication that the 50 *Pfennig* demand was raised by the strike leadership to hold the strike together. See also: note 38 above.

<sup>65</sup> *BV*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>66</sup> *BV*, 19<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>67</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 16-17. The date given in the congress protocol of 17<sup>th</sup> July can be assumed to be a printer's error given that the all-out strike was already one month old at this point.

<sup>68</sup> *BV*, 19<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>69</sup> *BV*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

duration of the strike.<sup>70</sup> Two days later, on 20<sup>th</sup> June, the wage committee announced that 3,000 bricklayers had already left, based on returns from the administrative office of the Central Illness and Mortality Fund for German Bricklayers (*Zentral-Kranken und Sterbekasse der deutschen Maurer*).<sup>71</sup> Both Paepflow and Kessler gave a total figure of 1,000 for bricklayers who continued to work; these were described at a meeting on the all-out strike's first day as being either older bricklayers or young lads ('Burschen'), employed on public works.<sup>72</sup> A report in the *Berliner Volksblatt* estimated that up to 10,000 striking bricklayers had attended a 'monster meeting' at the Berlin "Tivoli" on 19<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>73</sup> It was clearly a big strike, to which the Berlin police and presumably Puttkamer, so attentive to the rights of 'worker candidates' in the city council elections two years previously, paid close attention. As early as the 20<sup>th</sup> June, the journeymen's committee – which was now referring to itself as the 'wage or strike committee' (*'Lohn-oder Streik-Kommission'*) – publicly refuted before an estimated 7,000 strikers, once again in the "Philharmonie" in Bernburgerstrasse, what it considered to be exaggerated reporting of minor arrests in Charlottenburg and Pankow.<sup>74</sup> Although Kessler, is not reported as speaking at this meeting, the calls for strict observation of Paragraph 153 of the Industrial Code, and for the avoidance of conflict with the police, on the grounds that only peaceful persuasion could win over indifferent work colleagues, bear the hallmarks of his later advice following the lifting of the ban on bricklayer meetings in Berlin in 1888.<sup>75</sup>

The framework of strike organization saw Berlin divided into eight strike districts or *Streikbezirke*, for which eight branch committees (*Filial-Kommissionen*), each comprising three members, had responsibility for local day-to-day running of the strike, including the picketing of building sites. In addition, strikers received a red card

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> BV, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1885.

<sup>72</sup> BV, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1885; Kessler, op. cit., pp. 37-39; Paepflow, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>73</sup> BV, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>74</sup> BV, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1885.

<sup>75</sup> BV, ibid.; Kessler, 'An die Bauhandwerker Berlins!', op. cit.

conferring legitimation.<sup>76</sup> Of those expelled from Berlin one year later, Behrend, in his capacity as chair, and Fritz Wilke, who succeeded Conrad as publisher of the *Bauhandwerker*, are named as regular speakers at the large strikers' meetings which represented the public face of the strike's organization.<sup>77</sup> Kessler, a carpenter and architect, is mentioned less often in the reports and presumably spoke only when invited to in his capacity as national journal editor. At a meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June, attended by 8,000, this time at the "Tivoli" in Kreuzberg, 'in part in the giant venue itself, in part in the brewery garden', Kessler, exercising caution, is said to have read out a letter from the wage committee to the Berlin police presidium and city magistrate which thanked them for their hitherto well-intentioned attitude.<sup>78</sup> This was not without reason, for several speakers (not named in the report in the *Berliner Volksblatt*) sought to refute charges in local newspapers – said to have come from official police sources – that the strike was stirred up by Social Democrat agitators who the authorities should expel, and they pointed instead to its 'spontaneous and pure trade union character'.<sup>79</sup> At the same meeting, Kessler lambasted the *Baugewerks-Zeitung* as the mouthpiece of a minority clique among Berlin's master builders, dedicated to their own personal advantage, in the pursuit of which no means were too questionable.<sup>80</sup> Feelers towards non-guild masters seem to have already been put out by this time, a week into the all-out strike, for at the very next strikers' meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> June, one such 'independent' who had been present the previous day and presumably heard Kessler's words was reported as having confided to a speaker (again not named) that the majority of local masters did not agree with the guild, whose intransigence they believed had transformed the dispute into an all-out strike.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> BV, op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup> BV, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. The re-occurrence of the same wording 'social democratic agitators' in these police reports, in the complaints of guild masters after the strike, and in the Puttkamer Strike Decree of April 1886, is striking.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> BV, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

At the onset of the strike, the wage committee expressed its hope for a decisive victory within 8 to 14 days.<sup>82</sup> One week later, on 25<sup>th</sup> June, Kessler still maintained publicly that instead of one-to-one negotiation with individual employers, only an agreement between the bricklayers' elected negotiating body (that is, the wage committee) on the one hand, and a joint employers' committee representative of both guild and independent masters and contractors on the other, would bring success.<sup>83</sup> In the short-term Kessler was wrong in this, for the division on the employers' side faced with firm solidarity on that of the bricklayers led to a rash of individual settlements, and a calling off of the all-out strike on 21<sup>st</sup> July.<sup>84</sup> An attempt at negotiation with the intransigent remaining guild masters failed, however, following their refusal to meet with the journeymen's wage committee as sole representative of the striking bricklayers.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, Kessler later dated the strike as ending on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1885; Paepflow merely stated that by that date, 'not counting later lockouts', the strike, given the large numbers on strike and its long duration, had cost very little in financial terms ('eine rechte kleine Summe').<sup>86</sup> The strictures of the wage committee at the beginning of the strike regarding inevitable sacrifices, when explaining the postponement of strike payments for the strike's first two weeks, had clearly contributed to this; the strike did, however, as already mentioned, cost the life of one striker.<sup>87</sup>

By the middle of August, the vast majority of Berlin bricklayers were receiving the 50 *Pfennig* hourly rate.<sup>88</sup> In the long-term, the slow petering out of the strike carried within it the seeds of a further strike to enforce the new wage: citing the *Baugewerks-Zeitung*, the liberal *Freisinnige Zeitung* reported on 20<sup>th</sup> August that two building sites remained picketed.<sup>89</sup> In this sense, Kessler's earlier insistence on a single negotiated settlement

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<sup>82</sup> *BV*, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>83</sup> *BV*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1885.

<sup>84</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p.121

<sup>85</sup> The guild masters wished to also include the non-striking 'Building Workers Trade Association' (*Gewerkverein der Bauhandwerker*). Paepflow, *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>86</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 38-9; Paepflow, op. cit.

<sup>87</sup> *BV*, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1885; Paepflow, op. cit.; Bernstein, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>88</sup> Paepflow, op. cit.; Kessler, op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> *Freisinnige Zeitung* [henceforth: *FZ*], 20<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1885.

proved prophetic. On 1<sup>st</sup> September, the *Bauhandwerker* was this time quoted as stating that the partial strikes would be pursued up to 1<sup>st</sup> October, ‘until the time of year makes it necessary to adopt winter quarters’, and resumed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1886 as necessary.<sup>90</sup> Behrend, speaking at a bricklayers’ meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> September was more emphatic still, stating that a failure to pay the 50 *Pfennig* hourly rate by the following spring would result in the ‘General-Strike’ once more being declared.<sup>91</sup> For the guild masters, hints at negotiation were coupled with talk of possible joint action against violations caused by work stoppages.<sup>92</sup> The *Freisinnige Zeitung* – critical of what it termed the ‘socialist bricklayers’, who ‘in their journal, the *Bauhandwerker*, continue to credit themselves with victory in the Berlin bricklayers’ strike, which does not, however, stop them from holding out the prospect of a more dogged and longer-lasting strike next year’<sup>93</sup> – saw in the parallel employer manoeuvrings a possible referral to Paragraph 153 of the Industrial Code, on grounds which included the deployment of physical pressure, threats, libel, and calls to boycott.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, the guild masters were reported as early as 20<sup>th</sup> August 1885 – that is, while partial strikes were still on-going – to be pushing for the introduction of a special paragraph directed at workers’ leaders regarding incitement to breach of contract.<sup>95</sup>

Such calls were reminiscent of the failed campaign by some employers’ circles in the early 1870s to toughen up the punitive aspects of the Industrial Code of 1869.<sup>96</sup> From the evidence of police sources themselves, it is clear that a Berlin building employers’ delegation following the 1885 strike would have met with a sympathetic reception. The following passage from the report of the Berlin police president (*Polizeipräsident*) for 24<sup>th</sup> July 1886 makes this especially clear. Beginning with the craft unions he wrote:

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<sup>90</sup> *FZ*, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1885: ‘bis die Jahreszeit es notwendig macht, Winterquartiere zu beziehen’.

<sup>91</sup> *FZ*, 15<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1885.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Statut der Vereinigung von Inhabern Berliner Baugeschäfte’, *FZ*, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1885.

<sup>93</sup> *FZ*, 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1885.

<sup>94</sup> *FZ*, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1885.

<sup>95</sup> *FZ*, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1885.

<sup>96</sup> See Ch. 1.

These are not only hotbeds of Social Democracy but have also taken over leadership of the campaign for better wages, in part leading it down paths of illegality as they on the one hand seek to force employers to give way to their demands by means of work stoppages (so-called boycotts), *the sending away of unmarried workers, and blocking recruitment from outside*, and on the other, to force workers who think differently to obey their commands through threats and violence. As a result workers in Berlin and other locations who do not wish to participate in a strike when ordered to do so repeatedly have to be protected by police officers and escorted to and from the workplace'.<sup>97</sup>

The 'sending way of unmarried workers, and blocking recruitment from outside', in particular, reads as a recapitulation of the 1885 bricklayers' strike itself. The mediaeval tactic of building workers blacking a town by physically removing their labour, which the seasonal pattern of building work in nineteenth-century Germany continued to foster, was one which even regulated Prussia found difficult to counter and to have been seen to be attempting to do so would have run counter to the whole movement in the direction of freedom of labour from 1811 onwards. Guild masters, the police presidium, and Puttkamer, as interior minister, alike were concerned rather with the importation of outside labour and with countering the efficacy of picketing, as an example of which one reads on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1885 of Berlin building trades masters bringing in non-resident journeymen under police guard in support of one of their number, a "Meister Eckert". This attempt at strike-breaking failed however when, 'on Saturday all forty men gathered on site laid down work again'.<sup>98</sup> Although Puttkamer would specifically cite such collective action by organized workers in his 1886 decree as grounds for an intensified use of existing legislation, in practice recourse by the Prussian authorities in Berlin to Paragraph 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law and to the Law of Association, respectively, focussed more on the agitational role of Social Democrat 'leaders' and in

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<sup>97</sup> *My italics in quotation.* Polizeipräsident Bernhard von Richthofen, 'Übersicht über die allgemeine Lage der sozialdemokratischen und revolutionären Bewegung', 24<sup>th</sup> July 1886. Reprinted in Fricke/Knaack, pp. 290-317 (pp. 296-7): 'Dieselben sind nicht nur Brutstätten der Sozialdemokratie, sondern haben sich auch der Führerschaft in der Lohnbewegung bemächtigt und diese zum Teil bereits in ungesetzliche Bahnen gelenkt, indem sie einerseits durch Arbeitssperrung (sogenanntes Boykotten), Entfernung der unverheirateten Arbeiter aus dem Orte und Verhinderung des Zuzuges von außerhalb die Arbeitgeber zur Erfüllung ihrer Forderungen, andererseits durch Drohungen und Tätlichkeiten andersdenkende Arbeiter zum Gehorsam gegen ihre Anordnungen zu zwingen suchen. So ist es z. B. in Berlin und auch an andern Orten wiederholt vorgekommen, daß Arbeiter, welche sich an einem von den Vereinen angeordneten Streik nicht beteiligen wollten, vor Mißhandlungen seitens der streikenden Genossen durch Aufsichtsbeamte geschützt und nach und von der Arbeitsstelle begleitet werden mußten.'

<sup>98</sup> *FZ*, 1st Sept. 1885.



particular on the alleged ‘political’ nature of the Berlin bricklayers’ craft union, and wage and press committees. Ordinary criminal law, the *Strafgesetzbuch*, most specifically consisting of breach of the peace type charges, typically brought to bear against individuals finding themselves in conflict situations with the police, appears to have been deemed inadequate by Puttkamer, perhaps because Kessler's advice in particular on the avoidance of violence was generally heeded during and subsequent to the 1885 strike. Instead, Puttkamer’s decree would concern itself rather with, ‘excesses which without necessarily falling under the term of a criminal offence nonetheless bear the character of unlawful use of force which the police have full cause to actively oppose at the behest of those damaged’.<sup>99</sup>

Given the publicly stated preparedness of the Berlin bricklayers’ craft union to strike again from spring 1886, and following the election of a new wage committee at a public meeting of bricklayers in the “Tonhalle” earlier that year on 7<sup>th</sup> February,<sup>100</sup> it comes as no surprise that the very first sentence of Puttkamer's strike decree of 11<sup>th</sup> April 1886 reads, ‘There are grounds to assume that more or less widespread work stoppages will occur in the near future encompassing domestic trade and industry.’<sup>101</sup> By the end of May, over thirty trade union meetings had been banned in Berlin alone.<sup>102</sup> For the bricklayers, the banning of a meeting in the “Tivoli” scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> May inaugurated a period of two years during which all meetings of bricklayers independent of the guild were banned. These included those of the hitherto uncontroversial Central

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<sup>99</sup> ‘Streikerlaß des preußischen Innenministers Robert von Puttkamer vom 11. April 1886’, Auer, op. cit., pp. 103-5 (p. 103): ‘Ausschreitungen, welche, ohne gerade mit Notwendigkeit unter den Begriff von Straftaten zu fallen, doch den Charakter der widerrechtlichen Gewaltsamkeit in dem Grade an sich tragen, daß die Polizei vollen Anlaß und Beruf hat, sich ihnen auf Anrufen der durch sie Beschädigten thatkräftig entgegenzustellen.’

<sup>100</sup> ‘Die Berliner Maurerbewegung seit dem Puttkamer'schen Streikerlaß. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Koalitionsrechtes in Deutschland’, Part 1, *Volks-Tribüne*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1888.

<sup>101</sup> Auer, op. cit.: ‘Es ist Grund zur Annahme vorhanden, daß in der nächsten Zeit auf dem Gebiete der inländischen Industrie- und Gewerbetätigkeit mehr oder weniger umfassende Arbeitseinstellungen auftreten werden.’

<sup>102</sup> Thümmeler, pp. 49-50. In addition to the Berlin bricklayers’ craft union, Thümmeler names the Berlin Association of Working Women (*Verein der Arbeiterinnen Berlins*) and the Union of Seamstresses (*Fachverein der Näherinnen*) as having meetings banned by the police at this time. Ibid.

Illness and Mortality Fund.<sup>103</sup> Citing Paragraph 8 of the law of association, both the bricklayers' craft union and the press committee which published the *Bauhandwerker* were declared dissolved on 21<sup>st</sup> May.<sup>104</sup> A reported countryside excursion by several hundred bricklayers to Grünau, south of Berlin, on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1886, undertaken in an attempt to circumvent the ban on their meetings, illustrates the tense nature of relations between police and bricklayers in the new more repressive climate.<sup>105</sup> At the end of a day of countryside pursuit during which, 'the displeasure of the crowd understandably increased',<sup>106</sup> the actions of a charging mounted policeman in tearing the leggings of one bricklayer with his spurs led to an exchange of words with the assembled crowd in the course of which the police officer drew his sabre, seriously injuring four bystanders.<sup>107</sup> Following several arrests, unsuccessful charges were pursued by the authorities on this occasion under the criminal law on grounds of breach of the peace. The lesson, however, seems to have made its mark, for the sympathetic *Berliner Volks-Tribüne* later wrote of the worst no longer being unexpected by Berlin's bricklayers who became accustomed to not being allowed to hold meetings.<sup>108</sup> An appeal in person by three members of the bricklayers' wage committee to police president Richthofen one year later, on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1887, was followed by police raids on their homes and the final banning of the committee 'as a continuation' of the banned Berlin bricklayers' craft union, on 1<sup>st</sup> June. A petition in the same month to the *Reichstag* containing 10,000 signatures which called for the full restoration of the legal rights to association and

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<sup>103</sup> *Volks-Tribüne*, op. cit. The bricklayers' mutual fund was also known under a short title, *Grundstein zur Einigkeit*. See note 7 above.

<sup>104</sup> 'Anordnung des Berliner Polizeipräsidenten vom 21.5.1886'. Reprinted in *Zeitschrift der Zimmerkunst: Organ des Verbandes deutscher Zimmerleute*, June 1886.

<sup>105</sup> *Volks-Tribüne*, op. cit.; Richthofen, op. cit., p.295. While the *Berliner Volks-Tribüne* details an excursion of some 500 bricklayers ('etwa 500 Mann') on *Himmelfahrtstag* (Ascension Day) 1886, Richthofen's police report talks of an excursion of several thousand ('mehrere tausend') Social Democrats on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1886 (that is, the same day). Given the unlikelihood of the former, sympathetic, source underestimating the number of participants, the latter is more likely an exaggeration.

<sup>106</sup> *Volks-Tribüne*, op. cit.: 'der Unwille der Menge wuchs erklärlicher Weise'.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. The police report runs: 'also at this point the officers were violently attacked from out of the crowd and had to make use of their weapons so as not to succumb' ('auch hier wurden die Beamten aus der Menge heraus tätlich angegriffen und mußten, um nicht zu unterliegen, von ihren Waffen Gebrauch machen'). Richthofen, op. cit.

<sup>108</sup> *Volks-Tribüne*, op. cit.

assembly to Berlin's journeymen bricklayers was not called for discussion.<sup>109</sup> It would not be until eleven months later, in May 1888, after a full period of two years, that a public bricklayers' meeting could once more be held again in the German capital.<sup>110</sup> By that point in time, as the next chapter will detail, the national bricklayers' movement had effectively fractured into two, localist and centralist, halves, a split which would not be without consequence for the movement in Berlin itself.

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<sup>109</sup> 'Die Berliner Maurerbewegung seit dem Puttkamer'schen Streikerlaß. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Koalitionsrechtes in Deutschland', Part 2., *Volks-Tribüne*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1888.

<sup>110</sup> Kessler, 'An die Bauhandwerker Berlins!', op. cit. See also: Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, p. 62; Paepflow, op. cit., p. 173.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### *Der Bauhandwerker: the localist vs. centralist debate among Germany's bricklayers, 1884-87*

At the same time as coming into conflict with the state in Prussia, Berlin's localist bricklayers had become involved in an organizational dispute with bricklayers in Hamburg which represented the first stirrings of a twenty year long debate on the forms to be taken by social democratic trade unionism in Germany. Unlike earlier debates among Social Democrats, in particular that at the Stuttgart party congress of the SDAP in 1870, the existence of separate trade unions was not disputed. Nor, in Anti-Socialist Law Germany, did Yorck's single confederation of all trade unions ('Die Union') assume the importance it later would. In its origins, the dispute among Germany's bricklayer trade unionists was one of tactics: for localists, it was about protecting union organization in a climate of political repression; for centralists, first and foremost a question of expanding membership. The localist-led Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885, which was the subject of extensive discussion at the subsequent third national bricklayers' congress in Dresden in 1886, contributed to a hardening of positions, at which point the dispute also took a negative, personal, turn. The trigger of the parting of the ways, however, when it came one year later following the fourth national congress in Bremen, was not the 1885 strike but the battle between Berlin and Hamburg for control of the then bricklayers' trade journal, the *Bauhandwerker*. Following the 1886 congress, and in the wake of Puttkamer's decree, the Berlin police had raided the homes of the journal's editor, Gustav Kessler, and its publisher, Fritz Wilke. Kessler and Wilke, and the strike leader Carl Behrend, were then expelled from Berlin. The subsequent publication of *two* replacement journals from Hamburg and Brunswick, namely the *Neuer Bauhandwerker* and the *Baugewerkschafter*, representing the centralist and localist sides respectively, meant that the debate from that date onwards attracted a wider public.

Trade union reorganization among Hamburg's bricklayers after 1878 had occurred later than that in Berlin. At first sight, this appears paradoxical for unlike Berlin, Hamburg had not, in the immediate aftermath of the promulgation of the Anti-Socialist Law, been

subject to its most stringent provisions, namely those under Paragraph 28, which enabled local police forces, 'where not already allowed by local laws', to ban all unregistered meetings and publications, but more significantly, to expel those persons deemed to constitute a danger to public security.<sup>1</sup> Despite such apparent advantage, it had, however, been bricklayers in Berlin, not Hamburg, who had reorganized first. The explanation as to why this had been the case would appear to lie in the *later* application of Paragraph 28 to the city of Hamburg. This occurred on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1880, at a point in time when the Berlin labour movement had had two full years to recover from the initial shock of its almost complete suppression. Its extension to Hamburg had been preceded by a rapprochement between the city's *Senat* and the imperial government in Berlin, triggered by Georg Wilhelm Hartmann's *Reichstag* by-election victory for the Social Democrats in April 1880. Shortly afterwards, nearby Altona, then part of Prussia, had been incorporated into the *Zollverein* customs union on 19<sup>th</sup> May. In return for implementing Paragraph 28, or the 'minor state of emergency', the *Senat* extracted a concession on international goods and was to be allowed to keep its free trade storage and production facilities when it itself joined the *Zollverein* in 1888. A wave of expulsions of Social Democrats and trade unionists followed, beginning on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1880. Among the seventy-five persons immediately expelled were the former national bricklayer union officials, Carl Vater and Hans Schöning, as well as the Kapell brothers, for the carpenters, and Wilhelm Wissman, Fritz Hurlemann's earlier ally and former chair of the German Labourers Union.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, a secret bricklayers' meeting to discuss the arbitrary behaviour of charge-hands and employers is reported to have been held no earlier than one year later at the end of 1881, that is, some six months after the founding of the Berlin bricklayers' craft union.<sup>3</sup> Following two failed applications from the Hamburg bricklayers' representative Ernst Knegendorf for police permission to hold

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<sup>1</sup> '(Nr. 1271.) Gesetz gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie. Vom 21. 10.1878', *Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt*, 34 (1878), p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> Vater had been elected to the presidium of the Bricklayers Association alongside Hurlemann as early as January 1870. *Protokoll der Generalversammlung des Allgemeinen deutschen Zimmerer-Vereins und des Allgemeinen deutschen Maurer-Vereins im Januar 1870 zu Berlin*, Berlin 1870, p. 7. Cited in Albrecht, p. 67, note 131. For Schöning, see esp. Ch. 3 above. Wissmann's expulsion from Hamburg was his second; he had been expelled from Berlin previously. Auer, Vol. 2, pp. 89, 96.

<sup>3</sup> Paepelow, *Organisationen*, p. 102. Ignaz Auer recounts that 'country walks', as in Berlin, were employed by Social Democrats in Hamburg at this time as a tactic to get round the police ban on public meetings. Auer, op. cit., p. 23.

public meetings, the ban on workers' meetings in Hamburg was finally lifted in early 1882 following the intervention of the Progressive Liberal senator, Heinrich Gieschen.<sup>4</sup> The Hamburg bricklayers' craft union was shortly afterwards founded at a public meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1882.<sup>5</sup>

Knegendorf, the first chair of the new bricklayers' union, enjoyed a cordial relationship with several deputies of the lower house of Hamburg's parliament, the *Bürgerschaft*. His influence was such that when in 1885 he reported on the botched construction of the city's stock exchange, this triggered a debate in the council chamber.<sup>6</sup> Such co-operation under the police regime in Berlin, even before Puttkamer's decree, would have been unthinkable. The subsequent alignment of the Hamburg craft union with the 'reformist' Social Democrat *Reichstag* deputy Karl Frohme, one of those attacked by the party leadership for their role in the national parliament during the *Dampfervorlage* ('steamboat bill') debate when they had supported colonial subsidies, emphasised the difference in outlook.<sup>7</sup> The Hamburg labour historian Helga Kutz-Bauer summarises the Hamburg view thus: 'that an improvement in working conditions could be achieved by organization and influence on the (Hamburg) state'.<sup>8</sup> At a time of renewed state repression in Prussia, the latter appeared illusory to Berlin bricklayer trade unionists. 'Localism', the maintenance of local independence, was the means by which the connection between political Social Democracy, the ultimate guarantor of workers' rights, and trade unionism, could be defended against the encroachments of, in particular, the Prussian Law of Association. From the Hamburg perspective, in contrast,

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<sup>4</sup> Paepelow, op. cit., pp. 102-3.

<sup>5</sup> 'Bericht Rosalowsky vom 25.7.1890: Staatsarchiv Hamburg (StAH), CI VII, Lit Lb No 28, Vol. 14, Fasc. 1. Cited in Helga Kutz-Bauer, *Arbeiterschaft, Arbeiterbewegung und bürgerlicher Staat in der Zeit der Großen Depression: Eine regional- und sozialgeschichtliche Studie zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung im Großraum Hamburg 1873 bis 1890*, Bonn 1988, p. 217, note 29.

<sup>6</sup> StAH, PP, V104a, Vol.1, 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1885. Cited in Kutz-Bauer, p. 219, note 38.

<sup>7</sup> Frohme, *Reichstag* deputy for Altona, had been approached by the Berlin *Presskommission* in early 1885 as a possible replacement for Kessler as editor of *Der Bauhandwerker* at the time of their dispute with the latter. Engaged by the Hamburg 'agitation committee' as a contributor to *Der neue Bauhandwerker* from 1886, Frohme became a strong opponent of Kessler. Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, pp. 42-3; Paepelow, op. cit., pp. 118, 133; Paepelow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 316.

<sup>8</sup> Kutz-Bauer, p. 220: 'daß durch Organisation und Einwirkung auf den (Hamburger) Staat eine Verbesserung der Verhältnisse erreicht werden könne'.

‘political neutrality’ was the quickest means to re-building union membership for which the avoidance of any open affiliation between the trade unions and the outlawed SAPD remained the prerequisite. Increased state repression appears, at first, not to have constituted an essential part of this side of the argument.

The debate between the two sides was initially played out at the first of seven national bricklayers' congresses which took place before the establishment of the Central Union of Bricklayers in 1891. This first of these took place in Berlin on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 1884 and followed calls from Knegendorf and from Robert Conrad in Berlin. Prior to the congress, Knegendorf had in addition circulated a proposal on behalf of the Hamburg craft union which called for the establishment of a national bricklayers' union, arguing that a continued inward flow of labour from more disadvantaged regions rendered local successes illusory in the long term.<sup>9</sup> At the congress itself he added that the duty of a union was not to provoke war with the masters but to effect a peaceful solution of the work question (*Berufsfrage*) on a legal basis.<sup>10</sup> For the Berlin union, Conrad, replying to Knegendorf, referred to Paragraphs 8 and 24 of the Prussian and Saxon Laws of Association respectively, which forbade the combination of local craft unions, as ‘political associations’, with one another. A participant in the previous year's trial of local trade unionists in Berlin, he argued that the prosecution of just a few members of a local branch could bring the whole union down. In addition, the then economic situation did not favour newer, weaker, local craft unions joining a national body.<sup>11</sup> It was the intervention at this point of the veteran Hamburg bricklayer Thomas Hartwig which produced the compromise which would provide the organizational framework for relations between the Hamburg and Berlin craft unions for the next two years. Hartwig expressed support for the proposal of another ‘veteran’, the Brunswick delegate, Heinrich Rieke, for the establishment of a trade journal after the model of the earlier *Grundstein*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time as recommending the avoidance of centralization

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<sup>9</sup> Paepelow, op. cit., pp. 104-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1884 Berlin, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 7-8. This agreement did not prevent Rieke and Hartwig from trading mutual recriminations at the following year's congress in Hanover, where Hartwig repudiated Rieke's accusation that Hamburg

at that point, he expressed support for it in the long-term utilising Marxist terms at odds with the 'social peace' position of Knegendorf. Drawing an unfavourable comparison between the local craft unions and centralised bodies such as the armed forces, the postal service, and even the German state itself, Hartwig added that,

Imbued as we are with the idea that the craft unions comprise the basis of the whole workers' movement, nevertheless these on their own are not in a position to take up the main fight against centralised capital, it is therefore necessary that related unions join together to make common front against oppression.<sup>13</sup>

Such a formulation was atypical of the wider debate which both sides came to see as pitting 'realist' centralists against 'political' localists. Conrad, for his part, expressed support for the journal but with a caveat which would prove fateful for himself personally: 'under the condition, however, that this be published either by a colleague as a private concern or by an existing bricklayers' craft union'.<sup>14</sup> Re-formulated as a proposal, this method of production was unanimously accepted. At the same time, the in-attendance *Reichstag* deputy Wilhelm Hasenclever recommended that the new journal serve as an intellectual link between the unions and their members.<sup>15</sup> Berlin was proposed and accepted as the place of publication and its five congress delegates subsequently mandated at a meeting of local bricklayers to organize this.<sup>16</sup> This was the first Berlin *Presskommission* ('press committee'). The *Bauhandwerker* appeared for the first time as a pilot issue on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1884 with Conrad and Kessler as respectively publisher and editor.<sup>17</sup>

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had been guilty of allowing the *Grundstein* to fold in 1878. *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, pp. 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 11: 'Trotzdem wir durchdrungen sind, daß die Vereine der Kernpunkt der ganzen Arbeiterbewegung sind, sind sie einzeln doch nicht im Stande, jenen Riesenkampf mit dem zentralisierten Kapital aufzunehmen, deshalb ist es nöthig, daß diese Vereine mit gleicher Tendenz sich zusammenschließen, um Front zu machen gegen die Unterdrückung'.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Paeplow, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 27-8.

<sup>17</sup> The first numbered issue of *Der Bauhandwerker* appeared on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1884.



Kessler is not recorded as having attended the Berlin bricklayers' congress of 1884 and therefore played no part in the presentation of the localist position at it. His name, however, became personally identified with trade union localism in subsequent years to the detriment of predecessors such as Conrad and Rieke, whose earlier contributions are not, for example, recorded at all by Dirk Müller. There are two possible reasons for this omission in the case of Müller. Firstly, a primary source he cites, Paepow, neglected to mention Rieke's attendance at the 1884 congress, and therefore the latter's crucial role as originator of the trade journal proposal. Paepow attributed this instead to the politician Hasenclever.<sup>18</sup> The second possible reason is the estrangement which ensued between Conrad and Kessler following the former's expulsion from Berlin under the Anti-Socialist Law in October 1884.<sup>19</sup> Paepow, in his account of the affair, expressed a personal dislike for both parties to such an extent as to render it tempting to disregard his whole account, and with it the early role of Conrad, for lack of objectivity. In addition, the early falling out between the editor and the publisher of the *Bauhandwerker* represented a temporary break in the general pattern of localist alignments which it is tempting to overlook. Although Kessler's estrangement from Conrad *was* accompanied by a rupture between Kessler and Conrad's former press committee colleagues in Berlin, which was in turn followed by overtures from Hamburg, most especially from Knegendorf, for Kessler to edit the bricklayers' journal from there, this rupture was slowly overcome following the 1885 Berlin bricklayers' strike. In the immediate aftermath of this, Kessler had attracted the strongest invective from his erstwhile Progressive Liberal colleagues, thereby allaying bricklayer suspicions,<sup>20</sup> and in November 1885 Kessler finally declined Knegendorf's offer.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the affair was cited later by Kessler's enemies at the following year's national bricklayers' congress who questioned his commitment and motivation and therefore requires explanation in a focussed study.

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<sup>18</sup> Müller, as did Adolf Braun who reviewed Paepow's book in *Die neue Zeit*, incorrectly lists the book's title as 'Die *Organisation* der Maurer Deutschlands' (*my emphasis*). Dirk Müller, op. cit., p. 360; Adolf Braun, in *Die neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, 19 (1900-1901), 1.14 (1901), 442-3.

<sup>19</sup> Ch. 4, note 53.

<sup>20</sup> *FZ*, 27th Aug. 1885.

<sup>21</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 43. Cited in Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 312.

The estrangement between the erstwhile allies – Conrad had introduced Kessler to his bricklayer colleagues in Berlin - arose following a letter which Kessler wrote to Conrad on the latter's arrival in Halle following his expulsion from Berlin. Dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1884, Kessler expressed his frustration in it with the remaining Berlin press committee members and instead proposed that he and Conrad form a public company (*öffentliche Handelsgesellschaft*) to carry on publication of the *Bauhandwerker*. Both Paepow and Adam Drunsel, a potter and like Paepow a later national official of his trade union, devote considerable detail to this letter in their respective union histories and in particular to Kessler's suggestion in it that he and Conrad pay themselves a bonus from any operating surplus. For Drunsel, this clearly contradicted the bricklayer journal's founding statement, which had read that, 'the publishers stand by the principle that apart from appropriate and proper payment for services rendered, no-one shall make any kind of profit. The *Bauhandwerker* is no money-making scheme.'<sup>22</sup> By Kessler's account, Ernst Knegendorf at the time felt differently. Reporting back to the Hamburg craft union on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1884 following a visit to Berlin at Conrad's request, he reported nothing amiss and praised the quality of Kessler's articles, which several journals had reprinted.<sup>23</sup> A committee of investigation, presumably with Knegendorf's participation, found that Conrad had 'knowingly and wilfully deceived' ('wissentlich und absichtlich getäuscht') Kessler as to the journal's ownership status and Conrad was replaced as publisher by Wilke: Conrad's suggestion of such a private undertaking at the preceding national congress had not been forgotten.<sup>24</sup>

Paepow confirmed Knegendorf's support for Kessler at this time and claimed that later publication of the contents of the letter was prevented by Knegendorf at the third national bricklayers' congress in 1886 after it had been brought to the attention of the congress bureau by former Bricklayers' Federation treasurer, Hartwig Walther.<sup>25</sup> One can surmise from Paepow's account that the intervention of the 'veteran' Walther had

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<sup>22</sup> *Bauhandwerker*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1884. Cited in Drunsel, pp. 107-8. See also: Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 32. See also: Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 309.

<sup>25</sup> Paepow, ibid., p. 310. Walther's name, however, does not appear among the list of delegates for the 1886 congress. *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden, pp. 3-5.

been prompted solely by Conrad, given that the latter had already fully extinguished any sympathy he may have enjoyed among press committee members when he attacked them at the previous year's congress. Elsewhere, Paepflow speculated that Conrad had made Knegendorf aware of the letter but that the latter 'had not played an open hand'.<sup>26</sup> For Paepflow this appeared not quite to have been the end of the matter for he commented in summarising that, 'in any case as turned out later, they were both as bad as each other', a probable reference to Conrad's being charged in 1887 by the SAPD's *Eiserne Mask* ('Iron Mask') security organization with being a police spy.<sup>27</sup> This followed his trial and acquittal in Breslau alongside six other Social Democrats of state charges of being a member of a secret society. Conrad was innocent of party treachery but was not fully rehabilitated by the national party until the SPD party congress at Görlitz in 1921 following a campaign supported by Eduard Bernstein and by the early *Reichstag* ally of the Hamburg centralisers, Frohme.<sup>28</sup>

Paepflow reserved his strongest invective, however, for Kessler, who he described as being 'the Mephisto of the Labour Movement'.<sup>29</sup> Much criticism of Kessler, including that of Paepflow, centred on suspicion of Kessler's career hitherto as a *Regierungsbaumeister* ('state registered architect'): by 1887 carpenters in Hamburg were publicly inveighing that Kessler's message of support to the first 'congress' (actually constituent founding *conference*) of the Federation of German Carpenters on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1883 amounted to nothing more than a 'shamefaced job application' ('verschämtes Stellengesuch').<sup>30</sup> When this support had been offered, however, and read out to general applause, the new union's president Albert Marzian had referred to Kessler as 'the honoured and venerable state-registered architect, *Herr* Gustav Kessler, well-known to Berlin's carpenters'.<sup>31</sup> Kessler had in fact been apprenticed as a carpenter

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<sup>26</sup> Paepflow, *Zur Geschichte*, p.310: 'Mit offenen Karten hat auch Knegendorf nicht gespielt.'

<sup>27</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Frohme, *Politische Polizei und Justiz im monarchistischen Deutschland (Erinnerungen von Karl Frohme)*, Hamburg 1926, pp. 26-7.

<sup>29</sup> Paepflow, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> *Der Verband deutscher Zimmerleute (Lokalverband Hamburg) contra Gustav Keßler*, Hamburg 1887. Cited in Schmöle, Vol. 2, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> Schmöle, *ibid.*, p. 28.

and offered his support on the basis of his earlier long experience as such.<sup>32</sup> Reporting on his appointment as ‘technical advisor’ (*Sachverständiger*) to the new union at a meeting of its executive committee on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1883, the national carpenters’ journal, the *Zeitschrift der Zimmerkunst* (‘Journal for the Carpentry Art’), described him as ‘a sincere friend of the movement’ (‘ein aufrichtiger Freund der Bewegung’).<sup>33</sup> Marzian elsewhere acknowledged Kessler’s humble beginnings when he wrote of him having earlier in life shared the ‘stresses and strains’ (‘Strapazen’) of the journeyman.<sup>34</sup> Shortly before, speaking to the Berlin Chamber of Architects on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1883, Kessler had publicly criticised those building employers who blindly sought to take advantage of wage competition (the very issue which would prompt Berlin carpenters to call for the establishment of a national union).<sup>35</sup> When he wrote in the pilot issue of the *Bauhandwerker* on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1884 that his contact with local workers’ circles was no recent thing, Kessler was not stating an untruth.<sup>36</sup>

Kessler made his debut before a national bricklayer audience at the second national bricklayers' congress held in Hanover from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March 1885. His presence, in his capacity as editor of the *Bauhandwerker*, was uncontested although criticism of his editorship was aired during a debate on the journal. From Hamburg, Hartwig expressed his personal opinion that, ‘that which comes from Berlin is for the most part regarded with distrust’.<sup>37</sup> Conrad, in a complete volte-face, now stated that ownership of the journal lay with Germany's bricklayers as a whole, not just those in the capital city.<sup>38</sup> The Dresden delegate Heinrich Eltzschig declared that for him there was much about the matter of Conrad against Kessler which remained unclear and that he was in possession of letters which weakened trust in the editor. He demanded clarity in the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, No. 7 (Jan. 1884).

<sup>34</sup> Albert Marzian, ‘Kameraden des deutschen Zimmerhandwerks!’, *Zimmerkunst*, No. 6 (Dec. 1883).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Bauhandwerker*, op. cit. Cited in Paepow, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1885 Hanover, p.17: ‘Was von Berlin kommt, wird meistens überall mit Mißtrauen betrachtet.’

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

matter.<sup>39</sup> For Berlin, the delegate Carl Blaurock defended the press committee against all accusations, especially those of Conrad, while Wilke did likewise for the *Bauhandwerker*. Carl Behrend, who would later lead of that summer's strike, repudiated charges that Berlin was pursuing politics in the trade union movement.<sup>40</sup> Knegendorf's intervention from the chair effectively postponed further debate to the following year's congress: as far as Hamburg was concerned, the affair of Conrad against Kessler was settled; although he did not personally believe that Conrad's honour had subsequently been defamed in the pages of the *Bauhandwerker*, he would ensure that a statement from Hamburg rectified any slight.<sup>41</sup> Knegendorf was, however, unsure as to the journal's future place of publication, noting Kessler's own remark that Berlin lacked in agitational forces equipped with the necessary abilities.<sup>42</sup> This last remark points to lingering tension between Kessler and the Berlin press committee and may explain why the latter body turned to the new national 'control committee' in Hamburg a month later for their opinion on his possible removal. The Hamburg committee refused this.

Kessler, who carried no mandate, had left the 1885 congress before the decision to set up a control committee had been taken. On centralization, he had confined himself merely to seconding Conrad's known opposition, and referred to several recent judicial decisions in which the application of laws of association had been decisive.<sup>43</sup> Rieke, who with Knegendorf had called the congress, was much more forceful. The future *Reichstag* deputy insisted that the trade union movement was in no position to effect permanent change: this was the task of legislation. On this basis, centralization should be set aside for the time being in favour of agitation around the maximum working day, the abolition of those paragraphs of the Industrial Code which reduced workers' freedom of association, and in support of the Workers' Protection Bill before the *Reichstag*.<sup>44</sup> In place of a national union, Rieke seconded Behrend's proposal for the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 19, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 20, 24-5. Knegendorf had personally opposed any apology to Conrad but was in a minority when the vote was taken. Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

appointment of a national committee: this would have regulatory powers over the *Bauhandwerker*, and over work stoppages, agitation, and travel support.<sup>45</sup> Knegendorf, arguing once more for national organization, defended himself against the charge that he strove for centralization after the model of the Federation of German Carpenters, where allegations of financial impropriety had led to the dismissal of its first national secretary. Instead, he pointed to the less top-down structure of the national stonemasons' union in which local craft unions maintained their independent existence.<sup>46</sup> Without centralization, there could be no national fund in support of travelling journeymen; in addition, the limited success of the previous year's bricklayers' strike in Leipzig demonstrated the necessity of a national union.<sup>47</sup> This, however, remained a minority view, held almost exclusively by the Hamburg delegates, and in the face of overwhelming opposition Knegendorf withdrew his proposal in favour of that of Behrend.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, Behrend in his turn withdrew his own proposal in favour of one from the Zwickau delegate, Louis Eckstein, which entrusted the new control committee with somewhat stronger powers.<sup>49</sup> Both Kessler and Paepflow agreed that the five-person committee, consisting of Knegendorf, Hartwig, Adolf Dammann, Heinrich Lorenz, and Ludwig Limbach, was empowered to decide on all aspects of the journal including its title, writing style, and distribution, as well as being entrusted with responsibility for work stoppages, travel support, agitation, organization, and for 'alle den Congreß der Maurer Deutschlands betreffende Fragen' – that is, for all questions to do with the bricklayers' annual national congress.<sup>50</sup> Against the intentions of both Knegendorf and Behrend – for Knegendorf, his home city did not command enough respect – the 1885 congress also finally voted, following a lively debate, in favour of a proposal originating

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 14, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 16. For the Federation of German Carpenters, see Ch. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 16, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 34-5; Paepflow, op. cit., p. 116. See also: *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 26.

from Conrad that the new committee should have its seat in Hamburg.<sup>51</sup> Of interest is that Conrad was seconded here by his successor as *Bauhandwerker* publisher, Fritz Wilke, who pleaded for unity.<sup>52</sup> Knegeborn, in his conciliator role, closed the congress in similar manner: ‘if at times sharp words were also exchanged, then it was from enthusiasm for the good cause. Let us disperse peacefully in order to carry on the good work together.’<sup>53</sup> The earlier words of the Stralsund delegate Friedrich Dähn, however, were to carry greater prophetic weight. Arguing for publication of the *Bauhandwerker* to remain in Berlin, he expressed the fear that otherwise the outcome would possibly be two papers to the detriment of the wider movement.<sup>54</sup>

The journal and the Berlin bricklayers' strike of summer 1885 dominated the following year's third national bricklayers' congress in Dresden at which the competences of the Hamburg control committee in respect of both were intensely debated. Before turning to these debates, however, it is apt at this point to consider a source of friction at the earlier congresses which perhaps more than any other illustrated the chasm in outlook between the two main organized bricklayer centres of Berlin and Hamburg at this time: that of their respective attitudes towards piece work. It is no coincidence that ‘Akkordarbeit ist Mordarbeit’ (‘piece work kills’) was later to be a rallying cry of the anarcho-syndicalist FAUD, for among the latter's founders in 1919 were the localist trade unionists Carl Thieme, a survivor from the movement of the 1880s, and Fritz Kater.<sup>55</sup> Indeed Kater, as first editor of the FAUD's newspaper, *Der Syndikalist*, had in an early issue dedicated a lead article to the subject.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, in 1880s Germany the abolition of piece work had been a central demand of Kater's localist predecessors which they had inherited in turn from the earlier national bricklayers' union, the *Bund* (‘Federation’) of Paul Grottkau and Fritz Hurlemann. As well as being injurious to health, piece work was

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<sup>51</sup> Kessler, op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 30: ‘Sind auch manchmal harte Worte gefallen, so geschah es im Eifer für die gute Sache. Gehen wir friedlich auseinander, um in Einigkeit an dem guten Werke weiter zu arbeiten.’

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> For Thieme's activism among Germany's pottery workers, see Chs. 7 and 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Syndikalist*, 30<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1919.

viewed as encouraging competitive individualism.<sup>57</sup> When Berlin's bricklayers had voted in May 1881 to set up a craft union, they had at the same time condemned piece work as having contributed to a fall in wages of up to 40 percent at a time of high unemployment and they recommended its avoidance.<sup>58</sup> This had to a large extent happened: at the 1884 national congress, it was stated that of Berlin's 10,000 bricklayers, only 200 undertook piece work.<sup>59</sup> The issue had come to a head most recently when plasterers, for whom piece work was a characteristic mode of work, had cited 'breach of contract' when a majority voted not to support the bricklayers' strike of 1885.<sup>60</sup> Hamburg's better-paid bricklayers, in contrast, made no secret of their earnings from the practice: the early Hamburg labour historian, Heinrich Bürger, noted the large-scale take-up of piece work by the city's bricklayers from 1842 onwards in the aftermath of the Great Fire of that year which consumed large parts of the old city.<sup>61</sup> A piece work rate at that time of 9 Marks 60 *Pfennig* per 1,000 bricks laid compared favourably with that of 6 Marks 60 *Pfennig* in 1873.<sup>62</sup> More contemporaneously, Kessler described the situation in Hamburg in 1881 as one of piece work earnings supplementing a 'fixed, guaranteed (daily) wage' of 5 Marks.<sup>63</sup> For Paepow, writing later of the aftermath of the failed Hamburg bricklayers' strike of 1890, the long-established resort to piece work in the city and environs constituted a 'virtuosity', at the same time both astonishing and appalling: the employers knew exactly what could be extracted from the bones of their workers.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> In July 1877 the General German Bricklayers and Stone Carvers Federation had voted for the abolition of 'corrupting' ('verderblich') piece work at its national congress in Leipzig. Paepow, op. cit., pp. 84-5.

<sup>58</sup> Paepow, *ibid.*, p. 101. For piece work among other building workers in 1880s Berlin, see also: Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 432-3. According to Kessler, one of the first outcomes of the banning of the Berlin bricklayers' craft union was the employers' re-imposition of piece rate working in June 1886. Kessler, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Berlin delegate "Herr Peter". *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1884 Berlin, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> *BV*, 30th June 1885.

<sup>61</sup> Ch. 3, note 11.

<sup>62</sup> Bürger, p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 23. Kessler's possible source for this was Hartwig's statement to the 1884 congress in defence of his own take-up of piece work that, 'unter 5 Mark pro Tag dürfe nicht gelöhnt werden'. *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 21-2.

<sup>64</sup> Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 221.



Personal recriminations between congress delegates over the piece work issue had already undermined the hopes of Knegeundorf and Wilke for harmony before the 1886 congress. As early as the first national congress in Berlin two years earlier, Behrend had condemned the ‘hateful passions’ of envy and jealousy which this method of work gave room to when he called for a vote on its renunciation, only to be opposed by Hartwig who had cited his own experience of accepting piece work when none other was available and who argued that such congress decisions were difficult to hold to.<sup>65</sup> Although no binding vote had been taken in 1884, the following year’s congress in Hanover had seen a new call from the Mannheim delegate Phillip Bub for a clear position on the practice which he attributed to the ‘swindle period of the seventies’.<sup>66</sup> Hartwig this time conceded that piece work could be harmful; it should not, however, be condemned when sensibly (‘vernünftig’) taken up.<sup>67</sup> For Eckstein, echoing the arguments of the *Bund* and of Behrend, piece work often degenerated into ‘non-solidarity’.<sup>68</sup> These arguments now spilled over into the 1886 congress debate on the 1885 Berlin strike when the Berlin delegate F. Grothmann, responding to a demand from the re-named Hamburg *Agitationskommission* (‘agitation committee’) for an immediate transfer to it of the 6,000 Marks strike surplus, retorted that so long as piece work was being taken up somewhere, all agitation was in vain.<sup>69</sup>

The strike debate had opened acrimoniously enough with accusations from the Hamburg delegates Hartwig and Dammann respectively that the failure of the 1885 bricklayers’ strike in Rathenow had been due to the unannounced outbreak of strike action in nearby Berlin, and that this had rendered the control committee in Hamburg redundant.<sup>70</sup> This prompted an immediate retort from Kessler that bricklayers were no military force who

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<sup>65</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp.18, 20-2.

<sup>66</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* Eckstein is recorded subsequently as a guest speaker before a mass meeting of 1,000 Berlin bricklayers on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1885 in the run-up to that summer’s strike. *BV*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1885.

<sup>69</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden, p. 64. Grothmann’s own figure for the surplus was higher at 6,400 Marks. *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 14. The strike debate overlaps with that around the *Bauhandwerker*. For reasons of clarity, I have kept the two separate.

took orders when on strike.<sup>71</sup> Behrend countered the Hamburg charges more directly, firstly pointing out that the Berlin's bricklayers had responded to the earlier outbreak of strike action in nearby Rathenow with an immediate donation of 1,000 Marks, and secondly that no-one could blame Berlin's bricklayers for laying down work when the hourly rate dropped from 45 *Pfennig* one day to 40 the next.<sup>72</sup> Grothmann, who had opposed the all-out strike, stated from his own experience that it had been impossible to stop it. He nonetheless refuted the charge of lack of organization and pointed out that of thousands of Berlin bricklayers only 400 had worked through the strike.<sup>73</sup> Another Berlin delegate, Karl Krüger, reiterated the difficulty the wages panel had encountered in trying to hold the strike back, a point also noted by the Dresden delegate H. Vogel, for whom the strike was a great success for everyone.<sup>74</sup>

Knegendorf is not recorded as having spoken during this debate.<sup>75</sup> In his place, more confrontational roles were adopted by Hartwig and, in particular, Dammann. For Kutz-Bauer, Dammann's contributions at the 1886 congress contributed to the deepening of the split with Berlin.<sup>76</sup> In contrast to Knegendorf, who had characteristically appealed at the beginning of the congress for the avoidance of personal friction, Dammann appeared unconcerned with striking too partisan a tone and set this right from his first contribution when, reporting on the petition campaign in support of the Workers Protection Bill in the *Reichstag*, he attributed its 'magnificent' ('glänzend') success in collecting thousands of signatures to the efforts of the Hamburg control committee.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. pp. 16-17.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. pp. 31, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Knegendorf suffered from an increasingly painful spinal cord ailment which eventually led to his death on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1891. His gradual withdrawal from a leading role appears to date from the 1886 congress. Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 445.

<sup>76</sup> Kutz-Bauer, p. 220, note 45.

<sup>77</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 7, 9. Possibly a reference Knegendorf's 1885 speaking tour. The series of house searches and arrests triggered by his subsequent arrest in Altona culminated in a single trial of all involved before the Berlin district court from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> December 1890 at which the ailing Knegendorf, Dammann, and a further Hamburg bricklayer, F. Wilbrandt, were found guilty and fined 50 Marks each on the basis of their personal connection by letters to the bricklayers' craft union in Magdeburg (Prussian jurisdiction). Kessler, op. cit., pp. 52-4, 56; Paepow, op. cit., pp. 364-5, 368.

His proposal that the Berlin craft union transfer the 1885 strike surplus to the re-named Hamburg ‘agitation committee’ attracted the significant support of the veteran Hanover delegate Albert Paul, for whom the new committee would be powerless to carry out its duties of strike support and agitation when monies were not forwarded to it as soon as possible.<sup>78</sup> The Leipzig delegate C. Zscherpe added that if bricklayers anywhere were to say that money which they had collected was theirs, this would be tantamount to the ending of any feelings of solidarity.<sup>79</sup> Despite such expressions of support, however, Dammann's proposal was defeated in the face of wider admiration from other delegates for the conduct of the Berlin strike, among them delegates from Dresden, Altona, and Zwickau.<sup>80</sup> For Mannheim, Bub countered criticism of direct payments to strikers with the remark that it was not advisable for local craft unions to send monies directly to the agitation committee – presumably with one eye on the legal situation.<sup>81</sup> For Berlin, Heinrich Bock referred to forthcoming strike action by the capital city's carpenters, from whom the bricklayers had received a donation of 3,000 Marks and which they felt obliged to first of all pay back. He was seconded by the congress chair, the invited plasterer delegate Julius Dietrich, a ‘veteran’ of the Berlin petition movement of 1882. Another Berlin plasterer, “Kröbel”, referred to a further ‘five or six trades on strike in Berlin to whom the Berlin bricklayers likewise feel indebted’.<sup>82</sup>

Dietrich's intervention at the end of the strike debate in defence of Berlin's bricklayers illustrates the increasing impact of personal factors on the whole centralization debate, for at the preceding year's national congress in Hanover Dietrich had stated, in terms reminiscent of Hartwig at the first Berlin congress in 1884, that centralization was unavoidable and that workers had to learn from their enemies, the masters, who were organized in central associations across Germany. Even a localist such as Wilke had defended local activism as preparation for an effective centralization.<sup>83</sup> For both

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<sup>78</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 62-3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>80</sup> See note 74 above. See also: *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 15-16, 36.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p.41.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 68.

<sup>83</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, p. 12.

Dietrich and Wilke, the *then* point of difference with Hamburg had been one of timing: for Dietrich, centralization at such an early point would have meant the death of the craft unions. Wilke had recommended, ‘patience, common sense, and time’.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, at the 1886 congress Dietrich immediately found himself at the centre of a storm when Blaurock, replying to Dammann's opening report for the Hamburg control committee, accused the latter body of not having sent Dietrich, in his capacity as congress chair, the protocol manuscript from the previous year's congress. In addition, Blaurock complained that the wording on page 26 of the said protocol for 1885, namely that of the proposal summarising the competences of the control committee, was erroneous.<sup>85</sup> Knegendorf immediately refuted this, insisting that the minutes had been cross-checked with Paul in Hanover and that the wording of the printed protocol was correct.<sup>86</sup> An apparent attempt by Hartwig, however, to resurrect the old division between Kessler and the Berlin press committee, when he alleged that the latter body had told the journal's printers that they would not pay for articles included without their knowledge and agreement, fell flat when Kessler's retort that the complete mistrust which had existed at the beginning of the previous summer had given way to the warmest harmony went uncontested by the other Berlin delegates even though Wilke's subsequent testimony would reveal that this was not fully the case.<sup>87</sup> These opening recriminatory exchanges characterised the subsequent debates at the end of which the final acceptance by the congress of an organizational proposal from Conrad, and others, which more clearly delineated than that of the previous year the respective competences of the two committees, was somewhat undermined by the opposition of the Berlin press committee to those sub-sections appertaining to the *Bauhandwerker*.<sup>88</sup> Hartwig's

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden, p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 12, 15. For Wilke, see below.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-5, 44-5. Conrad's proposal stated that the control (henceforth, ‘agitation’) committee was responsible for all organizational, agitational, strike, and other such matters, and was to receive all monies including strike support; the annual congress was to appoint both it and the press committee, and to determine the location from where the *Bauhandwerker* should be produced; the latter was the property of Germany's bricklayers and of its subscribers. Confusingly, the press committee was also to pursue agitational work ‘in the spirit of the congress’; it was also to publish, unaltered, all written materials sent to it by the agitation committee. Both bodies were to report back to the annual congress and to present their accounts (‘Rechnung zu legen’). Paepow in his account neglects to mention the Berlin votes against, merely that the resolution, ‘was accepted with a few votes against’. Paepow, *Organisationen*, p.

proposal that the control committee and journal share the same location crystallised the actual point at issue: the Hamburg delegation wished to add publication of the *Bauhandwerker* to their list of competences as control, henceforth ‘agitation’, committee; the Berlin delegation and their supporters, for example C. Stüven from Altona, opposed this and warned of dictatorship.<sup>89</sup>

Dammann's opening remark that the Hamburg control committee had voluntarily relinquished control over the trade journal when this had repeatedly failed to print its notices prompted immediate criticism from the most vociferous of the Berlin delegates, Blaurock, that Dammann had not named the notices in question.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, Wilke was more circumspect in his response: he disputed the full accuracy of Dammann's charge that an article sent to Kessler without a signature had been returned but had then still not been printed after he had re-sent it signed although the press committee had wanted to accept it. He did not, however, dispute that Kessler had pulled the article in question but added that this had been done without his knowledge.<sup>91</sup> Wilke's admission followed a defence on his own part against veiled accusations of incompetence: in 1885, the Dresden delegate Eltzschig, a supporter of Conrad, had, to the consternation of Knegendorf, declared that Berlin lacked organizational talent.<sup>92</sup> Now, singling out Wilke without naming him, Eltzschig proposed the employment of a dispatch clerk for the *Bauhandwerker* with a knowledge of book-keeping.<sup>93</sup> Wilke's response throws light not just on the chaotic situation he appears to have inherited from Conrad but also for the later historian on the difficulties encountered by the publishers of the earliest German trade union journals many of whom, like Wilke, were self-educated artisans, ‘learning on the job’. Rejecting Eltzschig's accusations of incompetence, Wilke pointed

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129. For his part, Kessler later criticised the Berlin delegation for getting bogged down with the unsubstantial question of ownership. Kessler, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., pp. 13, 16. In his opposition to amalgamation (‘Verschmelzung’) of the two committees, Stüven dissented from his own delegation's proposal which called for this.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>92</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, p. 25. He had at the same time alluded to having seen the Conrad-Kessler correspondence when he had stated that he was in possession of letters which weakened trust in the editorship. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden, p. 24.

to the resources he had inherited from Conrad which had consisted solely of an incomplete listing of subscriber addresses. It had been a great effort to come to some reasonable order as he had not been mandated to strike out irrecoverable debts. No such irregularity could be attributed to the current management and if congress were to give him permission to complete the debt cancellation referred to, the accounts would soon be in order.<sup>94</sup> In support of Wilke, Behrend added that the book-keeper must be a bricklayer; he did not believe the job to be so difficult, as had been proven by the administration of the Central Illness Fund for Bricklayers and Stone Carvers. For Knegeendorf, the journal's administrator should not only carry out book-keeping but also help the editor with his increasing workload.<sup>95</sup>

Wilke's reply to Dammann hinted at continuing frictions between at least himself and Kessler, and the latter's own later writings and his contributions to the 1886 congress provide the outline of an explanation why. Kessler was 51 years old and had only that year broken with the Progressive Liberals when he approached the Federation of Carpenters in 1883. He later indicated that he saw himself as the originator of the idea for a journal for bricklayers and related trades when in 1895 he wrote that in contrast with the '*Zimmerkunst*', the trade journal published by the new national carpenters' union, he had aimed at establishing the new journal on a wider basis, 'for all building trades'.<sup>96</sup> His reference in the same piece to this being 'after the model of the London-based *The Builder*' (published from 1842 by fellow architect, and social reformer, George Godwin) may be retrospective but it is not inconceivable that Kessler, older and more formally educated than most of his contemporaries, did bring with him a broad knowledge of international developments as an additional string to his bow. His attractiveness to nascent carpenter and bricklayer trade unionists is understandable when the long tradition of artisans inviting academics to speak before their own workers' clubs, especially in Berlin, is borne in mind.<sup>97</sup> For Paeplow, Kessler's initial use to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8.

<sup>96</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 24-5.

<sup>97</sup> In contrast, the 'mutual improvement societies' in Britain during the same period were more guarding of their autonomy from the middle class. Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working*

Conrad was somewhat more mundane than the high hopes invested in him earlier by the carpenters' union; Conrad needed someone to do the work which he could not carry out himself.<sup>98</sup> At the 1886 congress he admitted that he had no knowledge of book-keeping but, refuting Wilke, he had carried out everything as necessary.<sup>99</sup>

For good measure, Conrad added that Kessler, as the editor, had been behind the improper behaviour of the press committee in undermining the powers of the control committee. Kessler now found himself having to refute the charge from the latter body that he had used the law of association as a pretext to make changes to articles although as editor of the *Bauhandwerker* he would surely have been within his remit to watch out for possible excuses for police intervention.<sup>100</sup> Criticism from Eckstein, however, had greater foundation, for Eckstein enjoyed close links with Berlin's bricklayers, having spoken in Berlin in the run-up to the 1885 strike and he had been quick to provide financial support when it began.<sup>101</sup> In addition, he shared the abhorrence of Berlin's bricklayers for piece work and their opposition to centralization.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, he now called for Kessler to be reprimanded for having sown discord by writing to the Hamburg control committee and to himself to complain of the incompetence of the Berlin press committee.<sup>103</sup> Kessler, while repeating his assertion that this all lay in the past and that complete harmony now reigned in Berlin (which as previously indicated was somewhat weakened by Wilke's testimony), did concede in replying to the Altona delegate H. Sternberg, who had complained that 'spiteful remarks' ('gehässige Bemerkungen') had been added to articles sent in, that he had been high-minded in the offhand manner with which he had dealt with these. In a revealing reference to his

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*Classes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., London 2010, pp. 58-91. For Berlin, see: Rüdiger Hachtmann, *Berlin 1848. Eine Politik- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte der Revolution*, Bonn 1997, pp. 94-103.

<sup>98</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>99</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36. See also: note 68 above.

<sup>102</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1886 Dresden, p. 36.

working methods, he stated that articles without spelling and grammar mistakes received preference due to time pressures.<sup>104</sup>

The latter comments appear to have been enough for the Dresden delegate Vogel, another supporter of the Berlin strike, to call for the control committee to have supervisory powers over the *Bauhandwerker*.<sup>105</sup> Wilke recommended that a committee of investigation look into Dammann's assertion that the crux of the matter was its editor having too much power; this would then report back to congress. He added that he interpreted the previous year's congress decision as allowing the Hamburg control committee supervisory rights only over business matters and reminded the delegates of another decision from that year which had allowed the co-option of pottery workers and stonemasons onto the Berlin press committee; given this latter circumstance, it was not possible for a bricklayers' congress alone to appoint this body.<sup>106</sup> Knegendorf seconded Wilke and proposed the election of a five-person investigative committee, to the opposition of fellow Hamburg delegate, Hartwig. However, another *Bund* 'veteran', Paul, also adopted a conciliatory position and argued against calls for the amalgamation of both committees to one location which he did not believe would end the dispute. For the Kiel delegate H. Müller, both committees had been at fault. Against this, the Itzehoe delegate C. Hiddessen crystallised the argument for amalgamation when he stated that the dispute would not have arisen if the press committee and Berlin in general had complied with the decisions of the previous year's congress. Amid argument and counter argument and the anomalous positions of respected figures such as Knegendorf and Paul, it was hardly surprising that the 1886 congress accepted the proposal of the Verden delegate "Badenhop", that the two committees remain unchanged in Hamburg and Berlin respectively, but this time clearly due more to delegate tiredness than to any general conciliatory spirit. Fritz Paepflow summed up the lack of conclusiveness at congress end thus:

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-6, 37.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-9. Indeed Carl Thieme, in attendance for the first time at a bricklayers' congress as a co-opted press committee member, confirmed that the pottery workers had adopted the *Bauhandwerker* as their own journal at their previous national congress. Ibid., p. 42.



With that, the third congress had completed its agenda. It had not, however, settled the dispute over the best form of organization, nor had it settled the dispute over the journal, and finally it had not dealt with that personal prejudice which had of late become noticeable. The antagonism had only been pasted over in makeshift fashion!<sup>107</sup>

The fissures which had deepened around the persons of Dammann and Kessler respectively finally split asunder in hastened circumstances (that is, before the following year's national congress) following the actions of Puttkamer and the Prussian state shortly afterwards. On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1886, the Berlin police raided the homes of Kessler and Wilke, among others, as part of the court case initiated the previous September following Knegendorf's arrest by Prussian police in Altona. This had happened at the end of a speaking tour by Knegendorf across Germany; in the course of his arrest, he was strip-searched and writings, including correspondence, were confiscated.<sup>108</sup> The charge sheet for the court case stated that this and correspondence confiscated subsequently following police raids in Görlitz, Stettin, Eberswalde, Potsdam and Magdeburg, and finally Berlin, proved that the Hamburg and Berlin committees, and the local bricklayer craft unions, constituted political organizations affiliated to one another in a single association ('Gesamtverein') in contravention of Paragraph 8 of the Prussian Law of Association.<sup>109</sup> Following the raids in Berlin, events there took a rapid turn: the Berlin bricklayers' craft union and the Berlin press committee were provisionally banned on 21st May.<sup>110</sup> Although its premises were also raided, the *Bauhandwerker* was not formally banned but, to quote Kessler's words writing two years later in the *Berliner Volks-Tribüne*, 'penalised out of existence' ('weggemäßregelt'): Kessler and Wilke were warned by the Berlin police president that further publication would be punished as a continuation of association activity.<sup>111</sup> In an attempt to get around the ban on the press committee, Wilke announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> May that the *Bauhandwerker*, 'with all

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<sup>107</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 130: 'Damit hatte der dritte Kongreß seine Tagesordnung erledigt. Erledigt war aber nicht der Streit um die beste Organisationsform, erledigt war auch nicht der Streit um das Fachorgan und erledigt war schließlich nicht die persönliche Voreingenommenheit, die sich in der letzten Zeit bemerkbar gemacht hatte. Die Gegensätze waren nur nothwendig überkleistert worden!'

<sup>108</sup> Paepflow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 364.

<sup>109</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 52-4. For the court case verdict, see note 77 above.

<sup>110</sup> See Ch. 4, note 104.

<sup>111</sup> *Volks-Tribüne*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1888; Paepflow, *Organisationen*, p. 131.

assets and debts', had been transferred to the ownership and administration of its printer W. Röwer. Kessler remained as editor.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, the journal's final issues up to 27<sup>th</sup> June were confiscated, albeit after subscriptions had been sent out.<sup>113</sup> In the meantime, Behrend, as Chair of the banned craft union, was expelled from Berlin under Paragraph 28 of the Anti-Socialist Law on 7<sup>th</sup> June and moved to Stettin where he immediately threw himself into electoral agitation for the Social Democrats.<sup>114</sup> The expulsions of Kessler and Wilke followed respectively on 9<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> June.

On 20<sup>th</sup> June, a new bricklayers' journal, the *Neuer Bauhandwerker*, appeared for the first time under the auspices of the Hamburg agitation committee with Andreas Bitter named as publisher and Frohme as collaborator. Attached to it was a circular in which the agitation committee described the behaviour of Kessler and Wilke as being incompatible with the interests of the bricklayers' movement and that this necessitated the publication of a new journal. This was a reference to Wilke's transfer of the assets of the *Bauhandwerker* to Röwer and to Kessler's support of this.<sup>115</sup> When one, however, compares the two organizational resolutions from the 1885 and 1886 national bricklayer congresses which dealt with the competences of the respective press and control (from 1886, 'agitation') committees, it is hard to disagree with Kessler's later assertion that the 1886 resolution meant that the Hamburg committee, 'should in future have nothing more to say on the affairs of the *Bauhandwerker*', for it had stated that it was for the annual congress to appoint the press committee and to determine the place of publication of the national journal.<sup>116</sup> The later resolution had also made no mention of

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<sup>112</sup> *Bauhandwerker*, 23rd May 1886. Cited in Paepow, op. cit., pp. 131-2.

<sup>113</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 49-50; Paepow, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>114</sup> Behrend was expelled subsequently from Stettin on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1887. This followed the police closure on 7<sup>th</sup> February of an electoral meeting on behalf of the Social Democrat *Reichstag* candidate Fritz Herbert, at which Behrend had been Chair. Of interest is that among Behrend's fellow speakers was another Berlin expellee, Fritz Görki. Following this meeting, one worker died of bayonet wounds sustained outside in clashes with the army. Auer, Vol. 2, pp. 84, 101, 109-10. For Görki, see also: Ch. 4.

<sup>115</sup> Confusingly, or disingenuously, Paepow in his narrative precedes this with a notice published in the *Bauhandwerker* on 20<sup>th</sup> June, i.e. on the same day, in which Röwer announced that owing to overwork and illness he had further transferred the title of publisher to a "T. Kaasch". Given the coincidence of timing, it is unlikely that this second transfer of title had any bearing on the decision of the agitation committee to publish although Paepow infers such. Paepow, op. cit.

<sup>116</sup> Kessler, op. cit., pp. 44-5: 'sollte künftig in den Angelegenheiten des "Bauhandwerker" garnichts mehr zu sagen haben'.

supervisory rights other than that the journal should publish everything unaltered which the agitation committee sent to it.<sup>117</sup> Hartwig had tacitly acknowledged the new situation at the end of the 1886 congress when he had called on Kessler not to publish anything in the journal which would damage sales of the congress protocol.<sup>118</sup> The speed of their subsequent actions clearly indicates that for the members of the Hamburg agitation committee, however, this was not the end of the matter. From their point of view, the body which had been called upon to lead the movement needed a journal at its immediate disposal which the *Bauhandwerker*, while it continued to be produced from Berlin by Kessler and the press committee, was not. They had clearly expressed their unhappiness with having their articles hitherto published at the favour of Berlin (although the congress resolution had addressed this).<sup>119</sup> In Paepow's opinion, it would have been more honourable if instead the Hamburg committee had resigned at the Dresden congress although he qualified this by stating that such a sacrifice as, 'a cornerstone of the German bricklayers' organization, which one definitely cannot say about the Berliners', would have had a greater effect than if Berlin had given up production of the journal, 'for competent colleagues were at that time thin on the ground', something which 'Berlin and other large centres were unable to come up with in sufficient numbers'.<sup>120</sup> It would also have been honourable, of course, if, at a time when the Berlin press committee and its members were the targets of police prosecution, the Hamburg committee had waited until the last Berlin issue of the journal had been published. Paepow, however, refuted this criticism 'from a few persistent enemies', namely that the behaviour of the Hamburg committee resembled the actions of a man who felt justified in stealing the wallet of a friend who was struggling against a superior enemy, with the retort that 'Kessler and his colleagues' had failed in their duty to keep the agitation committee informed following the police ban on the press committee.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Note 88 above.

<sup>118</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>119</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Paepflow exhibited less bias when he commented elsewhere that the action of the agitation committee in publishing the new journal from Hamburg with the title *Neuer Bauhandwerker* did indeed deepen the split between the two sides.<sup>122</sup> For their part, Kessler and Wilke now sought refuge, following their expulsions, with their fellow localist Rieke, now an independent master, in non-Prussian Brunswick. Their response to the actions of the Hamburg committee was not long in coming. On 4<sup>th</sup> July 1886 the first issue of a new bricklayer trade journal which made no secret of its localism, the *Baugewerkschafter*, was published from Brunswick with Rieke named as both publisher and editor.<sup>123</sup> This followed a conference in Magdeburg to which the Hamburg agitation committee had sent one delegate but did not participate.<sup>124</sup> In the new journal's first issue, Kessler, with Wilke as co-signatory, gave vent to the anger of both at the actions of the Hamburg committee when in a lead article entitled 'Eine schmutzige Geschichte' ('A Sordid Affair') he posed the question, 'where would today's craft union organization be if the editor of the *Bauhandwerker* had not so resolutely warned against and forestalled the cravings for power of Herr Knegendorf and comrades and their pursuit of a foolhardy central organization?'<sup>125</sup> Such a personalised attack on the hitherto main conciliatory voice within the Hamburg craft union represented a point of departure, for up to this point it had in fact been Kessler himself who had been the recipient of some personal rancour, albeit for his alleged conduct rather than his views: at the three national congresses it had been firstly Conrad, and then Behrend, who had led the anti-centralization argument on behalf of the Berlin delegations. There had been one personal attack on Knegendorf at the 1885 Hanover congress from which Kessler with the remainder of the Berlin delegation had publicly disassociated themselves.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Wilke himself had hitherto played a conciliatory role at national congresses

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<sup>122</sup> Paepflow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 315.

<sup>123</sup> By his own admission, Kessler was the real editor. Kessler, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>124</sup> Neither Paepflow nor Kessler provide a date for the Magdeburg conference and the first issue of the *Baugewerkschafter* does not mention it. Kessler adds that the conference was attended by delegates from Berlin, Brunswick, Halle, Leipzig, and Zwickau, in addition to Hamburg. Paepflow, *Organisationen*, pp. 132-3; Kessler, op. cit.

<sup>125</sup> *Der Baugewerkschafter: Socialpolitische Wochenschrift. Zeitschrift für Gesundheitspflege und wirtschaftliche Verbesserung der Arbeiter aller Baugewerbe*, 4th July 1886.

<sup>126</sup> *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1885 Hanover, pp. 22, 24. The Berlin bricklayer "Herr Peter" had stated that, 'some people get a certain thrill by playing at president' ('bei einzelnen Personen ein gewisser Präsidentenkitzel vorhanden sei').

analogous to that of Knegendorf for Hamburg. The manner of Kessler and Wilke's response lay Kessler in particular, as the article's assumed author, open to accusations of personal egotism which were to constitute a considerable part of the subsequent criticism of him by his political opponents. Amid the subsequent demonization of Kessler, to which the article had contributed, important actors such as Behrend and Wilke himself were henceforth relegated to bit-part roles. In fact, they disappeared from most historical accounts of the localist movement.<sup>127</sup> The singling out of Knegendorf for criticism was in any case misplaced: as the 1886 congress had already shown, whereas Knegendorf had indeed been the first proposer of a single central organization for Germany's bricklayers, other voices, in particular that of Dammann, were proving more assertive in advocating this idea. Right up to the 1890 conclusion of the law of association court case against the bricklayer craft unions in Prussia, Kessler appears in his writings to have continued to assign to the increasingly ill Knegendorf a leading role which the latter no longer possessed even within the Hamburg craft union.<sup>128</sup>

The animosity engendered by the actions, on the one hand, of the Hamburg agitation committee, and on the other, of Kessler and Wilke, was regarded so seriously by the SAPD as to warrant the intervention at this point of leading party functionaries. Frohme's collaboration with Hamburg was on record and he was not involved. Instead, a panel of arbitration consisting of Hasenclever, Wilhelm Liebknecht and Johann Dietz, called for a meeting of both sides in Magdeburg. By Kessler's account, this backfired when the party officials met the Hamburg delegates at Magdeburg train station but failed to bring them back with them to a meeting with Berlin bricklayers at a local pub.<sup>129</sup> A further attempt at mediation by Liebknecht failed amid mutual recriminations from Kessler and Knegendorf.<sup>130</sup> By Kessler's account, Liebknecht was, however, successful following a visit to Hamburg in persuading Rieke to cancel a national

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<sup>127</sup> See also: Introduction.

<sup>128</sup> Notes 75 and 77 above. Kessler commented of the final court case verdict that, 'The control committee paid a high price in its attempt to also outstrip Berlin on the petition question.' ('Das war etwas theuer bezahlt für das Bestreben der Kontrollkommission, auch in der Petitionsfrage den Berlinern den Rang abzulaufen.'). Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Knegendorf had in the meantime, at the beginning of 1888, stood down as chair of the Hamburg craft union in favour of Dammann. Kutz-Bauer, p. 224.

<sup>129</sup> Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

bricklayers' congress he had called for Magdeburg for 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 1887.<sup>131</sup> This had been called after the still extant Berlin wage committee had earlier written to the Hamburg agitation committee requesting that it call such a congress before the end of March at the latest; instead, the Hamburg committee had ignored this request and called a national congress for Bremen at the end of April.<sup>132</sup> In the *Baugewerkschafter*, Rieke stated that he had acted after Hamburg had ignored requests not just from Berlin but also from locations elsewhere, critical of Bremen's remote location.<sup>133</sup> Following Rieke's climb-down, the fourth national bricklayers' congress duly took place at the latter location from 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> April. In the meantime, the *Baugewerkschafter* itself fell victim to the Anti-Socialist Law, to be replaced before the congress by *Das Vereinsblatt*.

Kessler wrote of the fourth national bricklayers' congress that it left things as they were ('ließ die Sachen so stehen wie sie standen').<sup>134</sup> But he qualified this when he acknowledged that a lack of discipline among the Berlin delegates, and Rieke's abstention, had enabled a 'packed' Hamburg delegation to win the vote on recognition of the *Neuer Bauhandwerker* as national journal.<sup>135</sup> At the congress, Rieke had proposed the dissolution of both journals in favour of a new one.<sup>136</sup> Paeplow, who in his account, as in that for 1884, failed to acknowledge Rieke's authorship, speculated that this proposal, if at the same time it had been agreed that the new journal be published in Hanover or another central German city, would have carried the day if the Berlin delegates had not earlier walked out when the congress refused to investigate the background to the split with Hamburg.<sup>137</sup> Rieke's abstention on the vote to recognise the *Neuer Bauhandwerker*, one of two on a two vote majority 31-29, was actually

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, 27th Feb. 1887.

<sup>133</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, 6th Mar. 1887.

<sup>134</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> *Protocoll des Vierten Congresses der Maurer Deutschlands am 25., 26., 27. und 28. April 1887. Abgehalten in Bremen*, Hamburg 1887 [henceforth: *Protokoll Bricklayers*, 1887 Bremen], p. 62.

<sup>137</sup> The election of a congress commission to do just this had been an agenda item for the aborted Magdeburg congress. *Baugewerkschafter*, op. cit.

inconsequential. When a further vote confirmed Hamburg as place of publication, Rieke's Brunswick delegation, as well as that of Potsdam, also walked out. As he left the congress, Rieke announced that he would call a conference for those locations which did not accept the congress decisions.<sup>138</sup> This, the first separate conference of localist bricklayers, would duly take place in Halle on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1887.<sup>139</sup> For their part, the Hamburg delegation celebrated their victory by embarking on a pub crawl which included stopping off at a strip joint.<sup>140</sup>

Kessler had written of the first publication of the *Bauhandwerker* in June 1884 that the journal had soon developed into an object of such fierce and bitter argument that the subsequent period for the bricklayers' movement up to 1887 could be summarised as that of the dispute around its possession.<sup>141</sup> That period was now at an end. The dispute, however, would not have been waged with such vehemence from the Hamburg side if the journal had not become so associated with a view on trade union organization which Kessler had not invented but for which he had become chief ideologue. Kessler, who had attended the Bremen congress in a journalist capacity, had already sketched out a model for localist trade union organization in a series of twelve articles which had appeared in the *Baugewerkschafter* from 21<sup>st</sup> November 1886 to 6<sup>th</sup> March 1887. After their expulsion from Berlin, Kessler and Wilke had remained in close contact with the Berlin bricklayers' wage committee elected on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1886, which had not yet been banned.<sup>142</sup> It had been this wage committee which had been most insistent that the national congress planned for Bremen be relocated and it had been Berlin's delegates to this congress who had initiated the localist walkouts at it. It had become clear that

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<sup>138</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., pp. 140, 142.

<sup>139</sup> See Ch. 7.

<sup>140</sup> On 15th August 1890, the Hamburg bricklayers' craft union appointed a commission to investigate the administration of funds with reference to the conduct of Hamburg delegates to the 1887 national bricklayers' congress in Bremen in visiting music halls and a striptease, paid for by union money. StAH, PP, V 104, Bd.3, 15.8.1890/26.9.1890. Cited in Kutz-Bauer, pp. 225-6. Kutz-Bauer comments that, 'the ease with which money was collected in the union led ... to behaviour which when it occurred in middle-class circles was repeatedly condemned in the workers' press as behaviour typical of the "depraved middle-classes"'. Kutz-Bauer, *ibid*.

<sup>141</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>142</sup> The 1886 Berlin wage committee would be closed down by the Berlin police on 1st June 1887. See Ch. 4.

Kessler, a non-bricklayer, was now seen by the Berlin localists in particular as their spokesperson, a situation which would endure until his death in 1904. It would be apt to turn at this point to examine Kessler's programme and views in greater detail but because Kessler himself later referred also to the experience of the 'non-political' national carpenters' trade union in explaining his rejection of political neutrality, before we can do so we need to consider this experience which was somewhat different from that of the bricklayers. This experience, and Kessler's programme, comprise the next chapter.



## PART THREE

## CHAPTER SIX:

### *Localism as refuge: the Federation of German Carpenters and the trade union theory of Gustav Kessler*

Writing in 1896, Gustav Kessler looked back to the founding of the Federation of German Carpenters in 1883 and reminded readers of the *Sozialistischer Akademiker* that that national union's first executive committee had contained 'a Social Democrat, a Hirsch-Duncker trade unionist, an anti-Semite, and still a few other men of similar social shading'.<sup>1</sup> Kessler was in a personal position to know this. At one of the first meetings of the committee in Berlin on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1883 he had been elected technical advisor to it.<sup>2</sup> The committee's mixed political composition was not without background. The Berlin carpenters' craft union, the Association for the Protection of the Interests of Berlin's Carpenters, which had called first for a national union, had, under the leadership of Albert Marzian, a participant in the 1882 'petition movement', long enjoyed harmonious relations with the local Progressive Liberal-aligned *Gewerkverein* or trade association.<sup>3</sup> At the first public meeting of Berlin carpenters in the Anti-Socialist Law period, in June 1881, two of the seven delegates elected to the first Berlin carpenters' wage negotiating committee were *Gewerkverein* members.<sup>4</sup> Under their influence, the wage committee had proposed that a demand for a 35 *Pfennig* hourly wage be put to the Berlin Association of Bricklayer and Carpenter Masters. This demand was, however, rejected at a following carpenters' meeting as too moderate.<sup>5</sup> Reflecting this cross-party co-operation, the statutes of the Berlin craft union, founded on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1881, stated that all discussion of politics was to be excluded from union and

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<sup>1</sup> Gustav Kessler, *SA*, p. 760.

<sup>2</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, No. 7 (Jan. 1884). See also: Ch. 4, note 63.

<sup>3</sup> Marzian, alongside fellow building workers Bernhard Bütow (bricklayer) and Julius Dietrich (plasterer), had been a member of the trade union committee of 1882 which had drawn up the nine hour working day petition. He was among the thirty trade unionists later charged under the Prussian Law of Association. See Ch. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Confusingly, Josef Schmöle dates this meeting as having taken place on 26th June 1881, with the qualification, 'nach unseren Ermittlungen' [*sic*], but then dates its follow-up as 14th June. Schmöle, Vol. 2, pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

public meetings.<sup>6</sup> It was therefore not such a surprise when two years later another Berlin carpenter, Wilhelm Schönstein, raised a salutation to the German emperor in his welcome speech to the national carpenters' congress (or *Handwerkertag*) which preceded the founding of the national union. This was, however, seen as contentious enough for the new union to refer to it in the congress report published shortly afterwards by the euphemism, 'the usual three cheers'.<sup>7</sup> Possibly with one eye on contrary developments in the bricklaying trade, Marzian, the new national union's first chair as *Altgeselle* ('senior journeyman'), proposed that its statutes restrict union membership to those journeymen carpenters, 'who can convincingly prove that they have learned the carpenter profession in an orderly manner'.<sup>8</sup> The agreed statutes, after the model of the Berlin craft union, also stated that the new national union too should keep its distance from political parties.<sup>9</sup>

The new 'Federation' was plunged into a crisis one year later when Marzian was forced to resign on grounds of alleged financial impropriety. It is difficult not to agree with the contemporary social historian Josef Schmöle that one of the specific charges against Marzian, namely that he had helped indebt the union by claiming 4 Marks per day expenses when travelling to speak at meetings, was unfair given that this amount coincided with that daily wage rate for which Berlin's carpenters had gone on strike; in Schmöle's opinion it was insufficient to cover such expenses.<sup>10</sup> More substantial charges of mismanagement against Marzian, however, had their origin in the failure of the Berlin carpenter's strike of May 1883, that is, *before* the setting up of the national union; the local carpenters' craft union had had to call off the strike after three weeks having run out of money. Following this the wage negotiation committee, to which fundraising for a fighting fund had been delegated, had been dismissed at a meeting of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> 'Der Handwerkertag der deutschen Zimmerleute zu Berlin vom 19.-22. August 1883', *Zimmerkunst*, No. 3 (Sept. 1883). Schmöle commented: 'Dann brachte der Redner noch die üblichen Hochs. Gemeint war namentlich ein Hoch auf Kaiser Wilhelm I'. Schmöle, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> August Bringmann, in *Sozialpolitisches Centralblatt*, No. 14 (1893). Cited in Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 26-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 34.

Berlin carpenters on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1883.<sup>11</sup> The very first issue of the *Zimmerkunst*, a national carpenters' trade journal later adopted by the national union, painted a somewhat rosier picture of the strike's outcome, stating of the employers that, 'only a fractional number, containing however several large carpenters' sites, had hesitated to pay the wage demand'.<sup>12</sup> This did not assuage the dissatisfaction of some Berlin carpenters who this time went on partial strike under the leadership of a new wage committee in March 1884. When this second strike petered out under the weight of having to rely solely on collections, questions were now raised of the finances of the new national union. It emerged that due to insufficient dues having been collected, and none at all during the winter standstill months of December to February, that the national union's debts amounted to some 2,300 Marks while the national journal and agitational materials had continued to be funded.<sup>13</sup> Rumours now circulated that before the Berlin craft union joined the national union, a portion of its funds had disappeared; a discrepancy was highlighted between that union's general fund, which had stood at 17,000 Marks before the 1883 strike, and a total declared income of some 10,000 Marks although Marzian's eventual rehabilitation would indicate that it was later accepted that he was guilty here of no more than sloppy accounting given the large amount.<sup>14</sup> Additional questions were also raised of the 3,000 Marks cost of the 1883 national congress, which had been preceded by a traditional journeymen's procession bearing flags and displaying trade tools, and of a 1,000 Marks payment to invalided carpenters.<sup>15</sup> Local dissatisfaction culminated in Marzian's expulsion by a substantial majority at a meeting of his local union branch on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1884; nonetheless enough of his supporters were able to cause such uproar that the meeting was closed down by

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-3.

<sup>12</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, No. 1 (July 1883).

<sup>13</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p.32. This apparently small amount should be balanced against the low membership of the union at this time, which varied between 1,594 in November 1883, and 3,637 represented at its second national congress in June 1884. 'Vorstandssitzung vom 7. November 1883', *Zimmerkunst*, No. 6 (Dec. 1883); 'Protokoll-Auszug des zweiten Handwerkstages des "Verbandes deutscher Zimmerleute", abgehalten im Lokale des Herrn Gustaves, Dresdnerstr. 85 in Berlin, vom 1. bis 3. Juni 1884', *Zimmerkunst*, July 1884.

<sup>14</sup> The Berlin police also took an interest in Marzian's accounting methods and later charged him with concealment of savings records, a charge however of which he was subsequently cleared before the Berlin district court. Schmöle, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Schmöle, ibid., p. 34.

the police.<sup>16</sup> The subsequent congress of the national union in June 1884 voted unanimously to remove Marzian from his union post as national chair. A majority of three then voted to expel him from the union altogether.<sup>17</sup>

Marzian was succeeded as national union chair by Schönstein who is not recorded as having done anything other during this time than wait in the wings until Marzian's clear financial ineptitude, if nothing else, caught up with him. Since December 1883 the anti-social democratic tendency in the national union, of which Schönstein, *Zimmerkunst* editor Heinrich Nix, and the national union treasurer, Gustav Dietrich, were the most prominent representatives,<sup>18</sup> had received the support of the union's Hamburg branch of the national union following the affiliation to it of the local carpenters' craft union.<sup>19</sup> The Hamburg branch assumed an increasingly crucial role in the national union as rank and file disillusionment in Berlin, exacerbated by an appeal from Marzian shortly before his dismissal in 1884 for carpenters not to strike before the national union was large enough to sustain industrial action (Berlin's carpenters ignored this appeal and struck once more in support of the 40 *Pfennig* hourly rate), gave way to increased industrial militancy, reflected, for example, in enthusiastic support for the Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885.<sup>20</sup> Even Schönstein felt compelled to speak in support of the latter, while being careful at a Berlin carpenters' meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1885 not to antagonise the police lieutenant in attendance: he declined to read out the most recent bulletin of the bricklayers' wage committee.<sup>21</sup> At the national union's 1885 congress in Magdeburg, a stronghold of the union's Social Democrats, the support of the Hamburg branch chair, Oskar Niemeyer, was decisive in securing the Berlin executive's re-election. At the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 35. Schmöle added that the vote to remove Marzian from his post followed the intervention of Kessler, at this time still the union's technical advisor, and additional legal consultation. In its congress protocol extract, the *Zimmerkunst* said of the affair merely that, 'the decision of the national committee and that of the union executive with regard to the former chair of the national union Marzian was confirmed'. It noted Kessler's attendance at the congress. Schmöle, op. cit.; *Zimmerkunst*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, No. 6 (Dec. 1883).

<sup>20</sup> 'Zur Lohnfrage!!! Ein ernstes Wort an die deutschen Zimmerleute und speciell an unsere Verbandskameraden', *Zimmerkunst*, No. 9 (Mar. 1884).

<sup>21</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, Aug. 1885.

same time, Hamburg became the seat of the union's supervisory council.<sup>22</sup> Victory for the 'non-political' wing of the union was confirmed with the adoption of a strike regimen under which if agreement with local employers was not possible a dispute was to be referred to the national union which alone would decide if industrial action was to be undertaken. In clear contradiction of the support expressed in the *Zimmerkunst* for the Berlin bricklayers' strike, if a local branch of the national carpenters' union was to take such unilateral action, it would forfeit any national support.<sup>23</sup>

For radical Social Democrats in the carpenters' union, a circular issued by Schönstein in the wake of the Puttkamer Strike Decree in April 1886 confirmed the incompatibility of their position with that of the union executive. In it, Schönstein requested that local branches only allow the discussion at their meetings of 'solely economic questions, that is, of wages and working conditions'. Crucially, he also implored that, 'all comrades active in the political movement accept no position on local branch executives', adding that the well-being of thousands of families was dependent on the union's existence; a possible dissolution of the national union would once again open the floodgates to the Iron Law of Wages and force wages down.<sup>24</sup> The *Baugewerkschafter*, which later reprinted this circular along with several others, commented acidly that it was 'facetious' ('späßhaft') of Schönstein to boast 'in this document of cowardice' ('in diesem Dokument der Feigheit') of 'thousands of families' given the union's low membership figures. The effectiveness of Schönstein's argument among a mainly politically apathetic union membership which was in some cases hostile to Social Democracy was, however, evident enough at the next national congress of the carpenters' union in Breslau in June 1886 where protests from the Magdeburg, Lübeck, and Celle branches against what was seen as gagging were easily brushed aside on large majority votes for the union executive.<sup>25</sup> It had long been known that the national union did not 'own' the carpenters' national journal, the *Zimmerkunst*, owing to Marzian having been unable to finance the purchase of it from its editor Nix; nonetheless, a

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<sup>22</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Reprinted in *Der Baugewerkschafter*, 13th Feb. 1887.

<sup>25</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 43, 52.

proposal from Magdeburg that it be left to the individual member to subscribe to what was a private journal was also rejected.<sup>26</sup> When later that summer Magdeburg's carpenters staged a joint strike with the city's bricklayers, the national executive felt confident enough to reject a request for support on the grounds that the systematic incitement by those who made social democratic propaganda their special concern invited the intervention of the authorities.<sup>27</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1886, Schönstein declared the local Magdeburg branch to be dissolved in view of the danger caused to the national union by individual members who had ignored warnings to keep the bricklayer and carpenter wage movements separate. The later socialist 'Independent' Adolf Schulze was specifically named at this point and charged, among other things, with having facilitated joint meetings, and of having allowed the election of a joint committee of both groups of workers of which he had then become chair. Schönstein also added that the national executive would vet members of the dissolved branch's replacement.<sup>28</sup>

The Magdeburg police were then given notice of the dissolution, an action referred to scathingly in the *Baugewerkschafter* as both 'patriotisch-loyal' and 'pfiffig' ('cute'): 'by such means one makes any meeting impossible'.<sup>29</sup> This act of Schönstein's had the immediate effect of causing the Berlin North branch of the union under the leadership of Hugo Lehmann to rally to the support of the Magdeburg branch.<sup>30</sup> When the Social Democrat Lehmann in turn was threatened with expulsion for being 'harmful to the union', both the Berlin North and West branches declared that they would secede if one single member was expelled.<sup>31</sup> This ripple effect became a flood when the Leipzig carpenters' craft union, which had been unable to affiliate to the national union owing to the exigencies of the law of association in Saxony which forbade combination not just on political grounds but also when public affairs was discussed, called for a carpenters'

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: 'man macht einfach eine Versammlung dadurch unmöglich, daß man der Polizei in Magdeburg gleichzeitig die Auflösung des Lokalverbandes anzeigt'.

<sup>30</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

congress to discuss a form of organization suitable enough for it to join.<sup>32</sup> The immediate response of the national carpenters' union leadership was to threaten to expel all branches which chose to participate in the congress.<sup>33</sup>

It was no surprise in such a climate that when the dissolved Magdeburg branch quickly re-constituted itself as a local craft union it adopted the *Baugewerkschafter* as its journal, for Kessler's organizational model, which made no secret of its support for the social democratic ideal, was seen to offer the means for local craft unions to maintain their political identity. The decision by Kessler and his bricklayer supporters to re-launch the *Bauhandwerker* under a new name had pointedly been taken in Magdeburg at the time of the joint carpenters' and bricklayers' strike of the previous summer. The *Baugewerkschafter* now found itself at the centre of the dispute between the two irreconcilable sides when in its issue of 13<sup>th</sup> February 1887 it reprinted Schönstein's circulars of April and December 1886 together with a commentary condemning them.<sup>34</sup> Following a meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1887, the Hamburg branch of the national union now published a refutation of what they claimed to be Kessler's 'defamatory distortion of the true facts'; in it, Kessler was accused of appealing to the personal ambition of 'a few hollow-headed show-offs' in calling a congress to achieve his own purposes. With some irony, the author of this highly personalised attack on Kessler was another former carpenter turned journalist, *Zimmerkunst* editor Nix.<sup>35</sup>

The Magdeburg carpenters' congress duly took place on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1887 and established the *Freie Vereinigung der Zimmerer* ('Free Association of Carpenters') with a central committee in Leipzig. The subsequent history of this organization and of that of the other localist building worker unions will be considered in the remaining two chapters of this study. At this point it is now appropriate to look at the ideas which motivated the localist movement as crystallised at this time in Kessler's theoretical writings. The first thing to be said is that Kessler was no anarchist. The introduction to this study has

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<sup>32</sup> BV, 16th Jan. 1887. Cited in Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 50-1.

<sup>33</sup> Schmöle, ibid., p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> *Der Verband deutscher Zimmerleute (Lokalverband Hamburg) contra Gustav Kessler*, op. cit.; Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 53-6. See also: Ch. 5, note 30.



already highlighted Kessler's contribution to drawing up the Erfurt programme of the Social Democratic Party in 1891, as well as his opposition to rotation of membership of the party's executive at its Cologne congress in 1893.<sup>36</sup> In common with Rieke, Kessler did not deviate, once he had formally joined it, from public loyalty to the party. After 1890 he stood as a candidate in successive *Reichstag* elections. Unlike Rieke, however, he did not break with trade union localism in the wake of the acceptance by the SPD congress in Lübeck in 1901 of Eduard Bernstein's resolution calling for 'uniform centralization'.<sup>37</sup> Kessler was sympathetic to French syndicalism from his first encounter with its adherents in Paris but this was hardly party heresy before 1901. Of anarchism, he wrote as early as 1887 of 'the errors of the anarchists', that,

We believe it to be ... of great harm for our cause when the view forms in the heads of a few, when the lesson is propagated, that the unceasing activity currently generated by the supporters of the new era can lead to nothing, that only 'the bold deed' will lead to change and progress. We believe this view to be an error which is to be fought with all determination. It is based primarily on a false application of basically correct principles.<sup>38</sup>

In an article under the simple headline '1897 – 1927!', Kessler's successor Fritz Kater summarised the history of the localist and anarcho-syndicalist movements after the first of these two dates (that is, after the founding of the Representatives Centralization and first publication of the *Einigkeit*), and that solely of the localist movement before it (with reference to the *Bauhandwerker*, before and after 1890). He was careful to emphasise that, 'Kessler was a Social Democrat and as such, owing to his radicalism during the "Anti-Socialist Law", the most persecuted man in Germany.' Kater explained the latter epithet, with reference to the continued publication of the *Bauhandwerker* after 1886 'under the most varied of names', that this was 'in spite of the fact that the editor was nowhere ('an keinem Orte') tolerated by the local police for longer than six

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<sup>36</sup> Introduction above, pp. 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 18, note 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, 9th Jan. 1887: 'Wir halten es ... für einen großen Schaden unserer Sache, wenn sich in den Köpfen einzelner nun die Ansicht ausbildet, wenn man die Lehre verbreitet, daß diese rastlos thätige Arbeit, die Anhänger der neuen Zeit jetzt entwickeln, zu nichts führen könne, daß nur "die kühne That" Aenderung und Fortschritt schaffen könne. Diese Anschauung halten wir für eine Irrlehre, die mit Entschiedenheit zu bekämpfen ist. Sie beruht hauptsächlich auf eine falschen Anwendung an und für sich richtiger Grundsätze.'

weeks'.<sup>39</sup> It is therefore not surprising that one theme more than any other marked Kessler's writings on trade unionism to such an extent as to sometimes make the attribution to him of unsigned newspaper articles comparatively easy.<sup>40</sup> Kessler repeatedly stressed the necessity for organizations to keep within the law and avoid the tentacles in particular of the various laws of association in late nineteenth century Germany. Indeed, when imperial legislation in December 1899 overrode regional law of association restrictions on political activity by trade unions, this legal change would be interpreted by some localists, citing Kessler, as meaning that localism, as a tactic, was no longer necessary.<sup>41</sup> Kessler himself had appeared to predict such an outcome when he wrote in 1896 that, 'both forms of organization [*that is, the central unions and the local craft unions*] have their advantages and disadvantages and are not effective for all situations ... legal circumstances have had the effect that the trade union movement, including that with thoroughly social democratic foundations, has completely separated itself from the political movement. There is no other reason for the separation.'<sup>42</sup> Kessler cited Britain, France, the United States, and Australia as countries where the laws of association did not prevent the trade unions from intervening directly in politics and saw no reason why it should be different in Germany. Furthermore,

If we had a better right of association, the organization of the mass of social democratic workers, which is unitary and which does not consist of a 'right-wing' of trade unionists and a 'left-wing' of politicians, would naturally so organize itself after the model of the trade unions in associations. These same organizations would lead both sides of the struggle for an improvement to the situation of the workers under today's system and for the liberation of the proletariat, for the attainment of political power.<sup>43</sup>

Kessler, however, did not believe that such freedom of association would be achieved in Germany 'for a long time'.<sup>44</sup> His earlier advice in the *Baugewerkschafter* therefore still

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<sup>39</sup> *Syndikalist*, 18th June 1927.

<sup>40</sup> For example, the two part article, 'Die Berliner Maurerbewegung seit dem Puttkamer'schen Streikerlaß: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Koalitionsrechtes in Deutschland', *Volks-Tribüne*, 12th/19th May 1888.

<sup>41</sup> See Conclusion.

<sup>42</sup> Kessler, *SA*, p. 761.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 762-3. Kessler refers to 'England' in the German original text when he clearly means Britain.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 757. Kessler's lack of optimism was understandable given a series of attempts by the national German government in the course of the 1890s, beginning with the so-called '*Umsturzvorlage*'

stood: trade unions were not to limit themselves to being associations for illness or travel support which otherwise left everything as it was and waited for an economic transformation, to be ‘achieved by some unnamed and unknown power’.<sup>45</sup> With a glance sideways to his political and personal opponents and enemies, he continued to ask of the ‘central union enthusiasts’ (‘Verbandsschwärmer’) and ‘union executive committees of “non-political” associations’ who exhorted their members to keep their distance from political activists: ‘What can one do about it when no “political” speech (in the opinion of the German judiciary) can be held in the union? Wait until the man in red comes to his senses? Or until enlightenment comes to him through a miracle?’<sup>46</sup>

For Kessler, the enlightenment of the German judiciary lay in the future; in the here and now, the local craft union continued to provide an already available means of enlightening the workers as to their situation. Writing in 1887, he was critical of the failure of the central unions to attract members at that time by neglecting this role.<sup>47</sup> Enlightenment went beyond ‘bread and butter’ demands, although Kessler was careful to add the caveat that subjects such as state and foreign affairs, magnets to political

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(‘Subversion Bill’, or ‘Law regarding changes and additions to Criminal and Military Codes and to Press Law’) of December 1894, to re-muzzle the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions. In November 1895, recourse was even made to the Prussian Law of Association in provisionally banning the party’s central committee, now based in Berlin. The ensuing period of legal uncertainty lasted over a year before charges were dropped; during this period Hamburg, on the one hand, and the parliamentary party, on the other, assumed their old roles. Nevertheless, on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1899 the German government introduced national legislation over-riding the laws of association of the individual German states. A new law, ‘Das Gesetz betreffend des Vereinswesens’, guaranteed freedom of association and combination for workers’ organizations, including trade unions. This followed the defeat in the *Reichstag*, less than one month earlier on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1899, of a new attempt by the national government to curb workers’ organization, the so-called ‘Zuchthausvorlage’, or ‘Penitentiary Law Bill’, which had laid down terms of imprisonment and even penal servitude for attempts to enforce a closed shop or picketing during strikes. The change of direction was, however, not without precedent: the regional parliaments of Bavaria and Saxony had voted one year earlier to raise the bans both on political association and on women’s participation in political organizations (with the exception of the Social Democratic Party). The new national law, however, rolled back the latter concession and it would not be until 1908 with the adoption of a national law book that women in Germany could formally join political parties. There was also little doubt at the time that the raising of the ban on political combination was motivated by an attempt to encourage nascent Christian trade unionism and thereby split the Social Democratic Party from the mainly Roman Catholic *Zentrum* (‘Centre’) party, for both political parties had combined with Progressive Liberals in the *Reichstag* to defeat the Penitentiary Bill.

<sup>45</sup> Gustav Kessler, ‘Die gewerkschaftliche Organisation, XI. Die Lohnkommission’, *Baugewerkschafter*, 6th Feb. 1887.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

police intervention, or religion, a divisive issue, should be kept out of craft union meetings.<sup>48</sup> But one should not, for example, be restricted to asking for a pay rise without at the same time asking why wages were set at the level they were. Craft unions had to point out to their members that pressure on wages arose less from the evil intentions of employers than from general economic conditions which forced the employer through unregulated competition from all directions to insist on cheaper production. A fundamental improvement in the situation of the workers could therefore not be achieved through strikes, as useful and necessary as these sometimes were, but only through social reform. In addition the craft unions had to educate their members about those institutions and customs such as piece work through which they made their own situation worse.<sup>49</sup> The existing law too, as it impacted on workers' rights of assembly, on health and safety and on working conditions, on housing and nourishment, on health care and on provision for illness, invalidity and old age, on accident insurance, and on the legal organizations of masters and journeymen, certainly formed a basis for discussion in the craft unions which were to seek to provide their members with the greatest possible insight and clarification on such questions.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore,

The craft unions, in pursuit of this aim, the awakening of the workers, should make use of all legal means and utilise every advantage which the law offers and which the modern interpretation of the law, unsympathetic to the workers, still allows them. They should, as the expression says, 'offer something', to those not yet awakened workers they wish to make receptive to the aims of union life. They should hold social events, pay travel support, support their members in cases of emergency, and procure for them all kinds of smaller and larger advantages, from low-cost coal to the cheap theatre ticket. They should provide the members with access to good books, aiming to wean them away from life in the gin shops for more noble pleasures. Members should be so educated at union meetings through discussions, lectures and readings, as to cause them to reflect and learn to grasp their situation and their economic and social position.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Gustav Kessler, 'Die gewerkschaftliche Organisation, XII. Die Organisation ganzer Gewerkschaften', *Baugewerkschafter*, 6th Mar. 1887.

<sup>50</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, 6th Feb. 1887.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Kessler himself summarised the role of the craft unions thus as, ‘schools for struggle and for political education’.<sup>52</sup> The experience of the Federation of Carpenters made clear the danger inherent in leaving ‘politics’ to the party while building up a ‘non-political’ trade union movement open to all. The local craft union functioned both as an autonomous economic organization, with local control over finances and strike organization, and as a political ‘incubator’. Monarchists were welcome to join the union but they would not remain monarchists for long. This concept of ‘the grass roots making of socialists’ has much in common with later syndicalism although for Kessler it always supplemented the educational work of the Social Democratic Party.<sup>53</sup> The defence of this political function of the craft unions meant that while the laws of association remained on the statute books, compliance with them meant that they could not form a national union.

Whereas for his centralist opponents the union was everything, for Kessler the local craft union formed one part of an organizational triumvirate, the other two parts of which, the open assembly meeting and the wage committee, drew on earlier strike experience, for example that of bricklayers in Berlin in 1885. Because it also followed that wage struggles often required agreement beyond a single location and often also across unions, and that in Kessler’s view it was completely natural if bricklayers, stone carvers, and carpenters, at least, came to an agreement with one another on a question of wages which might lead to a strike (as had happened in Magdeburg in 1886), craft unions as political associations were unsuitable means for the conduct of such struggles if they were to avoid renouncing all educational activity on economic questions.<sup>54</sup> The open assembly meeting and the wage committee provided these means. Kessler recognised that many workers did not join trade unions out of disinclination towards organizational life. People were deterred for various reasons from joining the existing unions and not all of these people were hostile to ‘the cause’.<sup>55</sup> In addition, as unions became larger, and Kessler included craft unions in this, practical considerations, for

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<sup>52</sup> Kessler, *SA*, op. cit., p. 761.

<sup>53</sup> Gustav Kessler, *Die Ziele der Sozialdemokratischen Partei*, Berlin 1895.

<sup>54</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, 6th Mar. 1887.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

example of finding a large enough meeting place, meant they became more difficult to manage; the open assembly meeting was the tried and tested method of overcoming this. Such meetings, as ‘free associations’, were free of the legal constraints on organizations. Kessler summarised their functions as such:

They can debate and decide on all important and appropriate matters of a political nature or not. As a result the debates are for the most part interesting and appealing, the meetings are therefore for the most part well attended and their influence is deeper and of greater benefit. They have the effect of informing and inspiring to a very high degree. This public meeting can do and decide what it likes so long as it remains within the normal civil law. It can resolve on petitions to the authorities and to law-giving bodies, and appoint committees to draw up such petitions; it can delegate persons for a particular purpose to negotiate with the representatives of other trades of the same type or also of a different type; it can elect wage committees to regulate local wages and to also combine with wage committees in other localities; it can collect money from the voluntary contributions of trade colleagues and decide over its administration and expenditure; in short, such a general meeting can do everything which it finds beneficial to the interests of the trade and workers. The meeting is gone once it is closed; the next one has no further connection with it other than having the same interests.<sup>56</sup>

To be effective, the craft unions needed to call such meetings frequently. Such meetings were open to all trade colleagues irrespective of membership of craft union, trade association (*Gewerkverein*), guild, or no membership at all.<sup>57</sup> Kessler recommended that a three-person secretariat be elected each time but added a warning on minute-taking that, ‘one is mindful above all of the malpractice of writing up the minutes of such general meetings in the same book as for the minutes of meetings of the craft union. This particular practice has already cost the existence of many a craft union.’<sup>58</sup> The meetings were therefore to be kept fully separate from the union although in practice they could share the same chair – as indeed had been the case with Carl Behrend during the Berlin bricklayers’ strike.<sup>59</sup> Kessler went so far, writing in 1887, as to assert that if called frequently and regularly trade colleagues would come to see in the meetings ‘an

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Kessler was possibly thinking back here to the mass meetings of several thousand bricklayers during the Berlin strike of 1885.

<sup>58</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> See Ch.4 above.

enduring institution for the representation of their interests'; 'the open assembly meeting of the trade will then prove itself suitable for delivering the firm basis for the organization of the trade unions, broader and more solid than that which can be achieved by any other organization'.<sup>60</sup>

One of the functions of the open assembly meeting was to elect the third part of the organizational triumvirate which made up the localist model, that of the wage committee. As an elected body charged with a specific function, to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions on behalf of those who had elected it, it was a semi-permanent body in the sense that its mandate did not end with the closure of the meeting. It was therefore subject to the laws of association but in contrast with the craft union, which abjured combination in favour of politics, the wage committee abjured politics in favour of combination. That is, while Kessler advised that wage committees under no circumstances associate themselves with a craft union or other body which pursued political aims, among themselves they could safely contact other wage committees which likewise concerned themselves with nothing more than local wage matters.<sup>61</sup> In this respect only was the local wage committee similar to the non-political trade union; in contrast to the latter it was regularly accountable to its electorate at the open assembly meeting. Although independent of the craft union, the two organizations were linked by the assembly meeting which the union more often called and at which the wage committee was elected. In addition to its negotiating role, the latter body was also responsible for strike organization and support; in fact, in the *Berliner Volksblatt* of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1885, the wage committee was actually referred to as the '*Lohn-oder-Streik-Kommission*' in acknowledgement of this dual role.<sup>62</sup> Kessler advised here that, 'according to the usual interpretation of the law by the courts they need to avoid just the one pitfall, which however is easy to avoid. They may not allow themselves to be tempted to make decisions or debate proposals which go beyond local activity. They may not therefore for instance decide: "A normal working day is to be adopted for our

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<sup>60</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, 6th Feb. 1887.

<sup>62</sup> *BV*, 23rd June 1885.

trade across the whole of Germany!’’<sup>63</sup> On strike support, he advised that the collecting of money was legal in Prussia where this was done *privately*; ‘the collector of contributions therefore cannot go from house to house or collect in public places but he may certainly collect in closed circles. Following judgements in Berlin it has also been determined that collecting money on a building site is not punishable where this is carried out by a worker employed there.’<sup>64</sup>

Shortly before the setting aside of the law of association restrictions on political activity by the trade unions, Kessler sketched out a draft model of future workers’ organization under freer circumstances. In envisaging an additional, intersecting, layer of workers’ organization based on political constituency boundaries, mirroring that of the Social Democratic Party, open to workers of all trades and also to the non-unionized, he came closer still to revolutionary syndicalism, such as that in France, with its *Bourses du Travail*, or ‘labour exchanges’, which cut across trade union boundaries. Ironically, Kessler viewed the French trade union movement itself as one divided between the various socialist factions such as the Allemanists, Blanquists, and Guesdists, as well as Marxists.<sup>65</sup> He pointed out that in Germany the trade union organizations which sprang up following the Industrial Code of 21<sup>st</sup> July 1869 which had granted the right of combination found the ground prepared for them by the young social democratic movement and developed where this was strongest.<sup>66</sup> In contrast with the liberal ‘Hirsch-Duncker’ trade associations, the social democratic workers’ movement, resting on the basis of the class struggle, had recognised the fundamental opposition between the interests of the property-less and propertied classes, and knew that the propertied only conceded so much as could be gained and held on to through struggle and the power of organization.<sup>67</sup> Although every thinking worker, of whatever party, had to pursue higher wages, shorter working hours, and better conditions, differences in principles, which determine tactics, had caused all attempts at organizing the trade

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<sup>63</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, op. cit.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Kessler, *SA*, op. cit.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 759.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 759-60.



union movement without considering workers' party membership to founder. This was a clear reference to the Federation of Carpenters and also to that of the printers, the Federation of German Print Workers (*Verband der deutschen Buchdrucker*), which, in Kessler's opinion, functioned only as a mutual fund.<sup>68</sup>

For Kessler 'the struggle' had two aspects: firstly that which aimed at improving the day-to-day situation of the workers; and secondly that which had as its aims the liberation of the proletariat and the attainment of political power. His future model proposed that,

For the first struggle those workers organized in the craft unions would join with their peers in other localities by trade or occupational group according to expediency, for the second they would combine without respect to trade. The trade union committees, which today are already widely distributed, would organize themselves according to electoral constituency and at the same time constitute themselves as representative political bodies which themselves also are able to unite with one another according to need. Since not all workers are able to join trade union organizations and one may not exercise pressure on them, there are also social democrats who don't belong to any trade union and who cannot be accommodated in them, there will also be free associations which enjoy the same rights as the trade unions and which will also have their representatives in the committees.<sup>69</sup>

With respect to the last sentence Kessler was saying that if solidarity was lacking in the workplace, the constituency-based committee could provide this. This was a re-writing of the practice under the still extant laws of association of the open assembly meeting being open to non-craft union members. Kessler did not dispute that the sectional trade unions in the United States and Britain, in a freer climate, had achieved considerable success in certain industries and had won a decisive influence on wages and conditions but he was highly critical of the growth of a conservative labour aristocracy, citing the example of trade unions in the United States who charged high joining fees to keep out immigrants, for example. Betterment for one part of the working class in these circumstances was at the expense of the other and the economic struggle was thereby brought into the working class itself, providing the propertied classes with the means of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 760.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 763.

fighting the workers through the workers.<sup>70</sup> The practice of such unions in encouraging their members to vote for a given political party, which Kessler conceded had in the past yielded considerable improvements, was not without its limitations. The trade unions in those countries had been unable to prevent a considerable fall in wages in the course of the economic crisis which followed the Chicago World Exhibition of 1893. By the time of the United States' general election of November 1896, workers had been so divided that no party had made an offer for their votes.<sup>71</sup>

For Kessler, such experiences taught workers the necessity of positioning the trade unions beneath the flag of Social Democracy and to conduct the trade union struggle on the basis of the class struggle. He acknowledged that in Britain the 'new trade unionism' [that is, the *new unionism* of the unskilled], 'imparted higher aims to the sectional battles of the trade union organizations'.<sup>72</sup> Where earlier he had spoken of social reform, now, in 1896 in his mid-sixties, Kessler spoke rather of the conquest of political and economic power. In contrast with the Lassalleanism of which localists were sometimes accused, he rejected the idea of producer co-operatives as any kind of workers' panacea, having been involved in the setting up of one such for building workers in Berlin in 1893. Dirk Müller has written that 'Gustav Kessler's concept of using capital for the general good rather than abolishing it lay behind this enterprise'.<sup>73</sup> If so, while not rejecting co-operatives *per se*, three years later his views on capital were hardly favourable: 'It is not the aim of the trade union movement to secure for the workers a small share of capital ownership but rather to strengthen as much as possible their ability to resist those demands of capital which aim at the highest possible exploitation of the workers.'<sup>74</sup> In a direct repudiation of Lassalleanism, Kessler pointed out that his organizational model retained separate trade union organization; in his own words, both movements of the working class supported one another, 'like the two feet

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 757-8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 758.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 756-7. See also: Dirk Müller, 'Syndicalism and Localism in the German Trade Union Movement', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Hans-Gerhard Husung, *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany 1880-1914*, London 1985, pp. 239-49 (p. 245, note 44).

<sup>74</sup> Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 757.

of a traveller'. They supported the same body, 'that of the fighting proletariat'.<sup>75</sup> He compared trade union activity with that of the political party which, 'at its higher levels offers more stimulation and pleasure and at its lower less danger and fewer burdens'. This disparity, and trade union expenses which had eaten up contributions to the party, had given rise to resentment on both sides.<sup>76</sup> Kessler is presumably referring above all to the central trade unions here and when in conclusion he does not exclude them when writing of two branches of the movement which, 'can work in harmony with one another until the time comes when the right of coalition becomes a reality for the workers', it is hard not to conclude in turn that a door was being held open here.<sup>77</sup>

If, for his colleague and later anarcho-syndicalist Fritz Kater, writing in 1927, Kessler and his legacy were 'unforgettable', for a centralist such as Paepow, he remained a 'Mephisto' character whose impact on the early German trade union movement had been solely divisive.<sup>78</sup> Paepow's view was derived from that of his 1880s predecessors in the Hamburg bricklayers' craft union and their supporters; this view held that the Berlin craft union, under Kessler's influence, had been primarily responsible for the split in the bricklayers' movement which occurred in 1886. While Kessler had, with his unfair denunciation of Knegendorf in the first issue of the *Baugewerkschafter*, thereby invited some of the invective subsequently directed at himself, such invective, on both sides, paled in comparison with that directed at Kessler by the Federation of German Carpenters in March 1887. Bearing the nominal authorship of the Hamburg branch of the national union, a union pamphlet under the title *Der Verband deutscher Zimmerleute (Lokalverband Hamburg) contra Gustav Keßker*, whose real author was the, yet to be unmasked, police spy Nix, attempted to attribute responsibility for the split in the union's ranks to the malign influence of Kessler.<sup>79</sup> Much of the pamphlet's 'criticism' bordered on the crass and puerile. For example, citing the Hamburg bricklayers' agitation committee, it wrote of Kessler that, 'The flood of insults ... is that element in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 763.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 764.

<sup>78</sup> *Syndikalist*, op. cit.; Paepow, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>79</sup> For Nix: Ch. 8, note 15.

which the buccaneer Kessler, an aborted giant microbe, most prefers to move, he swims in his own muck and gasps for air.’<sup>80</sup> Elsewhere, Kessler was accused of cowardice, again with reference to the bricklayers’ agitation committee, for having earlier advised it that everything was to be avoided which gave the appearance of a connection to other organizations: ‘note, too, that committees are organizations in the sense of the Prussian law’.<sup>81</sup> Such advice was, in fact (as indicated above), part of the developing localist programme and in any case timely, given the police closure of bricklayer craft unions across Prussia which had followed Knegendorf’s arrest at the end of his ‘ambassadorial’ tour of 1885 on behalf of the earlier Hamburg control committee in support of the Workers’ Protection Bill.<sup>82</sup> Any charge of cowardice against a man who, following his expulsion from Berlin, was tolerated by the local police in no single location for longer than six weeks, and whose odyssey before returning to his home and family in 1890, would in addition to Brunswick, take in Brandenburg, Saxony, Thuringia, Hanover, Munich, and Nuremberg, was worse than disingenuous given that the harassment Kessler was subject to was no secret: even a political opponent such as Eduard Bernstein conceded, following Kessler’s death (of the effects of a stroke), that during the Anti-Socialist Law years he had, ‘as a result of direct and indirect police pressure been chased right across Germany, like no other’.<sup>83</sup> In contrast with Bernstein’s later magnanimity, the Federation of German Carpenters signed off their attack on Kessler with the following words: ‘Now we ask of Germany’s carpenters: Is such a person worthy of being a workers’ leader? In our opinion he belongs among the dead and there may he vanish.’<sup>84</sup>

The main charge, that Kessler had split the national carpenters’ union, was patently untrue and demonstrated how out of touch the union’s right-wing leadership had become with much of its activist base. The call for an independent carpenters’ congress

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Cited in Schmöle, op. cit., p. 54: ‘Die Schimpfflut, sagt die Agitationskommission der deutschen Maurer schon, ist das Element, in welchem der Freibeuter Keßler als abgetriebener Riesenbacillus am liebsten sich bewegt, er schwimmt in seiner eigen Jauche und schnappt nach Luft.’

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>82</sup> See Ch. 5, note 77.

<sup>83</sup> *Syndikalist*, op. cit.; *Einigkeit*, 6th Aug. 1904; Bernstein, *GBA*, Vol. 2, p. 357.

<sup>84</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 56.

had come at a seemingly opportune time but it had not come from a localist theorist (Kessler), or even from union Social Democrats in Magdeburg or Berlin, but from Wilhelm Stephan of the Leipzig craft union. Stephan's appeal made no mention of ideology but exhibited exasperation with the national union which, citing the local law of association, had neglected to organize in Saxony at all. His appeal had been sent to all 'worker-friendly' newspapers and was first published in the *Berliner Volksblatt*.<sup>85</sup> Stephan, in his response to the immediate brutal denunciation of his call by Schönstein and the national union leadership, added, in a second circular, that 'anyone honest and open regarding the workers' question could only agree that a congress for all Germany's carpenters is necessary, for only by this is it possible to create a good organization to deal with the social evil so prevalent in our trade'.<sup>86</sup> The claim that Kessler was a 'buccaneer' proved of longer duration but hostile trade union leaders such as Paepflow and Drunsel, who 'rose' through union activity, pointedly neglected to mention Kessler's humble origins in their criticisms of him and thereby appear not to have taken into account the reality that for Kessler as a young man, born in 1832 and a generation older than themselves, there had been no carpenter organization other than the hated guilds to which he could have dedicated his activities. He had instead chosen the path of adult education, a biographical detail they could easily have discovered if they had read Marzian's article in the *Zimmerkunst* of December 1883.<sup>87</sup> If they had further read the following month's issue of the same journal they would have noted that at a general meeting of Berlin's carpenters at the beginning of December, Kessler had volunteered that the door to his home remained open every afternoon between 3 and 5 p.m. for the discussion of technical matters in confidence.<sup>88</sup> This was in addition to his paid position with the national union. He did not ask for money and would hardly have endeared himself if he had done so.

Criticism of Kessler's motives took a different form ten years later with reference to his commitment to the Social Democratic Party. At the same Berlin carpenters' meeting

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<sup>85</sup> BV, op. cit.; *Baugewerkschafter*, 20th Feb. 1887.

<sup>86</sup> *Baugewerkschafter*, ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, No. 6 (Dec. 1883).

<sup>88</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, No. 7 (Jan. 1884).

described above, Kessler had requested that the national union keep its distance from party politics and instead strive only for an improvement in its lot, 'for then the establishment of the national union would be a step with great results'.<sup>89</sup> Kessler later admitted himself that he was not a member of the Social Democratic Party at this time, and sympathetic biographies made no such claim; his obituary in *Die Eingikeit*, for example, noted the hitherto leading role he had played in the Berlin West branch of the Progressive Liberal Party from which, however, he had resigned in 1883, 'in order to prove his ability and activity in the service of our party'.<sup>90</sup> Kessler made no secret also of the fact that he had not formally joined the (in any case, outlawed) party by the time of his expulsion from Berlin in 1886 and eighteen months later, in January 1888, the parliamentary party petitioned the *Reichstag* on this basis that he be allowed to return to Berlin for family reasons (Kessler was married and father to six daughters and one son).<sup>91</sup> Ignaz Auer noted in his account of the Anti-Socialist Law years that neither Kessler, nor Wilke, nor Behrend, had played any role in the 'political workers' movement' before their expulsions.<sup>92</sup> It was already obvious to Kessler's former Progressive Liberal colleagues, however, where his political sympathies now lay, for in the aftermath of the Berlin bricklayers' strike in 1885 they attacked both him and the 'socialist' bricklayers' movement he supported.<sup>93</sup> Nor did the German government accept the parliamentary petition: for Puttkamer, Kessler was one of the most dangerous of Social Democrats 'who had done everything possible to drag the united joiners, bricklayers and carpenters of Germany into revolutionary waters'.<sup>94</sup> Despite such evidence, August Bringmann, a carpenter ally of Kessler's before 1890, maintained in 1897 that Kessler had been a member of the Progressive Liberal Party up to 1886 who turned to the radical '*Jungen*' movement in Berlin in response to Puttkamer's words. He had then fallen out with these and the mainstream of the Social Democratic Party in turn before turning to 'political trade unionism'. Bringmann noted that the majority of the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, pp. 24-5; *Einigkeit*, op. cit.

<sup>91</sup> Bringmann, 'Ein Führer der politischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung', op. cit.; *Einigkeit*, op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Auer, Vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>93</sup> Ch. 5, note 20; Ch. 4, note 93.

<sup>94</sup> Bringmann, op. cit.

spokespeople for the latter (presumably here was also meant Fritz Kater) had previously held the opposite point of view, and cited in support Kessler's advice to Berlin carpenters in 1883. In addition, citing Puttkamer, Kessler was a criminal who had been found guilty on five occasions, including once of a crime of dishonour ('wegen eines entehrenden Verbrechens').<sup>95</sup>

Kessler responded most immediately to the latter charge although the preciseness of the dating, and circumstances ('without hesitation, as always, he broke with the former Progress Party'), of his resignation from the Progressive Liberals in 1883 which is contained in his obituary indicates that he also acted to clear up the ambiguity in this area too.<sup>96</sup> Refuting Puttkamer, Kessler stated in the *Einigkeit* on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1897 that he had been convicted on not five but nine occasions of misdemeanours but never of a crime, and most certainly never of a crime of dishonour, 'for otherwise he would not have been able to carry his title of state-registered architect'.<sup>97</sup> Bringmann had known this before 1890 for these convictions had been admitted in the course of the parliamentary petition two years earlier. The party had not deemed them grounds to bar him from subsequently standing for election to the *Reichstag*.<sup>98</sup> Aside from clarifying the circumstances of the withdrawal of his parliamentary candidature for Magdeburg in 1890 ('from party tactical grounds'; Kessler in subsequent years stood, unsuccessfully, for the SPD in Calbe-Aschersleben), Kessler did not deem 'the remaining nonsense' which Bringmann had 'cooked up' worthy of discussion and ended it at that point but he and Kater would presumably have noted the irony of Bringmann for criticising them for having previously held different views, for the latter had himself moved in the opposite direction, from localism to membership of the General Commission of the Free Trade Unions by 1896.<sup>99</sup> As the Introduction to this study has indicated, leading SPD politicians were for the most part unwilling to take sides in the trade union debate during Kessler's lifetime and both his obituary in the *Einigkeit*, and a separate notice of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. For Bringmann after 1890, see Ch. 8.

<sup>96</sup> *Einigkeit*, op. cit.

<sup>97</sup> *Einigkeit*, 14th Aug. 1897. Cited in Schmöle, op. cit., p. 193: 'denn dann dürfte er seinen Titel Regierungsbaumeister nicht führen'.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 193-4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 194

thanks from his daughter Johanna, noted the presence in his funeral cortege of representatives of local SPD electoral associations, of the editorial board of *Vorwärts*, and of several members of the party executive.<sup>100</sup> Towards the end of his life, Kessler had twice been imprisoned, on the first occasion for four months following criticism of police violence against the unemployed in an article in the *Volksblatt für Teltow-Beeskow-Storkow-Charlottenburg* of which he was editor, and on the second for one month in 1898 at the age of 67 following a speech he had given on the annual 18<sup>th</sup> March commemoration of the Paris Commune.<sup>101</sup> For the party leadership in 1904, for the writers of his obituary, and for Fritz Kater in 1927, there was no longer any ambiguity. Kessler had died a Social Democrat.<sup>102</sup>

Co-author with Kater of Kessler's obituary in the *Einigkeit* was the one participant in the later founding of the anarcho-syndicalist FAUD in 1919 who had also witnessed the birth of the localist movement over three decades earlier. That witness had been Carl Thieme, who in 1886 as a stove fitter had been seconded on to the press committee in Berlin overseeing the publication of the *Bauhandwerker*. In a second obituary, on behalf of Berlin's localist pottery workers organized under the umbrella of the *Geschäftskommission* (here, 'Organizing Committee'), Thieme praised Kessler's contribution as a 'co-founder of our organization'.<sup>103</sup> Germany's pottery worker craft unions had adopted the *Bauhandwerker* as their trade journal at their first national congress during the Anti-Socialist Law period in 1884: 'We have known our old friend of many years from this time on and not to the disadvantage of the further development of our organization'. Kessler had been 'extremely gifted as a writer, with a rich experience and education in all areas of knowledge and jurisprudence ... he knew how to make himself understood in a down-to-earth of manner'; at all times, he had been

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<sup>100</sup> *Einigkeit*, 6th Aug. 1904.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> The hostility of the centralised building worker trade unions remained undimmed. For example, the *Grundstein*, journal of the Central Union of German Bricklayers, commented in its obituary that Kessler had 'approached the workers at the age of 52 as a much-travelled man, driven more by need than desire, after he had rendered his position as a state official untenable ... afterwards he had turned out to be of very dubious character and had inflicted immeasurable damage on the bricklayers' movement'. *Grundstein*, 6th Aug. 1904.

<sup>103</sup> *Einigkeit*, op. cit.



glad to volunteer his help and advice and had been present as a guest and advisor to all national pottery worker congresses from 1885 until 1892.<sup>104</sup> Bearing these words of Thieme in mind, the following chapter will first of all examine the burgeoning national pottery workers' movement of these years, within which Kessler's programme aroused little controversy, before returning to the more contested field of bricklayer unionization after the split of 1887.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### *The Vertrauensmänner system: the examples of the stove fitters and bricklayers, 1884-1892*

This study has so far focussed its attention on bricklayers and carpenters as the two most significant examples of localist trade union organizing in the construction trade, the industrial sector within which localist organizing had the most impact. Among both groups of workers, this method of organization encountered significant opposition from fellow trade unionists at its outset, in the case of the former, that of the bricklayers, from other Social Democrats, and in the latter case, that of the carpenters, from a coalition which was led by non-Social Democrats. Among the bricklayers, moderating voices on both sides, most notably those of Ernst Knegendorf for the centralists and Fritz Wilke for the localists, had attempted to temper the degree of personal calumny which the organizational disagreement was engendering. No such attempt at moderation had been made in the case of the carpenters but among a third group of workers associated with the building industry, namely the pottery workers, who included both stove fitters and workshop-based potters,<sup>1</sup> such animosity was for the most part missing before the first national congress of the Free Trade Unions at Halberstadt in 1892.<sup>2</sup> Although numerically far less significant both in absolute and in union membership terms, it was nonetheless among the pottery workers that the *Vertrauensmänner* or ‘regional representatives’ model of national co-ordination would develop most freely to become, by 1892, the localist alternative at national level to the vertical branch structure of the centralists.<sup>3</sup> During the same period, the development of a similar system of regional representatives among Germany’s bricklayers was stopped in its tracks after it became

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<sup>1</sup> Of an estimated ‘5,000’ *unionised* pottery workers in 1888, 2,077 were stove fitters, 2,933 workshop-based. 3,001 craft union members were represented at the fourth national pottery workers’ congress of that year. Drunsel, pp. 133-4.

<sup>2</sup> At first glance the connection of pottery workers to the building trade is a tenuous one but at a time when the oven or stove was the main heating source for many homes, the role of the *Ofensetzer* or stove fitter as part of a new home’s completion was analogous to that of a modern plumber or heating engineer.

<sup>3</sup> At their respective second national congresses the following totals of unionised workers were represented: 10,422 bricklayers in 1885; 3,637 carpenters in 1884; 1,123 stove fitters and potters in 1886. *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1885 Hanover, p. 4; *Zimmerkunst*, July 1884; Drunsel, p. 111.

another object of differing interpretation between the centralist and localist camps. This chapter will compare and contrast the experiences of both groups of workers.

The stove fitters and potters had turned to the *Vertrauensmänner* model following a costly mistake made in the early days of union reorganization after the initial Anti-Socialist Law hiatus. Following the establishment of several local craft unions, beginning with that in Berlin in the summer of 1882, the first national congress of stove fitters and potters had taken place in Dresden from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June 1884 at the initiative of stove fitters in Hamburg with the aim of centralising various local health insurance funds and launching a trade journal.<sup>4</sup> The former duly took place under the umbrella of the ‘Central Illness and Mortality Fund for Pottery Workers and Allied Trades of Germany’ (*Zentral-Kranken- und Sterbekasse der Töpfer und Berufsgenossen Deutschlands*) with its seat in Dresden. A trade journal, however, was not launched as the congress had cited lack of funds. Instead, it voted to adopt the bricklayers’ journal, the *Bauhandwerker*, as its own.<sup>5</sup> The Dresden congress also marked the first appearance on a national stage of the Berlin stove fitter and later anarcho-syndicalist Carl Thieme, who shortly afterwards became the pottery workers’ representative on the press committee supervising publication of the Berlin-based journal.<sup>6</sup> At this early juncture, Thieme expressed no opposition to centralization *per se* and at the 1884 congress he was elected chair of a separate national journeymen’s travel fund. Adam Drunsel, chair after 1899 of the Pottery Workers Union of Germany (*Töpferverband Deutschlands*), commented of the statutes for this organization which Thieme laid before the authorities in Berlin in April 1885, that, ‘they are clearly the statutes of a central union’, before adding: ‘The same Thieme who so strongly opposed the central union founded in the 1890s.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Einigkeit*, 6th Aug. 1904; Drunsel, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> *Einigkeit*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Confusingly, Hartmut Rübner, in his study of the FAUD after 1919, appears to attribute sole responsibility for publishing the *Bauhandwerker* to Thieme (it was Wilke’s name which appeared on the journal’s masthead). Rübner, p. 60, note 4. See also: Ch. 5, note 106.

<sup>7</sup> Drunsel, pp. 103-4.

The second national pottery workers' congress in Berlin, which took place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1886, narrowly rejected by one vote the translation of the journeymen's travel support fund statutes into the establishment of a national organization and recommended instead that travel support be a local responsibility.<sup>8</sup> Drunsel attributed this decision, to forego centralization in favour of the 'local path', to the undue influence of Gustav Kessler, 'a man of great knowledge', who alone knew the full importance of the central journeymen's fund. For Drunsel, this fund would have been the precursor to a national union and at any rate the means by which the 'Bruderkrieg' between localists and centralists would have been avoided.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation of Drunsel's is not borne out by the facts, for by *not* establishing a national union at that time, the pottery workers before 1892 actually did avoid the kind of fratricidal struggle which so poisoned bricklayer and carpenter ranks. As evidence of Kessler's influence, Drunsel cited a notice which appeared in the *Bauhandwerker* two weeks prior to the 1886 congress in which attention had been drawn under the heading 'Warnung für Zentralisationslüstige' ('A Warning to Centralization Enthusiasts') to the closure of the joiners' craft union in Königsberg after it had affiliated to the national union.<sup>10</sup> In addition to Kessler, Fritz Wilke had also attended the Berlin congress as an invited guest, and he assured pottery workers that in future the *Bauhandwerker* would devote more coverage to their trade.<sup>11</sup> Neither Kessler nor Wilke would have disapproved when the congress decided, with one vote against, to restrict piece work in favour of the hourly wage 'according to local circumstances' ('je nach örtlichen Verhältnissen'). In addition, it unanimously passed a resolution critical of the role of the guild masters in training apprentices and instead called for a legalised transfer of this role to producer co-operatives.<sup>12</sup> To address concerns over a number of unplanned and unsuccessful strikes during the previous year, the congress elected a 'control committee' of five members, all in Berlin, to which all intended strike action had to be reported six weeks in advance and which would oversee local craft unions' compliance with the laws of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-4, 112.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-15.

association. With reference to the latter, the committee was ‘not authorised to stand in contact with local unions themselves but with individual persons or with pottery workers as a whole’ [that is, at the national congress]; conversely, craft unions were not allowed to have contact with one another or to each other’s meetings but all publically registered meetings had the right ‘to entrust one or several persons with the conduct of external correspondence’.<sup>13</sup>

It is, however, hard to disagree with Drunsel when he asked why no-one realized that also entrusting the new control committee, of which Thieme was a member, with, in its own words, ‘complete control’ (‘Vollmacht’) over agitation, would lay it open to prosecution under the very laws of association it was trying to safeguard the craft unions against.<sup>14</sup> This duly happened three months later in June 1886 when in the course of strike action by Berlin pottery workers not just the control committee but also the Berlin pottery workers’ craft union were declared provisionally closed under Paragraph 8 of the Prussian Law of Association. The control committee’s chair, Boleslaw Przytulski, was expelled from Berlin under the Anti-Socialist Law while Thieme and a third member of the committee, R. Seidel, were fined. Although the strike itself achieved its aims of a 25 percent wage supplement and the nine hour working day, the other parallels with simultaneous state action against Berlin’s bricklayers are clear enough.

At the following year’s national congress in Hanover, the banned control committee was replaced by a ‘general committee’ (‘General-Ausschuss’) with its seat this time in Hamburg.<sup>15</sup> Of the 1,648 unionized pottery workers represented at the congress, none represented the still banned Berlin craft union which was said to have had 800 members at the time of its dissolution, a testament to the relative strength of pottery worker unionization in the German capital following an earlier successful partial strike in

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<sup>13</sup> *Bauhandwerker*, 21st Mar. 1886. Cited in Drunsel, pp. 116-18.

<sup>14</sup> Drunsel, pp. 113, 116. Drunsel himself added, regarding the committee’s wide remit, that, ‘Die von diesem Kongreß geschaffene Kontrollkommission hatte eine unbeschränkte, durch kein Statut eingeeengte oder begrenzte Vollmacht, viel weitgehender, als sie die Zentralvorstände der damals bestehenden Verbände der Zimmerer, Tischler usw. hatten und wie sie heute der Zentralvorstand unseres Verbandes hat.’ Ibid., pp. 115-16.

<sup>15</sup> The third national pottery workers’ congress took place in Hanover from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1887.

1885.<sup>16</sup> Continued unsuccessful strikes elsewhere, however, despite a clear growth in union membership, did provoke renewed debate about how strikes in the pottery trade were to be prevented. The new general committee was as a result entrusted with similar powers over strike authorisation as its predecessor although two concessions did water these down: the requirement for six weeks' notice was quietly dropped and the necessity sometimes of 'wildcat' action in an industry dominated by small employers was acknowledged with the requirement that the general committee be informed by telegraph as soon as possible after a 'defensive' strike had broken out.<sup>17</sup>

Reduced national powers did not, however, prevent the new committee in Hamburg from finding itself in turn arraigned before the magistrates' court for contravening Hamburg's local law of association which permitted organizations and meetings only at police discretion. At the fourth national pottery workers' congress, which took place in Stettin from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May 1888, the Hamburg committee, in continued existence pending appeal, lay down its mandate in favour of Halle on the congress recommendation that the general committee, to avoid dissolution, should not communicate with unions or bodies recognised as such. To facilitate communication in compliance with the law, the congress then nominated five *Vertrauensmänner*, or 'regional representatives', from five different locations.<sup>18</sup> This in itself did not necessarily indicate ultimate opposition to setting up a central union; following the walkout of localist delegates to the previous year's national bricklayers' congress in Bremen, that congress's centralist remainder had also nominated five representatives to whom complaints were to be individually directed.<sup>19</sup> In the person of Ferdinand Kaulich, however, the new pottery workers' general committee in Halle had a chair who was, at that time, a convinced localist. Under his stewardship, the regional representatives were allowed to constitute an additional organized body – something

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<sup>16</sup> Thieme had been imprisoned for ten days following the 1885 strike for transgressing Paragraph 153 of the Industrial Code. Drunsel, pp. 109-10, 125-6.

<sup>17</sup> At the following year's national congress in Stettin, outgoing general committee chair Heinrich Wolff reported that 36,325 pottery workers, including 900 women, worked in an estimated 11,400 pottery establishments. Drunsel, pp. 133-4. Some of these will have been single person workshops.

<sup>18</sup> Drunsel, p. 135.

<sup>19</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, pp. 140-1.

rejected by bricklayer centralists. To the later consternation of Drunsel, Kaulich, speaking at the following year's national congress in Breslau during a debate proposed from Hamburg and Altona on the meaning and value of centralised organization, concluded that the system in use was a good one and that he saw no reason to change it: 'Mit dem "System" meinte Kaulich die lokalen Organisationen' - 'By "system", Kaulich meant the local organizations.'<sup>20</sup>

Under Kaulich's nominal stewardship, the 'loose' organization of unionized pottery workers remained unchanged until after the Halberstadt trade unions' congress in 1892.<sup>21</sup> Calls from Hamburg to launch a dedicated pottery workers' journal were rejected at both the 1889 and 1890 national congresses.<sup>22</sup> At the 1889 congress, Thieme, representing the re-launched Berlin craft union, was elected as one of the five *Vertrauensmänner*, a position to which he would be re-elected the following year.<sup>23</sup> Kessler, in attendance at Breslau, was chosen as the pottery workers' delegate to the International Workers Congress in Paris in July.<sup>24</sup> In its annual report before the 1890 congress, the general committee noted of the 'institution' of the *Vertrauensmänner* that this had proved its worth. It described its own working relationship with the regional representatives thus: 'Occasionally face to face but more often in writing, the general committee discusses the handling of individual questions with the *Vertrauensmänner* and can only recommend their deployment once again.'<sup>25</sup> The national congress in

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<sup>20</sup> Drunsel, p. 139. The Breslau congress took place from 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> May 1889. In 1890 Kaulich was even more insistent in appealing to that year's national congress in Munich to avoid time-consuming organizational disputes: 'We have learned enough to our cost before we found today's form, safe from attack under the Prussian Law of Association, capable even of being introduced into Saxony. We have no wish to make yet further experiments.' Drunsel, p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> Another feature which distinguished pottery worker trade unionism at this time was its pronounced cross-border aspect. For example, Drunsel reported delegates from Bucharest, Vienna, and Prague in attendance at the 1889 national congress and explains elsewhere that Bucharest, Copenhagen, and Zürich stood in close contact because many German potters worked there. Drunsel, pp. 133, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp. 144-6, 165. The 1890 national pottery workers' congress in Munich took place from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June. As in 1885, there was no national congress in 1891.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 145, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Drunsel noted with disdain Kessler's admiration for French syndicalism on his return from Paris. Drunsel, pp. 146-7. On 19th November 1890, a public meeting of Berlin pottery workers expressed support for a Job Exchange on the model of the French *Bourse du Travail* following a speech by Kessler. Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

Munich itself noted that to comply with the laws of association, additional regional delegates with fund-raising duties would have to be elected locally at open meetings.<sup>26</sup> When, following this congress, pottery workers from Kiel complained that the bias of the *Vereinsblatt* (successor to the *Baugewerkschafter*) made an impartial judgment on centralization difficult, the general committee replied in the journal that whoever infringed congress decisions, 'is our common enemy'.<sup>27</sup>

An alternative national structure to the centralist, 'politically neutral', model of Theodor Yorck was slowly taking shape, for the bridging function of the regional representatives did not just protect the national co-ordinating body, in the case of the pottery workers the general committee, from prosecution but also enabled the craft unions to maintain a politicising role within a national framework.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, it facilitated local autonomy, irrespective of applicable laws. This was not what centralist bricklayers had had in mind in 1887 when the Bremen national congress had elected their own *Vertrauensmänner*; the dispute over the functions of these regional representatives would dominate renewed hostilities in bricklayer trade unionist ranks after both centralist and localist sides had met in an attempt to re-unify the movement in Bremen on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1889. This meeting of leading representatives, among them Dammann, Staningk, and Andreas Bitter, for the centralist side, and Wilke, Heinrich Fiedler, and Albin Schlöffel, for the localists, had followed an inconsequential period of some eighteen months during which neither side had built on the decisions of the Bremen congress.<sup>29</sup> A localist conference called at the request of Rieke and others in Halle on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1887 had merely directed that strike support funds could be sent directly to the strike committee concerned or via a single national representative, Schlöffel, who was also entrusted with coming to an agreement with the Hamburg agitation committee

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 167-8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> In 1886, the pottery workers' *Kontrollkommission* before it was banned had summarised the tasks of the craft unions thus: '1. Regulate local and internal matters; 2. Promote intellectual clarification and education in economic matters; 3. Nurture an independent mode of thinking in trade matters; 4. Promote solidarity; 5. Establish employment agencies; 6. Support disciplined colleagues'. 'An die Töpfer Deutschlands', *Bauhandwerker*, op. cit. Cited in Drunsel, p. 117.

<sup>29</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 62; Paepflow, op. cit., p. 174.



on a suitable, central, location for the following year's national congress.<sup>30</sup> When this was ignored by the Hamburg committee, a 'Vertrauensmann der deutschen Maurer' ('representative of Germany's bricklayers'), writing in the *Vereinsblatt*, advised against attending a congress called by one side which would only deepen the split and cost unnecessary money at a time when the outcome of the bricklayers' court case in Berlin was still awaited.<sup>31</sup> From Hamburg, the *Neuer Bauhandwerker* retorted that the agitation committee had no authorisation to negotiate with persons other than those nominated at Bremen, and that the outcome of the Berlin court case would affect individuals, not the holding of congresses or the further development of the organization.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, a successful prosecution under the Prussian Law of Association of members of the bricklayer craft unions in Berlin, Magdeburg, Itzehoe, Elmshorn, Ottensen, Altona, Görlitz, and Stettin, would have had long-lasting consequences for future bricklayer organization nationally. As if to underline this, the 1888 national congress in Kassel, without localist participation, itself proceeded to devote much time to discussing legal matters, in particular the decision of the Third Criminal Division of the Supreme Court (*III. Strafsenat des Reichsgerichts*) on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1887 that Paragraph 152 of Industrial Code did not preclude use of the laws of association where trade organizations ('gewerbliche Vereine') concerned themselves with legal matters or international affairs and thereby assumed the character of political organizations.<sup>33</sup> With some irony, a congress resolution stated that according to circumstances unions should rename themselves 'Streikvereine' ('strike associations'); in practice, the 'localist' wage committee by another name.<sup>34</sup> The 1888 congress, which took place from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May, also passed a resolution stating that there could be no talk of collaboration between Germany's bricklayers and Gustav Kessler but even Paepow, later president of

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<sup>30</sup> *Protokoll des Fünften Kongresses der Maurer Deutschlands. Abgehalten am 22., 23., 24. und 25. Mai 1888 in Kassel*, Hamburg 1888, pp. 16-18. Cited in Paepow, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> The Hamburg agitation committee assumed this 'Vertrauensmann' to have in fact been Kessler although this was Schlöffel's actual title as sole national representative of the localist organization established at Halle in 1887. Paepow, *ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-1.

the national union, described this congress as a ‘Rumpfparlament’, and one in a weaker position than those of previous years.<sup>35</sup> Apart from Berlin, important centres such as Charlottenburg, Potsdam, Stettin, Altona, Magdeburg, Halle, Gera, Leipzig, Görlitz, Breslau, Nuremberg, Munich, and Mannheim had also been unrepresented, in part because like Brunswick because they were localist strongholds, in part because as in Berlin their organizations were banned. In addition, there had been a chaotic late change of congress location.<sup>36</sup> At the Bremen congress in 1887, 70 delegates had represented 16,668 unionized bricklayers; at Kassel, these totals fell to 43 and 13,983 respectively.<sup>37</sup>

For all their bluster, bricklayers in Hamburg were amenable to some kind of reconciliation; Paepflow was wrong to attribute this solely to the need of Berlin’s bricklayers for strike support.<sup>38</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> June 1888, the print run in Hamburg for the *Neuer Bauhandwerker* was confiscated following publication of an article entitled ‘Der moderne Sklavenmarkt’ (‘The modern slave market’). This had drawn attention to the demand from local employers in Oppeln (Upper Silesia) for action by the authorities against the mass recruitment of labour by some Saxon employers. The article also referred to the effects of such a practice elsewhere in Germany, for example in Kiel, where bricklayers were at that time on strike. In similar manner, the *Neuer Bauhandwerker* called for action against the employers and agents who drove the practice.<sup>39</sup> This would prove a topical issue in Hamburg for following the final opening of the free port in September 1888, building employers attempted to reduce wages by importing outside labour. In addition, the Hamburg police had prevented the national agitation committee from fully publishing its petition and memorandum to the *Reichstag* on the right of coalition and later went on to ban two subsequent issues of a new national bricklayers’ journal bearing the name of that of the 1870s, *Der*

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-9.

<sup>36</sup> The agitation committee announced on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1888 that the congress could not take place in Gera as planned following the police withdrawal of permission after local bricklayers went on strike. According to Paepflow, the Hamburg committee alleged that Schlöffel had orchestrated strike action to so thwart the congress. Paepflow provides no proof behind this allegation. Ibid., pp. 147-8, 170-1.

<sup>37</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1887 Bremen, p. 4; Paepflow, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> Paepflow, ibid., p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-4.

*Grundstein*.<sup>40</sup> For their part, Berlin's bricklayers were in a better position to play the role of conciliator than those localists who had boycotted the Kassel congress. The two-year ban on bricklayers' meetings in the capital city had only been raised on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1888. Writing one month later in the *Berliner Volks-Tribüne*, Kessler attributed this decision to exasperation on the part of the police authorities with the constant flouting of building regulations, in particular of notice periods, by the capital city's building contractors.<sup>41</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 11<sup>th</sup> June, the long-running court case against the banned bricklayer craft unions in Berlin and elsewhere had resulted in the acquittal before the 7<sup>th</sup> Criminal Division of the Berlin Regional Court (*Landgericht*) of all concerned – pending appeal.<sup>42</sup> The re-establishment of the Berlin bricklayers' craft union then took place following a public meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>43</sup> This same meeting raised a demand for the 60 *Pfennig* hourly rate and the nine hour working day.<sup>44</sup> Although Berlin's journeymen bricklayers had faced down demands from the guild masters that they form a journeymen's committee under guild tutelage, the two years since 1886 had not been without detrimental impact for in that time wages had fallen back to an hourly rate of 45 *Pfennig*.<sup>45</sup> Lack even of a wage committee since June 1887, however, left Berlin's bricklayers ill-prepared to launch strike action without outside support. But when the call came from Berlin for a 'conference of unification' (*Einigungskonferenz*) they did not have to knock on the door that hard. In this new climate, where roles appeared to have been reversed and it was now the Hamburg organization which was at the receiving end of state prosecution (veteran bricklayer organizer Thomas Hartwig had also been expelled under the Anti-Socialist Law in May 1888), the call from Berlin received a positive response and the leading personalities from both sides assembled in Bremen on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1889.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> StAH, PP, V 104-1, Bd.2, 09.09.1888. Cited in Kutz-Bauer, p. 222, note 60. See also: Paepow, op. cit., p. 159; Peter Rütters, *Der Grundstein 1888 bis 1933: Gewerkschaftszeitung des deutschen Baugewerbes*, Munich 2004, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Gustav Kessler, 'An die Bauhandwerker Berlins', op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> *Grundstein*, 1st July 1888; Kessler, *Maurer-Bewegung*, p. 54; Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 368.

<sup>43</sup> The new Berlin bricklayers' craft union adopted the name, the *Freie Vereinigung und Fachgenossen der Maurer Berlins* ('Free Association and Colleagues of the Bricklayers of Berlin').

<sup>44</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 65; Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Paepow, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> For Hartwig's expulsion, see: Auer, Vol. 2, p. 92; Thümmeler, p. 195.

All participants at the Bremen conference committed themselves to working towards the forthcoming national congress in the hope that differences would once and for all be set aside. They also decided that personal attacks would cease in both journals, both of which would also advertise the other side's activities.<sup>47</sup> This did not, however, prevent the Hamburg committee shortly afterwards from stating on the front page of the *Grundstein* when asked for an opinion on a speaking tour by Gustav Kessler that it would be a mistake to assume that their view of him as expressed at the Kassel congress had changed: the 'Bremen Agreement' ('Bremer Abkommen') had the single purpose of re-creating unity among Germany's bricklayers and was not concerned with re-establishing the reputation of individual personalities.<sup>48</sup> It was therefore not such a surprise that one of the first acts of the sixth national bricklayers' congress, which took place in Halle from 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> March 1889, was for the Hamburg delegation to challenge Kessler to withdraw his proxy mandate for Essen, 'as only bricklayers could be allowed to be delegates'. Kessler duly did this.<sup>49</sup> The congress had been preceded by arguments for, and against, a proposal from Heinrich Fiedler on behalf of the Berlin craft union that an executive committee should be balanced against an arbitration committee comprised of a membership spread across several larger towns and cities. This latter would monitor the spending of the first body and mediate in all internal disputes so that, 'no room for encroachment by a single location remains'.<sup>50</sup> The congress, which was opened by Schlöffel and at which 105 delegates represented 18,490 unionized bricklayers, did not accept Fiedler's proposal, nor another which

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<sup>47</sup> *Grundstein*, 12th Jan. 1889. Full list of delegates: A. Dammann, J. Staningk, H. Lorenz, H. Limbach, F. Wilbrandt, H. Meyer, A. Bitter (all Hamburg); H. Fiedler, F. Grothmann (Berlin); F. Wilke, Th. Lüttichau (Brunswick); C. Schulze (Wilhelmshaven); R. Beyer (Leipzig); Albert Paul (Hanover); Louis Eckstein (Zwickau); Albin Schlöffel (Giebichenstein).

<sup>48</sup> 'Maurer Deutschlands!', *Grundstein*, 9th March 1889. Earlier, in repudiating the demand from Berlin that a second national body, a committee of arbitration, be set up, the agitation committee did not mention Kessler by name but described such a second body as providing a pretext for foolish megalomania, wounded vanity, petty malice and scheming. Given that these are all accusations previously levelled at him, it is no surprise that Kessler wrote of his speaking tour that it was accompanied by personal attacks and the usual slanders from the Hamburg journal. 'Zur Frage der Organisation der Maurer Deutschlands', *Grundstein*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar. 1889. Kessler op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> *Grundstein*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1889. Curiously, Paepflow, attending his first bricklayers' national congress as delegate for Chemnitz, did not mention this in his own account.

<sup>50</sup> *Grundstein*, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1889.

would have abolished the Hamburg committee altogether.<sup>51</sup> Instead, it confirmed the organizational blueprint of 1887 at the centre of which Hamburg controlled agitation and administered strike support, albeit under a different name; the agitation committee was replaced with a four-person business executive committee, the ‘Geschäftsleitung der Maurer Deutschlands’, consisting of the same people with Dammann as executive secretary and Staningk as his deputy. Three locally based auditors were also appointed. In a concession to the localist side, the number of regional representatives was increased to seven. They would have joint responsibility with the new business committee for organizing the next national congress.<sup>52</sup> They would also have a right individually both to receive and examine complaints against the business committee and to arbitrate in all other disputes.<sup>53</sup>

At the Halle congress, 34 delegates had unsuccessfully argued for recognition for both bricklayer journals; the *Vertrauensmänner* would arbitrate in disputes between both. This was rejected.<sup>54</sup> Instead, the *Grundstein* assumed the place of its predecessor, the *Neuer Bauhandwerker*: firmly ensconced as before under the control of the Hamburg executive, its masthead now read, ‘offizielles Publikationsorgan der Maurer Deutschlands’. Owing to a growing number of subscribers, a resolution from the Berlin delegate Wilhelm Kerstan, that the journal not draw on the ‘general fund’ was accepted at the same time.<sup>55</sup> Writing later, Kessler summarised the 1889 congress, in terms reminiscent of that of Bremen two years earlier, as being characterised on the one hand by a Hamburg refusal to listen to other points of view, and on the other by a Berlin lack of discipline but, aside from his own experience and arguably that also of Wilke, whose request that the congress bureau be elected by card vote rather than show of hands was rejected, there was little of the rancour which had characterised the last ‘full’ congress

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<sup>51</sup> *Grundstein*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1889; Paepow, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>52</sup> *Grundstein*, op. cit. See also: Paepow, op. cit., pp. 181-4. The *Vertrauensmänner* were: Louis Eckstein (Zwickau); Heinrich Fiedler (Berlin); Albert Paul (Hanover); Fritz Wilke (Brunswick); Friedrich Kandt (Rostock); A. Peter (Königsberg); H. Trautmann (Görlitz).

<sup>53</sup> ‘Zur Aufklärung’, *Grundstein*, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1889.

<sup>54</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 186

<sup>55</sup> *Grundstein*, 6<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1889; Paepow, op. cit.

of 1887.<sup>56</sup> There were, however, already enough indications that bricklayer ‘unity’ would be short-lived, for in addition to the old tactical arguments around the laws of association, and the personal animosity of some towards Kessler, differences of philosophy which bore no clear relation to the legal framework or past misdemeanours were now also being voiced. Fiedler’s ‘arbitration committee’ proposal may have felt to Hamburg like the usual localist paranoia but in the two years since Kessler had first published his organizational blueprint it had been supplemented with the positive example of the *Vertrauensmänner* system under the stewardship of Kaulich for the pottery workers.<sup>57</sup> For their part, Hamburg and their supporters clearly believed more than ever that centralization around a single body was more efficient. Their argument against Fiedler’s proposal was couched in terms familiar to a modern context, namely that control over a body appointed by congress, in this case the Hamburg agitation committee, lay with that congress. Experience had taught them that good administration of trade union matters was rendered almost impossible when this and that member of a supervisory body interfered in it at will. Only a congress could decide if an administrative body had done its duty. There was no guarantee that a supervisory body would act more correctly.<sup>58</sup> An administrative and executive body situated in one location was in a far better position to act convincingly when the need arose than one spread over several locations. There would always be arguments over such things as non-payment of strike support; in such situations only the maintenance of discipline and mutual trust were of use, for past experience had shown them that arbitration in technical matters and basic principles made things worse. This lay in the nature of the thing. If an argument could not be avoided it would be better dealt with in the open. Behind supervisory and arbitration bodies lay often status-seeking, vanity, and malice.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kessler, op. cit., p. 64; *Grundstein*, op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> Adam Drunsel, no friend of localism, nonetheless conceded later that the ‘*Vertrauensmänner-Zentralisation*’ of the pottery workers was among the best of its type (‘tatsächlich eine der besten Organisationen von allen war, die auf diesem Boden standen’) and that this explained why Berlin’s potters were of the opinion that local organization was better than a national union. Drunsel, p. 201.

<sup>58</sup> *Grundstein*, 2nd March 1889.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

This is an argument with obvious flaws which flow from its over-emphasis on subjective experience. To advocate washing one's dirty linen in public in preference to internal arbitration is clearly at odds with the maintenance of organizational discipline; no modern trade union would advocate such behaviour. In addition, dishonest motives can affect all organizations to a greater or lesser degree; they are not a sufficient argument on their own for rejecting one particular form. At its core, however, the Hamburg committee, whatever *its* motives, was claiming sole national legitimacy for itself and having thwarted the attempt at Halle to foist a second national body on the movement, it felt confident in defending its position. Fiedler felt differently for, as the business committee conceded, the congress had conceded individual ombudsman rights to each of the regional representatives: it was the duty of these to examine and decide on all complaints which they received regarding the Hamburg-based committee. In addition, they were to adjudicate in all other disputes among bricklayers as well as to jointly organize the annual congress.<sup>60</sup> In a circular which he distributed to the other regional representatives following the Halle congress, Fiedler proposed that they elect a national contact from among their number to co-ordinate their work.<sup>61</sup> Responding in the *Grundstein* on 29<sup>th</sup> June, the business committee repudiated this 'ludicrous' ('irrsinnige') idea which it interpreted as meaning no less than that the regional representatives would thereby constitute a special closed body with a permanent secretary. In its view, this was a breach of congress decisions.<sup>62</sup> Given that its agitation committee 'predecessor' (consisting of the same people) had one year earlier rejected localist reasoning for non-attendance at the Kassel congress while the outcome of the bricklayers' court case in Berlin was pending with the retort that this concerned individuals not organizations, the business committee lay itself open to accusations of selectively playing the legal card when it now also pointed out that the regional representatives were spread across the states of Saxony, Prussia, Brunswick, and Mecklenburg. What would happen, the committee asked, if - which current practice suggested was highly probable - the authorities in one or more states were to perceive the formation of a political organization prohibited under the laws of association? As if

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<sup>60</sup> *Grundstein*, 29th June 1889

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

to underline the suspicion of obstruction, the business committee stated that co-ordination between the regional representatives was to be conducted by letter, ‘without by so doing in any way compromising the individual character of the independent *Vertrauensmann* bound only by the decisions and purpose of the struggle and responsible only to the next congress’.<sup>63</sup>

Open conflict between the two sides was renewed following a bricklayers’ meeting in Brunswick on 31<sup>st</sup> July chaired by Wilke (for Paepflow, from this point onwards, ‘the most passionate opponent of the Hamburg business committee and of those congress decisions relating to agitation and the journal’).<sup>64</sup> This meeting, at which Wilke read out the business committee’s repost (above) to Fiedler’s circular, voted in support of the latter that the *Vertrauensmänner* appoint Friedrich Kandt from Rostock as their national contact.<sup>65</sup> Expressing the hope that the business committee would be so led that no valid complaints against it would arise, the meeting was also of the opinion that no clash with the laws of association was entailed as in common with the business committee, the regional representatives only concerned themselves with wages and working hours.<sup>66</sup> For Wilke, the opposition of the business committee to the proposal would mean that the regional representatives would be powerless to fulfil their duties. While it would be costly to call a meeting for every single complaint, in extraordinary cases mediation by writing would be impossible and it would be necessary to have one person to call the others together. If the rights of bricklayers were being erroneously or deliberately restricted, it was the duty of every *Vertrauensmann* worthy of the name to seek judgement before all bricklayers and to act accordingly.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.: ‘ohne daß dadurch der Charakter des Einzelnen als selbstständiger nur an die Beschlüsse und Absichten des Kampfes gebundener und nur dem nächsten Kongresse verantwortlicher Vertrauensmann irgendwie beeinträchtigt wird’.

<sup>64</sup> Paepflow, op. cit., p. 198: ‘der enragirte Gegner der Geschäftsleitung und der bezüglich Agitation und Fachorgan gefaßten Kongreßbeschlüsse’.

<sup>65</sup> *Das Vereinsblatt*, 17th August 1889. Cited in the *Grundstein*, 31st August 1889. This meeting confirmed Fiedler’s authorship of the original circular; the Hamburg *Geschäftsleitung* had hitherto not revealed this.

<sup>66</sup> *Vereinsblatt*, op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



The business committee commented in the *Grundstein* on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1889 that the accusation raised against it was no surprise and it referred readers to its previous statement.<sup>68</sup> In the aftermath of that summer's only partially successful bricklayers' strike in Berlin, Fiedler now called at a public bricklayers' meeting on 3rd September for a joint meeting of the Hamburg business committee with the regional representatives to decide on an effective campaign of agitation for the following year in which he cited the example of the Berlin strike: 'so that we can hold on to that which was achieved by this year's strike and be in the situation to carry through that which was not achieved'.<sup>69</sup> In response, the business committee stated that it would never submit to such coercion and that it was especially characteristic that the Berlin call for such a joint meeting revolved around the interests of that city's bricklayers: 'in Berlin one should justifiably be wary of injuring the feelings of colleagues in other areas through public expressions of such arrogance as contained in the resolution'.<sup>70</sup> It furthermore accused Fiedler and Wilke of having neglected their duty as *Vertrauensmänner* to promote the *Grundstein*, the official journal, in their areas and pointed to totals of just 20 (Berlin) and 28 (Brunswick) subscribers in the two cities.<sup>71</sup> In a separate article, the veteran Albert Paul, *Vertrauensmann* for Hanover, admitted that he had immediately passed Fiedler's circular to the business committee on receiving it. He accused Fiedler, with the help of Wilke, of wishing to sow new discord and to disparage the business committee in the eyes of the unknowing and uninitiated.<sup>72</sup>

Nonetheless, a joint conference of the business committee with the regional representatives, as well as with the three Hamburg-based auditors, did duly take place in Rostock from 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> November 1889 but at it the business committee demanded the de-selection of Wilke and Fiedler as regional representatives.<sup>73</sup> In the manner in which this was framed, Dammann in particular played a skilful double game. In

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<sup>68</sup> *Grundstein*, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1889

<sup>69</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>70</sup> *Grundstein*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1899

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 200.

Fiedler's case, the accusation was that his actions had resulted in Berlin bricklayers publicly challenging congress decisions; in addition, he had pursued agitation at his own will for which he had demanded recompense. In his defence, Fiedler argued that he acted under the pressure of the strike. He was not aware that he was contravening congress decisions and would abide by them in the future. The conference declared itself satisfied with this explanation.<sup>74</sup> This left Wilke isolated. Even Paepow, an actual witness to events from this point, would later concede that the vindictiveness from hereon left a bad taste. Dammann accused Wilke of having immediately disregarded the decisions of the Halle congress when he had reported back that which journal to support was a matter of personal choice. In addition he had sent strike support money directly to Berlin and boasted that he would do the same again. His interpretation of the role of the regional representatives was contrary to congress decisions.<sup>75</sup> In his defence, Wilke stated that he had acted in good faith regarding the latter; if he had breached congress decisions then this was after the example of the business committee. Regarding the strike, he had felt obliged to send money direct to Berlin's striking bricklayers after he had been told by letter twenty days into the strike that no money from the business committee had yet been received. As a contributor to the *Vereinsblatt* he could not champion the *Grundstein* but neither had he agitated against it. It was all the same whether the conference excluded him or not but he would take care to so organize his actions in future that they did not damage Germany's bricklayers.<sup>76</sup> The business committee attempt to expel him failed, however, on a tied vote. At this point the Altona auditor C. Stüven, a localist sympathiser, criticised the business committee for making use immediately after the national congress of its authority to add to its numbers; the committee replied that this had not taken place, it had only sought occasional advice from experienced and reliable persons.<sup>77</sup> Dammann and the business committee had the last word; when Kandt complained at the lack of involvement of the regional representatives in agitation, Dammann replied that as events around Fiedler and Wilke

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 200-1.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

had shown, not all *Vertrauensmänner* were suited for this work, even when otherwise capable and reliable.<sup>78</sup>

The following, seventh, national bricklayers' congress at Erfurt from 27<sup>th</sup> to 31st May 1890 took place to the backdrop of ongoing strike action in Hamburg for a nine hour working day and 65 *Pfennig* hourly wage.<sup>79</sup> Paepow, for whom the mood of the congress was narrow-minded and no memorial to the tolerance of other opinions, described the attitude of the majority of delegates from the outset as being against the 'separatism and obstructionism of the Kessler tendency'.<sup>80</sup> 143 delegates represented 151 locations and 30,982 unionized bricklayers, a clear increase on previous congresses.<sup>81</sup> Among the many new craft unions from Bavaria, for example, localists had put down few if any roots, if the names and locations of those who voted against a congress resolution condemning Wilke's action in sending strike support monies directly to Berlin are an indicator: Schlöffel and Heinrich Rieke were among nine delegates from Halle, Berlin, Magdeburg, and Brunswick, opposing a majority of 133.<sup>82</sup> Fiedler, in attendance, did not support his former ally.<sup>83</sup> Wilke did not witness either display of solidarity. At the beginning of the congress, his mandate as proxy delegate for Stadtoldendorf was declared invalid by a large majority at the request of the credentials panel ('Mandatsprüfungskommission') on the technical grounds that the name of the previous mandate holder, a "Herr Splinti", for whom Wilke was standing in, remained on the mandate form. Letters of proof from Splinti himself, and from bricklayers in nearby Wangelstedt, that the mandate had indeed been transferred were

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> The 1890 Hamburg bricklayers' strike followed a lockout by employers on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. This in turn followed a one-day general strike in Hamburg on 1<sup>st</sup> May in support of the demand for an eight hour working day raised at the International Workers Congress in Paris in July 1889. The chair of the Hamburg bricklayers' craft union, Henry Meyer, had opposed any action on 1<sup>st</sup> May at a joint meeting of Hamburg trade unions on 25<sup>th</sup> April citing police repression, the infeasibility of raising voluntary contributions as an alternative, and the possibility that it would be followed by an employer lockout, but was out-voted. Bürger, pp. 487, 490.

<sup>80</sup> Paepow, op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>81</sup> *Grundstein*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1890; Paepow, op. cit.

<sup>82</sup> *Grundstein*, op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> Fiedler did vote, however, alongside 12 others, including Schlöffel, Rieke, and a former member of the Berlin press committee, G. Hempel, against the *Grundstein* continuing to be the sole official journal for Germany's bricklayers. 126 voted for. Ibid.

not accepted. The congress then voted that Wilke was not to be re-admitted either in his capacity as *Vertrauensmann* or as a reporter for the *Vereinsblatt*.<sup>84</sup> Acknowledging the work of all the regional representatives, with the stated exception of Wilke, the congress then voted to abolish the post when it accepted a final resolution from Hamburg which confirmed the existing organizational basis and strike regimen with the exception of the regional representatives.<sup>85</sup>

With what little other dissent there was having also been marginalised – Stüven, for example, was not re-elected to his auditor's position – Staningk, for the business committee, at the end of a long talk during which he cited the main reason for centralization as being to combine forces in the face of ever growing combination on the employer side, nonetheless refrained from recommending the establishment of a national union at that point; it was assumed that the Anti-Socialist Law would not be renewed after which there would hopefully be greater freedom of movement.<sup>86</sup> In the meantime, the Hamburg craft union became involved in an internal financial dispute which originated from the expenses claimed by delegates to the 1887 national congress in Bremen and ensuing pub crawl. The misogyny hinted at during that episode received some confirmation when, according to a political police report, the craft union chair, Henry Meyer, stated at a meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1890 that, 'Women still cannot understand the terms of the class struggle, the man must sometime put his foot down before the woman.'<sup>87</sup> The financial dispute was resolved at the end of October with one dissenting voice. Meyer commented that it was a 'Bagatellsache' ('a minor case').<sup>88</sup> By this time, the Anti-Socialist Law had already expired.<sup>89</sup> At the end of a meeting of 74 representatives from various trade unions which took place in Berlin from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November, Dammann was elected as one of seven members to the first 'General

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<sup>84</sup> *Grundstein*, *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Paepow, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>86</sup> Paepow, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>87</sup> StAH, PP, V 104 1-3, 24.6.1890. Cited in Kutz-Bauer, p. 229, note 99.

<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, that sole dissenting voice, a "Herr Müller", also called for the admission of women to technical meetings. 'Protokoll der Hauptversammlung des Fachvereins der Maurer Hamburgs, abgehalten am 16., 23. und 30. Oktober 1890', StAH, PP, V 104 1-3. Cited in Kutz-Bauer, p. 229, note 98.

<sup>89</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> September 1890, the *Reichstag* finally refused to extend it.

Commission of the Trade Unions of Germany' ('Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands'). It was against this new, post-Anti-Socialist Law, backdrop that the battles of centralist and localist trade unionists in the German building industry would continue to be fought. Whereas Germany's pottery worker trade unionists had embraced the *Vertrauensmänner* system, the majority of its bricklayers had seemingly rejected it in favour of the centralised model favoured by the Hamburg business committee. This dichotomy, within which the centralists now appeared to have the upper hand, was complicated by the anomalous position of Germany's carpenter trade unionists to which the final chapter of this study will now turn before a final balance is drawn of the respective strengths of the two opposing organizational concepts as they affected building worker trade unionism up to and beyond Halberstadt.

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### *Before Halberstadt and beyond: the break with centralism, 1887-1893*

It came as no surprise when the first national bricklayers' congress after the expiration of the Anti-Socialist Law, that at Gotha from 8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> May 1891, voted by a large majority to establish the Central Union of German Bricklayers. This vote, by 93 delegates against 8 who opposed it, was followed by the walkout of seven delegates from Berlin and Halle, among them Wilke, who had returned to Berlin earlier that year and whose mandate on this occasion was not rejected.<sup>1</sup> Brunswick, anticipating the result, had not even attended.<sup>2</sup> This decision by the bricklayers followed that of building labourers, including stone carriers and bricklayer and carpenter labourers, who had likewise voted one month earlier to form a national union, the Federation of Building Labourers and Allied Tradesmen (*Verband der Bauarbeitsleute und verwandten Berufsgenossen*), albeit on a closer majority of 26 votes to 15.<sup>3</sup> Following the expulsions (and subsequent emigration to the U.S.A.) of Wilhelm Wissmann, former chair of the General Labourers Union and a close ally of Fritz Hurlemann, from Hamburg and Berlin respectively in October 1880 and May 1881 under the Anti-Socialist Law, building labourer re-organization had trailed behind that of the bricklayers and carpenters.<sup>4</sup> Stone carriers in Hamburg were reported as having been the first to set up their own craft union at the beginning of 1885. The Hamburg labour historian Heinrich Bürger recorded that these then supported strike action by their colleagues in Berlin later that year.<sup>5</sup> In March 1886, a decision by the Hamburg-based Association of Bricklayer Labourers (*Verein der Maurerarbeitsleute*) that no more than

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<sup>1</sup> Wilke's previous behaviour was, however, once more judged by a majority of delegates to have been 'unworthy'. Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Fritz Kater voted on behalf of Magdeburg's bricklayers for the central union. Paepow, op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> The third national congress of building labourers and allied trades took place at Halle from 6th to 10th April 1891. *Verband der Baugewerblichen Hilfsarbeiter Deutschlands, Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Verbandes der baugewerblichen Hilfsarbeiter Deutschlands: Mit einem Anhang über die bis Ende 1907 vom Verband abgeschlossenen Tarifverträge*, Hamburg 1909, pp. 12-14. Cited in Albrecht, pp. 437-8, notes 101, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Auer, Vol. 2, pp. 89, 96. Thümmeler, pp. 59, 243.

<sup>5</sup> Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, pp. 435, 437; Bürger, p. 154.

thirty stones be carried at a time was rejected by breakaway piece workers.<sup>6</sup> A national congress of building labourers at Magdeburg from 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> May 1889 then supported the Hamburg decision on health grounds. It also reported that the Hamburg union had 879 members. This congress, at which Hamburg opposed a proposal from Berlin that the invitation be extended to factory and agricultural labourers after the example of Wissmann's earlier labourers' union, had eschewed setting up a national organization citing the laws of association, as did a second national congress the following year in Hanover from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> April 1890.<sup>7</sup> This did, however, agree to set up a journal for labourers, *Der Bauarbeiter* (later, *Der Arbeiter*), in collaboration with the veteran Social Democrat Wilhelm Pfannkuch.<sup>8</sup>

The seat of the national building labourers' union from 1891 was, like that of the bricklayers' union, in Hamburg. The outcome of the founding of both national unions was the continued existence of craft unions alongside local branches of the national union in the established localist strongholds and beyond: in 1903, locally organized building labourers in Hamburg numbered 500. In Berlin, membership of the local labourers' union exceeded that of the local branch of the national union until 1899.<sup>9</sup> More immediately, localist bricklayers from Berlin, Brunswick, Halle, and Königsberg called a national conference for Berlin on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1891, citing their unwillingness to join the new national union and their intention to stand by the tried and tested method of free organization and centralization via the *Vertrauensmänner* system, a system it furthermore shared with the re-legalised Social Democratic Party. Significantly, the reasons given for rejecting the national union were not just to do with the laws of association but also included 'social political grounds'.<sup>10</sup> The Berlin bricklayers' conference, attended by 17 delegates from 13 locations, established a loose national

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<sup>6</sup> Paepow, op. cit., pp. 436-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Protokoll des 1. Kongresses der Bau-Arbeitsleute Deutschlands 13./14.5.1889*, in StAH, PP, V 100-1. Cited in Kutz-Bauer, p. 223, note 68. See also: Paepow, op. cit., p. 440.

<sup>8</sup> Paepow, *ibid.*, pp. 438, 440.

<sup>9</sup> In 1895, a very low membership figure of 90 for locally organized building labourers in Berlin was still higher than that of 50 for the national union branch. In 1899 the respective membership figures were 700 and 1,050. For both Hamburg and Berlin, see: Troeltsch & Hirschfeld, pp. 79, 178; *Ibid.*, 'Appendix', p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Paepow, *Organisationen*, p. 286.

organization around an executive committee of one manager and two internal auditors in Halle to which a portion of locally raised funds was to be sent for agitation and strike support purposes. In addition to setting up craft unions where none existed, all locations were to publically elect their own *Vertrauensmann*.<sup>11</sup>

The statutes of the new national organization of localist bricklayers drew on the earlier example of the Free Association of German Carpenters. This had been established in April 1887 by Social Democrats for the most part from Magdeburg, Leipzig, and Berlin, in opposition to the anti-social democratic and authoritarian style of the then leadership of the Federation of German Carpenters.<sup>12</sup> Like that of the localist bricklayers four years later, the new organization's national committee in Leipzig was entrusted with agitational and strike support functions with the proviso in the latter case that support monies collected locally did not have to go through it.<sup>13</sup> The latter stipulation, coupled with the decision of the new organization to adopt the *Vereinsblatt* as its mouthpiece, confirmed the localist orientation of what had begun as a revolt of social democratic activists. Its strike regimen whereby industrial action was to be avoided where possible by means of free arbitration between employer and worker representatives was reminiscent of that proposed by Berlin's bricklayers following the strike of 1885.<sup>14</sup> Although Wilhelm Schönstein was replaced as national union chair at its very next congress in May 1887, his fellow anti-Social Democrat Heinrich Nix remained firmly in place as editor and publisher of the *Zimmerkunst* and enjoyed the support of Schönstein's successor, Karl Quast, and that of the influential chair of the Hamburg branch of the union, Oskar Niemeyer, even after he was unmasked as a police spy by *Der Sozialdemokrat* in March 1888.<sup>15</sup> Even a supporter of centralist trade unionism such as the academic Josef Schmöle later commented that this was seen to confirm a widely-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 286-7.

<sup>12</sup> See Ch. 6.

<sup>13</sup> This was the demand which would see Wilke excluded from the national bricklayers' congress three years later. *Vereinsblatt*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1887. Cited in Schmöle, Vol.2, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> At a public bricklayers' meeting chaired by Fritz Wilke in the Berlin "Tonhalle" on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1885, the strike's leader Carl Behrend, seconded by Kessler, had proposed that in future direct negotiations be held with all building firm owners rather than with the guild masters. *Vossische Zeitung*, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1885.

<sup>15</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 64, 66, 69.



held view that the deliberate repression of all radical activities in the union had simply been paid work.<sup>16</sup>

Reconciliation with such a leadership was hardly possible and became even less so when, following the police closure of the Berlin carpenters' wage committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1887 under the Anti-Socialist Law, the December 1887 issue of the *Zimmerkunst* reprinted without comment the rejection by the *Reichskommission* (a joint appeal committee consisting of four members of the *Bundesrat* and five nominated higher judges) of the appeal from Julius Setzt, wage committee chair, against the closure. In its judgement, the state appeal committee declared that the provisions of Paragraph 1 of the Anti-Socialist Law applied in this instance,

given the enthusiastic activity by the wage committee, that is, of its chairman and a majority of its members, in the interests of the Social Democratic Party, given its close links to the known agitator Kessler, but especially given its ... agitation against the allegedly "reactionary" executive committee of the carpenters' federation, which has hitherto been averse to all social democratic agitation.<sup>17</sup>

This specific naming of Kessler by the German state, which followed a vicious personal attack on him earlier that year by the national carpenters' union executive in Hamburg, aroused sympathy for him among the dissident carpenters while at the same time strengthening the appeal of his ideas.<sup>18</sup> Adolf Schulze, who had long stood out as an opponent of the leadership of the national carpenters' union, first of all against the financial impropriety of Albert Marzian, and then against the anti-socialist coterie around Schönstein, emphasised the educational role of the craft union at the second national congress of the Free Association at Chemnitz, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June 1888, in terms reminiscent of Kessler:

Only the intellectually and morally developed person also possesses the 'staying power' ('Ausdauer') required in pursuit of those aims, which are necessary to achieve the well-being of the workers. The apathetic person quickly tires when

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> *Zimmerkunst*, Dec.1887.

<sup>18</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 68-9.

confronted with difficulties. Even material successes are neither to be achieved nor held on to with intellectually and morally unenlightened people.<sup>19</sup>

Schulze added that even if the best will was there, the national union was in no position to change this. It was the task of the Free Association to remedy the situation. He did, however, emphasise that the organization did not wish to hinder national unions in general or the Federation of German Carpenters in particular; it wished to be the natural complement to them.<sup>20</sup>

Another Magdeburg carpenter was at first less conciliatory. Writing in the *Vereinsblatt* following his election as single chair of the Free Association at its third national congress in Halle from 31<sup>st</sup> May to 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1889, August Bringmann stated that the national union was a fatal stumbling block for the workers' movement. It had no right to exist.<sup>21</sup> That year's congress had acknowledged that two hostile organizations faced one another.<sup>22</sup> Bringmann's intervention was timely for by this time the carpenters' federation was almost moribund at a time when the 'non-political' wage committees, per localist theory, had been leading successful industrial action by mostly non-union members in Magdeburg, Leipzig, Wurzen, and Eisenberg.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the national union had been unable to provide adequate financial support to members on strike in Berlin.<sup>24</sup> This strike, held at the same time as that of the bricklayers and building labourers during May and June 1889, had witnessed tensions among the striking carpenters when members of the 1887 wage committee argued that to replace all-out strike action with partial strikes directed only at recalcitrant employers would lead to the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.81. Schulze somewhat modified the absolutist tone of the last sentence later in the same speech when he pointed to the national union having to restrict itself to the narrow and rather unfruitful ('ziemlich unfruchtbare') field of wage disputes, on which only meagre successes were to be recorded without the aid of intellectual influence. Schmöle, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Vereinsblatt*, 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1889. Cited in Schmöle, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Under pressure of the Saxon Law of Association, the 1889 congress of the Free Association decided to relocate the seat of its chair to Magdeburg while leaving its cashier and a three-person supervisory committee in Leipzig. Schmöle, *ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-1.

strike's collapse.<sup>25</sup> Shortly afterwards, long-standing disquiet with the national union came to a head when in September 1889 the Berlin North branch under the leadership of Hugo Lehmann rejected a national instruction to amalgamate with the remaining Berlin branches. Instead, it opted to leave the union, reforming itself as a craft union under a name which left little doubt as to where its sympathies lay: the 'Free Association of Carpenters in Berlin and District' (*Freie Vereinigung der Zimmerer Berlins und Umgegend*). Its members included the 1887 wage committee.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of a year which had seen a short-lived reconciliation among bricklayer trade unionists, the Free Association and the national union, responding favourably to a call from a regional carpenters' meeting in Thuringia that the two organizations amalgamate, agreed to call a joint conference.<sup>27</sup> In the case of the carpenters, however, the reconciliation was to be of longer duration due to a greater willingness to compromise on both sides. The Free Association, aware of continuing dissent within the national union, had taken the initiative in making an offer of financial help.<sup>28</sup> Within the national union, indebtedness caused by large strikes in Berlin and Kassel was combined with the suspicion that the union policy of avoiding conflict with the authorities actually served the interests of a few individuals.<sup>29</sup> Attempts at successive congresses from 1887 onwards to limit strike support to those who had paid into it also indicated a high membership turnover.<sup>30</sup> The localists on the other hand held great hopes from their

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-2. The strike's central demands were for the nine hour working day and 60 *Pfennig* hourly wage. The bricklayers' central strike committee estimated that 6-7,000 carpenters joined the 1889 strike. LaB, Bestand A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030 Polizeipräsidium Berlin, No. 15295, p. 91.

<sup>26</sup> At a public carpenters' meeting in Berlin on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1889, Lehmann rejected a call that the Free Association set aside its argument in favour of the national union. *Grundstein*, 9<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1889.

<sup>27</sup> This had taken place on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1889. Schmöle, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-6

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-1, 103.

<sup>30</sup> At its 1887 national congress, the carpenters' federation had advised the delegate from Bromberg, who represented 40 of 200 local carpenters and who had requested support in the event of a possible strike, to recruit a majority to the union first as the union only paid strike support to members. At its 1888 congress, Niemeyer had proposed restricting payment of strike support only to those who had paid contributions for 13 or more weeks a year. 'Gewerkschaftliche Beilage', *Zimmerkunst*, June 1887; Schmöle, op. cit., p. 75.

position of strength of forming a single national organization for all unionized carpenters on the *Vertrauensmänner* model.

Following an exploratory conference of representatives from both organizations at Halle on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1890, a general carpenters' congress open to both sides was duly held over Easter 1890 at Gotha. In his opening speech, Bringmann recommended that political craft unions comprise the permanent basis of the carpenters' organization; wage struggles were to be conducted by strike committees with local funds. The congress then duly elected regional representatives to aid agitation.<sup>31</sup> This was not unexpected. Nor was Bringmann's reference to the existing legal framework as restricting workers' freedom to achieve a real improvement to in their economic situation. The lack of success of most strikes and growing power of the employers proved to him that no other way out remained than to pull out the evil at the roots, that is, to make fundamental changes to the existing law. He believed that the February decrees of the *Kaiser* showed that the necessity of this path was recognised at the highest level and it was therefore doubly necessary to continue on it. Where unions existed, Bringmann proposed that they made it their duty to educate all local workers in social and political questions.<sup>32</sup> For the national union, its treasurer H. Müllerstein countered that it was not possible to bind people to the trade unions through a couple of political speeches. It was much more the case that a gradual understanding for political demands was awakened in those who joined the unions for specific reasons, namely in the hope of achieving material improvements. Organization and education were forever breaking down in the face of a lack of understanding by the masses and in this the local organizations were certainly no luckier than the national union. Given the uncertain nature of the successes of the local unions, it was impossible to demand that the national union simply dissolve itself and to relinquish that which it had painstakingly built up. Instead of the craft unions, he believed that 'general workers' clubs' ('Allgemeine Arbeitervereine') should work for changes to the law. Local unions and the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

*Vertrauensmänner* system only made sense in Saxony with its stricter law of association.<sup>33</sup>

After a committee to which he and Müllerstein were elected met separately to discuss a total of nine organizational proposals, Bringmann announced to the congress that all were united that they no longer wished to fight one another. The congress accepted the committee's proposal that both organizations should continue to exist for the time being while being committed to the creation of a single organization.<sup>34</sup> The following, eighth, national congress of the Federation accepted proposed statutes which Bringmann as one of two representatives of the Free Association had brought with him. These statutes struck out all remaining vestiges of the caste spirit of the guilds including the restriction hitherto of membership only to those carpenters who had learnt their trade 'according to the rules' ('ordnungsgemäß', in this case, the rules of the guild). Henceforth, membership was open to any carpenter working in Germany. A further demand of the Free Association was the removal of Karl Quast from the chairmanship of the national union. This was duly accepted and he was replaced by the later member of the Hamburg *Bürgerschaft*, Fritz Schrader.<sup>35</sup> Bringmann did not hide the importance he attached to class politics from the Federation delegates at Frankfurt, stating that, 'If the propertied and employing classes succeed in mobilising their economic power against us, no legal means will be able to eradicate it. Against such destructiveness there is only one means: our power, the power of the working class, has to be deployed, no matter how restrictive the legal boundaries.'<sup>36</sup>

This was somewhat of a departure from localism, for which legislation was the absolute guarantor of working class achievements, and which Bringmann had supported up to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 109-10. Müllerstein did not say, 'Leave politics to the political party', but the similarity between his 'general workers' clubs' and the local branch structure of the re-legalised Social Democratic Party after October 1890 is marked.

<sup>34</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 110-11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 115: 'Gelingt es der besitzenden und Unternehmerklasse, ihre wirtschaftliche Macht gegen uns aufzubieten, so kann die verderbenbringende Thätigkeit (derselben) mit keinem Rechtsmittel aus der Welt geschafft werden. Dagegen giebt es nur das eine Mittel: Unsere Macht, die Macht der Arbeiterklasse, so eng ihr auch die gesetzlichen Grenzen gezogen sind, muß entfaltet werden.'

that point. But while he came to be seen by those localists who did not re-join the national union as having betrayed his former views for a place at the union manger ('um an der Verbandskrippe einen Platz zu erwischen'), long-standing members of the Federation were also suspicious of his political militancy.<sup>37</sup> Up to 1896, when he was elected as Federation representative to the General Commission, Bringmann's sole national function was as editor of a new carpenters' journal, *Der Zimmerer*.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, he was able to persuade the 1890 national congress (the first without the guild moniker 'Handwerkertag') of the Federation to prioritise its resources at a time of high unemployment in favour of a campaign for the eight hour working day, arguing that in view of contemporary production methods and on health grounds this was fully justified. Union support, however, was to first of all be given where ten hours or more were being worked.<sup>39</sup> Under his influence, the bitter divide which had accompanied the establishment of the national bricklayer and building labourer trade unions was, as with the pottery workers, postponed until after the first congress of the Free Trade Unions at Halberstadt in 1892. Although a fourth national conference of local carpenter craft unions at Halle in September 1890 had voted to dissolve the national committee of the Free Association (of which Bringmann had been chair), a minority of craft unions, including Bringmann's own in Magdeburg, decided not to join the national union.<sup>40</sup> At the 1891 national congress of the Federation, Bringmann merely appealed to the minority to join the fold.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 128, note 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Der Zimmerer: Organ des Verbandes deutscher Zimmerleute und Publikationsorgan der Zentral-Kranken- und Sterbekasse der Zimmerer*, 6th Jan. 1894.

<sup>39</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 124. Unlike Grottkau and Yorck before him, Bringmann did not reference the Iron Law of Wages when arguing for industrial action to be directed at reducing working hours. From 1890 to 1891, membership of the Federation of German Carpenters fell from 12,000 to 10,600. In Bringmann's view, the union could not afford any more defeats like that in Hamburg the previous year. Ibid., pp. 118, 121-3.

<sup>40</sup> This took place at Halle on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1890. *BV*, 28<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1890; Schmöle, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>41</sup> The ninth national congress of the Federation of German Carpenters took place at Halle on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1891. Bringmann's resolution, unanimously accepted, read: 'Congress declares that today the Federation of German Carpenters views the politically active carpenter differently than it did in 1886 and calls on the Magdeburg comrades excluded in 1886, if you take the slogan, "Proletarians of all lands, unite!", seriously, to join the national union.' Ibid., p. 127.

Of the decisions taken at the Halberstadt congress of 1892, the General Commission appeared most keen to publicise that to postpone industrial unionism in favour of immediate bilateral agreements between related trade unions, on the one hand, and ‘general unionism’ on the other.<sup>42</sup> The emphasis on bilateral agreements and general unionism was hardly new. At the following year’s Social Democratic Party congress in Cologne, Carl Legien, Commission chair, would let slip that before hearing Bebel speak at the International Workers Congress in Paris in 1889, he had been told by various Hamburg trade unionists, and believed it to be the case, that Bebel was an enemy of the trade unions. Bebel, author of the ‘model statutes’ of 1868, would retort that one should expect that a man who stood at the head of the trade union movement would have known its history.<sup>43</sup> Legien and other members of the General Commission, however, were certainly not ignorant of the legacy they owed to Theodor Yorck: at their very first meeting, in November 1890, the plumbers’ representative Wilhelm Metzger had referred to Yorck’s earlier attempts at establishing a trade union confederation as a model for that to be set up.<sup>44</sup> A preponderance of local craft unions at the Erfurt congress of trade unions in 1872 had prevented Yorck from moving their exclusion from affiliation to his proposed union confederation.<sup>45</sup> Twenty years later, with the same organizational basis in mind, the General Commission now signalled its expectation of fierce argument with the modern localist unions, and also what it expected the outcome would be: ‘The number of those who support local organization is becoming ever smaller ... Should, despite this, individual representatives wish to persist in their point of view, they are at liberty to do so. The movement will also in that case progress without them.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Die Beschlüsse des Gewerkschaftskongresses’, *Correspondenzblatt*, 4th Apr. 1892.

<sup>43</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1893 Cologne, pp. 182, 200. Legien later replied that he had known what Bebel had done earlier for the trade union movement but that others had informed him that he (Bebel) had changed his position on the trade union question. Bebel’s response was to query why Legien had not made this clear at the time. *Protokoll*, *ibid.*, pp. 212, 216.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Umbreit, *25 Jahre Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbewegung 1890-1915: Erinnerungsschrift zur 25-jährigen Jubiläum der Gründung der Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands*, Berlin 1915, p. 157. Yorck’s ‘Union’ resolution at the Stuttgart congress of the SDAP in June 1870 had proposed general, mixed membership, unions. Bilateral agreements had been concluded between his own woodworkers’ trade union and those of the metal workers and shoemakers in January 1874. See Ch. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Hermann Müller, *Geschichte*, p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Zum Gewerkschaftskongreß’, *Correspondenzblatt*, 9th Mar. 1892.

The localist delegates to the Halberstadt congress, who numbered 38 out of a total of 208 and who represented 34,477 members (from a total of 303, 519), were therefore perfectly aware that any further recommendation in favour of the central trade unions contained an 'or else' caveat.<sup>47</sup> The General Commission recommendation, attached to the proposal for bilateral agreements, read, 'Congress declares that centralization, as the basis for trade union organization, is best suited to solve the latter tasks devolved to it and recommends that all trades hitherto locally organized or linked with one another by means of a *Vertrauensmänner* system join the existing central union or form one such ('resp. solche zu bilden').'<sup>48</sup> The localist delegates presented their own counter proposal. In it they stated that they saw nothing in the General Commission proposal which advanced the trade union movement and they could therefore not vote for it. A good organization would not restrict the freedom of movement of individual trade unions, irrespective of whether they wished to organize themselves as national unions or on the basis of the representatives' system.<sup>49</sup> After reiterating familiar localist arguments that the existing laws of association represented a stumbling block to trade union centralization, and that the education of a class conscious proletariat must be of both a political and economic nature, the localist delegates asked that the congress recognise the right to existence of all workers' organizations and that it in no way seek to exercise a dictatorship.<sup>50</sup>

The General Commission proposal was passed by 148 votes to 37. Thereupon 13 localist delegates, all but one representing building trades, left the congress after distributing a note in which they said that while they recognised the view of the majority, they remained committed to the proven system of the representatives' centralization. At the same time, they regarded it their most sacred duty to support the

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<sup>47</sup> *Protokoll* Free Trade Unions, 1892 Halberstadt, pp. 3-10. This figure includes the four pottery worker delegates listed among the national unions, as well as the 4,700 members they represented. It does not take into account all Saxon trade union members, only those listed under 'locally organized'.

<sup>48</sup> *Correspondenzblatt*, 4<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1892.

<sup>49</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*



proletariat irrespective of trade and point of view wherever it finds itself in struggle.<sup>51</sup> The Halberstadt ‘recommendation’, which in the General Commission’s view had ‘extensively dealt with and settled the question of organizational form’ (‘die Frage der Organisationsform eingehend behandelte und diese Frage erledigte’), remained without immediate consequence for either of the two bricklayer camps.<sup>52</sup> A second national conference of locally organized bricklayers at Brunswick in May 1892 reaffirmed the organizational structure set up one year before.<sup>53</sup> For its part, the Central Union of Bricklayers repudiated the idea of bilateral agreements at its second national congress in Altenburg in 1894 when its new chair, Theodor Bömelberg, rejected a proposal from the Federation of German Carpenters for a single building workers’ journal, citing the need to maintain a stable organization at a time of poor economic circumstances.<sup>54</sup>

The amalgamation proposal had come about following a heated debate at the 1893 national congress of the Federation of German Carpenters which had been triggered by a proposal from the union’s Elberfeld branch that the union promote the setting up of ‘economic associations’ (‘wirtschaftliche Vereine’) embracing workers of all trades.<sup>55</sup> The debate took place against a backdrop of falling national union membership: from 12,000 paying members in 1890, numbers had fallen to 10,600 the following year. Now, in 1893 (there had been no national congress in 1892), the union chair Fritz Schrader reported that the number of members had fallen again to 8,171.<sup>56</sup> The Elberfeld proposal was followed by a call that the union re-adopt the structure of the Free Association, that is, of a loose organization of independent political craft unions. At the same time, an unfavourable comparison was drawn between the trade unions and the Social

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<sup>51</sup> The thirteen delegates included six bricklayers, three pottery workers, and respectively one stucco plasterer, decorator, metalworker, and general labourer. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-2.

<sup>52</sup> *Correspondenzblatt*, 27<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1896.

<sup>53</sup> Paepow, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>54</sup> *Grundstein*, 24<sup>th</sup> Mar. 1894. Bringmann, guest speaker for the carpenters’ federation, is recorded as concluding that the time for amalgamation of the two journals was not opportune. Another guest speaker, Carl Deisinger for the General Commission, in contrast stated that bilateral agreements were possible if the will was there. *Grundstein*, *ibid.* Dammann, Bömelberg’s predecessor, died of consumption on 14<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1893. Paepow, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 445.

<sup>55</sup> Schmöle, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1. The tenth national congress of the Federation of German carpenters took place over Easter, 31<sup>st</sup> March to 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1893 in Bremen.

<sup>56</sup> Figure for the end of 1892. Schmöle, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-2.

Democratic Party, which had succeeded in carrying the unorganized masses along with it since stripping off the chains of the Anti-Socialist Law.<sup>57</sup> At the conclusion of the debate, the congress decided that while it sympathised with the proposal, the aim should be for one single organization embracing all workers. To this end, the national executive was entrusted with carrying out the decision of the Halberstadt congress and to conclude cartel agreements with related trade unions to gradually pave the way for an industrial union of the building trades. In this spirit, the Federation's name was changed to the *Verband deutscher Zimmerleute und verwandter Berufsgenossen* ('Federation of German Carpenters and Allied Trades'); membership was now open to 'every carpenter and any construction worker'.<sup>58</sup>

For pottery workers, who hitherto had eschewed a national union structure in favour of loose centralization in accordance with the *Vertrauensmänner* model, enacting the decisions of the Halberstadt congress meant immediate change of a much more fundamental nature. At the seventh national pottery workers' congress in Berlin from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May 1892, the affiliated craft unions also reported a combined drop in membership in comparison with 1890 from 4,902 to 4,092.<sup>59</sup> This congress was marked by a speech from the delegate for Breslau, Paul Hennig, in which he posed the question that perhaps up to that point the craft unions had not been political enough, in which case they would have to become so. It was not to be disputed that the central unions were intentionally non-political; that would have to be fought against.<sup>60</sup> For the centralist Rudolph Pgötz, the system hitherto was built on 'trust'; centralization was the means to bring all forces together to attract the non-member with something fixed and definite. The example of Hamburg, marching at the head of the trade union movement, countered talk of 'dilapidation' ('Versumpfung'). In the countryside, more enlightenment could be provided by means of a pure trade union than by little loved political meetings.<sup>61</sup> Although a proposal from Hamburg, that Germany's pottery

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 141-2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 142: 'jeder Zimmerer sowie im Baufach beschäftigte Arbeiter'.

<sup>59</sup> Drunsel, pp. 163, 178, 188.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 179-80.

workers recognise the decisions of Halberstadt and form a national union, was defeated with the support of the Halle general committee chair Ferdinand Kaulich, the congress nonetheless accepted another Hamburg proposal to establish a central journeymen's travel organization. With the established two-person general committee of Kaulich and Hermann Plorin installed as chair and cashier respectively, and with a five-person 'control committee' in Berlin, the new 'General Support Association for Germany's Pottery Workers and Allied Trades' (*Allgemeiner Unterstützungsverein der Töpfer und Berufsgenossen Deutschlands*) bore the hallmarks more of a future trade union than of a mutual fund.<sup>62</sup> In a further concession to the Hamburg centralists and their supporters, another body, a five-person press committee under the chair of the author of the centralization proposal, Gustav Heinke, was entrusted in Hamburg with publishing a new pottery workers' journal, *Der Töpfer*.<sup>63</sup>

At their own conference at Brunswick in the same month, localist bricklayers complained that the Central Union of Bricklayers was not honouring reciprocal travel support arrangements.<sup>64</sup> It was to be this very issue which would finally destroy the harmony hitherto in pottery worker ranks. On 14<sup>th</sup> July 1892 a public meeting of pottery workers in Berlin accepted a proposal from the Berlin *Vertrauensmann*, Carl Thieme, that following the recent national congress it remained at the discretion of colleagues at each location as to how they wished to organize themselves.<sup>65</sup> The proposal stated further that as it was not appropriate to change the form of organization during the current economic crisis, the meeting resolved to keep the existing form with its collections to the local general fund. The meeting expected from colleagues elsewhere in Germany that they acknowledged those in Berlin enjoyed equal rights so long as it could be proven that the latter met their obligations to colleagues elsewhere and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 180-1, 186.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 186-8. Kessler, in attendance at the congress, expressed dissatisfaction with this decision. Drunsel. p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> Paepflow, *Organisationen*, pp. 287-8.

<sup>65</sup> Drunsel, pp. 192-3. The Berlin national congress had not only left the *Vertrauensmänner* system intact, but had laid down that additional representatives be elected at local level for strike support purposes. Ibid., p. 187.

locally.<sup>66</sup> The practical import of this vague form of words became evident at a subsequent meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> August when Thieme himself, in his representative capacity, was entrusted with effecting the affiliation of individuals to the travel support fund.<sup>67</sup> Berlin's localist craft union did not wish to set up a local branch of the trust fund and had instead opted for the 'Saxon' model of individual affiliation via regional representatives.<sup>68</sup>

A minority of centralist pottery workers opposed to this point of view went ahead and formed a Berlin branch of the General Support Association anyway on 11<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>69</sup> The dispute over interpretation of the congress decisions came to a head when on 23<sup>rd</sup> November a further meeting in Berlin resolved that Thieme should make no more payments to the Support Association following the non-payment of support elsewhere to travelling Berlin journeymen. At the end of a subsequent circular in which this decision and the background to it were explained, Thieme declared that, 'since the greater part among the local colleagues does not deviate from this, on the other hand that two tendencies exist here, it is better that each goes its own way'.<sup>70</sup> The Berlin branch of the Support Association was not without its supporters. Writing in the *Töpfer*, August Jacobey, for the Association's control committee, conceded that the association was most clearly a centralist organization, borne of compromise, and that where branches were set up it would want to set aside the craft unions but he protested at the hatefulness ('Gehässigkeit') and ignominy ('Niederträchtigkeit') constantly directed at those who wished to uphold the full congress decision. He conceded that the alternative was individual affiliation through the *Vertrauensmänner* which left the craft unions intact.<sup>71</sup> If it so happened that Berlin had exhausted its local funds in favour of the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 193-4.

<sup>68</sup> The General Commission at Halberstadt had conceded individual affiliation for Saxony alone in view of the severity of the Saxon law of association. The Federation of German Carpenters had previously done likewise. *Correspondenzblatt*, 4<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1892; Schmöle, op. cit., pp. 128-31.

<sup>69</sup> Drunsel, p. 194.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-6: 'Da nun der größte Teil der hiesigen Kollegen von Vorstehendem nicht abgeht, andererseits tatsächlich zwei Richtungen hier bestehen, so ist es besser, daß jede Richtung ihre eigene Wege geht.'

<sup>71</sup> *Der Töpfer*, 4<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1892. Cited in Drunsel, pp. 197-8.

general movement, then that was an act of solidarity worthy of respect but it had nothing to with solidarity when some Berlin colleagues continually insisted that this or that place had received no support when the funds weren't there. Solidarity meant more than being able to give out money.<sup>72</sup>

Drunsel in his written account was more sympathetic, noting that Berlin's pottery workers had raised considerable amounts for the movement in the 1880s. They enjoyed strong support from places such as Stettin, Königsberg, Fürstenwalde, and Hanover. This and the fact that the representatives' representation of the pottery workers was, in the opinion of Drunsel, the best of its type, allowed one to view their behaviour in a milder light.<sup>73</sup> Centralists and localists both attended the next national pottery workers' congress at Halle, 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> June 1893. There were no denials of mandates and no walk-outs. Nonetheless, a majority now voted to rename the Support Association as simply the 'General Association of Germany's Pottery Workers and Allied Trades' (*Allgemeiner Verein der Töpfer und Berufsgenossen Deutschlands*) after Jacobey and Thieme had exchanged familiar views: for the former, politics was not necessary in the trade unions when this could be pursued in the organizations of the Social Democratic Party; for the latter, local circumstances had to be borne in mind. Berlin would stick to its position on the central unions until these had proven they could do their job.<sup>74</sup> Drunsel and other moderate voices opposed a complete break as proposed by Hamburg. Instead, a general fund was set up in the capital city after the example of the carpenters, into which both the local branch of the new national union, and the craft union, would pay.<sup>75</sup> The founding afterwards, at a public meeting of pottery workers in Berlin on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1893, of a national executive committee for the localist craft unions, the *Geschäftskommission der Töpfer Deutschlands*, chaired by Thieme, completed the formal division of building worker trade unionism in late nineteenth century Germany into two camps.

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<sup>72</sup> Drunsel, p. 200.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 204, 216.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-5.

This study has concerned itself with the origins of localist trade unionism in Germany and concentrated on one industrial sector, albeit that with which it was most associated. The subsequent history of localist trade unionism as an ‘independent’ movement lies outside its scope. Nonetheless, a couple of examples which straddle both periods illustrate just how guilty the General Commission had been of wishful thinking when before the Halberstadt congress it had looked forward to the quick demise of the localists. Firstly, the localist trade unions had participated in the setting up of a ‘Strike Control Committee’ (*Streikkontrollkommission*) in spring 1890 (the first cross-union body in the city since the failed attempt of 1882), that is, *before* the founding of the General Commission. The localist trade unions remained part of this organization, which in 1892 was renamed the ‘Berlin Trade Union Committee’ (*Gewerkschaftskommission*), until August 1899. Secondly, by 1895, the Berlin carpenters’ craft union, numbered some 800 members; by 1900, this would rise to 1,530.<sup>76</sup> In such a scenario, the Social Democratic Party which counted both centralist and localist trade unionists among its members, saw it as prudent not to take sides, a view expressed most forcefully by the party’s leadership during the famous trade union debate at its Cologne congress in October 1893. The party too had recommended trade union centralization at its very first national congress as a re-legalised organization at Halle in 1890, but the SPD leadership which had moved the expulsion of members of the extra-parliamentary *Jungen* movement at its Erfurt congress two years earlier, now rejected any action which would lead to another two camps within the party.<sup>77</sup> Bebel, Ignaz Auer, and even Max Schippel, a more vociferous supporter of trade union centralization, did not see the two disputes as related.<sup>78</sup> In the opinion of Auer in particular, both sides to the trade union dispute had behaved as abrasively as each other. He reported that the party executive had found the dispute to be extremely unpleasant. It had remained neutral up to that point and had to continue to do so in the future.<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>76</sup> Schmöle, op. cit., p. 226-7; Troeltsch & Hirschfeld, p. 178. The ‘Free Association’ was renamed the ‘Union of Carpenters for Berlin and District’ (*Verein der Zimmerer Berlins und Umgegend*) in July 1893.

<sup>77</sup> Ignaz Auer: *Protokoll SPD*, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>78</sup> Aside from the Magdeburg carpenter Adolf Schulze, there is little evidence of active localist participation in the *Jungen* movement. See Introduction.

<sup>79</sup> Auer went so far as to express a wish to lock the leading representatives of each side in a darkened room until they begged to be allowed out to negotiate. *Protokoll SPD*, op. cit., pp. 194-5, 217-18.

Social Democratic Party would not take a definite position, in favour of the centralists, until its Mannheim congress in 1906.<sup>80</sup> It was this decision, and not the laws of association, nor changes to them (as the Conclusion will demonstrate), which would prove to be the hammer blow which finally destroyed localist trade unionism as an adjunct of political Social Democracy. The split with the centralists on the central question of ‘political neutrality’ which had constituted the continued *raison d’être* of the localists would be the very cause of their expulsion once the party leadership changed its mind.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>81</sup> Reporting on the Eighth, ‘Extraordinary’, Congress of the Free Association of German Trade Unions, in Berlin, 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> January 1908, the *Correspondenzblatt* estimated that from 17,633 members of the Free Association as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1907, 6,743 remained afterwards. This figure, a clear underestimate which excludes all remaining bricklayers, carpenters, and building labourers, does nonetheless give an idea of the split the party decision caused. *Correspondenzblatt*, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1908.

## CONCLUSION

The laws of association, most especially that of Prussia, in late nineteenth century Germany have overshadowed the subject matter of this study of the early development of localist trade unionism among building workers to such an extent that one is immediately confronted with the question as to why, when these laws (more accurately, those parts of these laws which applied to men) were overridden by national legislation at the end of 1899, the localist movement, which had defined itself in opposition to these laws, did not make its peace with the central unions. As recently as 1896, Gustav Kessler had described both forms of organization as follows:

there are two main ways in which workers attempt to make their trade union organizations conform to the requirements of the German laws of association: either they refrain, as far as possible, from discussing political matters in the individual organizations before combining these non-political associations together to form 'central unions', or they found political 'craft unions', the aim of which is to enlighten and hold together the workers, and next to these, which are actually only schools for struggle and for political education, they set up specialist organizations, completely independent from the unions, comprising non-political smaller bodies of representatives which deal with the centralization of wage struggles. Both forms of organization have their advantages and disadvantages and are not effective for all situations.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Kessler added that legal circumstances alone were responsible for the separation between the trade union and political movements.<sup>2</sup> But therein lay the rub, for while Kessler's opponents among Hamburg's bricklayers may have defined their centralism, following the decision of the Third Criminal Division of the Supreme Court in November 1887 that the right of combination under Paragraph 152 of Industrial Code of 1869 was no defence against the laws of association where trade organizations concerned themselves with legal matters or international affairs, along the tactical lines he so described, this was to miss the point of the original theory of 'political neutrality' which was conceived by its originator, Theodor Yorck, as a long-term strategy of encouraging trade union growth.<sup>3</sup> Neither at the Stuttgart congress of the SDAP in 1870, nor at the two trade union congresses of 1872 and 1874, did any of Yorck's proposals

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<sup>1</sup> Kessler, *SA*, p. 761.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Moses, p. 49.



for trade union centralization refer to the laws of association although he was alive enough to their implications to allow the 'Union' central committee elected at Erfurt to fall foul of the Saxon law because he didn't like the concessions the first congress had made to the craft unions.<sup>4</sup> The 1887 decision of the Supreme Court induced an air of panic within the ranks of the Hamburg bricklayers' craft union which contrasted with the considered argument in favour of centralization three years earlier of its first chair, Ernst Knegeundorf: at the fifth national congress of German bricklayers in Kassel in 1888 the Hamburg union now moved a resolution, which was unanimously passed at a meeting from which localists were absent, that in certain circumstances local craft unions could even rename themselves 'strike associations', that is, organizations of temporary duration after the localist model, in order to comply with the law.<sup>5</sup>

Knegeundorf's circular to the other bricklayer craft unions prior to the first national bricklayers' congress in Berlin in 1884 had not mentioned the law; instead, it had confined itself to 'bread and butter' issues. A national union was needed because the influx of workers from less well-paid areas rendered local improvements to pay and working conditions illusory. The local craft unions constituted the foundation stone of such a national union.<sup>6</sup> Before Knegeundorf, Yorck had opposed the centralization of workers into a single *political* body on the grounds that this would have caused them to turn back to the guilds in repudiation.<sup>7</sup> More famously, the Erfurt congress of trade unions had unanimously accepted his proposal that as capital exploited conservative, progressive liberal, and social democratic workers alike, it was their first duty to set aside political quarrels; the politically neutral ground of a unified trade union organization was the pre-condition for successful resistance.<sup>8</sup> Yorck's insistence on this point drew on his earlier experience as a member of the ADAV. This, by 1871, had succeeded in dissolving all national unions affiliated to it, with the exception of that of the bricklayers.

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<sup>4</sup> Ch. 2, note 77.

<sup>5</sup> Paepelow, *Organisationen*, pp. 150-1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-6.

<sup>7</sup> *Protokoll SDAP*, 1870 Stuttgart, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Müller, *Geschichte*, pp. 142-3

While Yorck had stated at Stuttgart that the workers' struggle was 'against the whole modern state', his subsequent theory was based, in the face of this state and not just of single pieces of legislation, on the need for trade unions to avoid fractional strife along political lines.<sup>9</sup> As Chapters 2 and 3 of this study have shown, Yorck's 'political neutrality' thesis was less controversial before 1878 than another aspect of his centralist project: his proposal for a single trade union journal. The connection between the laws of association and the need to avoid the discussion of political questions at union meetings to avoid prosecution appears to have first been raised in the course of the trade union conference at Gotha in 1875, that is, after Yorck's death.<sup>10</sup> However, although the national carpenter and bricklayer trade unions had had to re-locate from Berlin to Hamburg as a result of the deployment of the Prussian law against the trade unions by Public Prosecutor Tessendorf from 1874 onwards, neither union cited the law in the course of their dispute over the single journal proposal, nor did those other trade unions who took sides during it.<sup>11</sup> If the example of the General German Tailors Union can be taken as typical, it appears that the laws of association, while their effects were certainly being felt, did not feature as a subject of arguments around union organization at this time: on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1878 (that is, on the eve of the Anti-Socialist Law), its journal, *Der Fortschritt*, following police house searches, warned of tougher *future* laws directed at workers' political organizations. It added that it would be short-sighted to exempt trade unions from their effects.<sup>12</sup>

A general pattern emerges here which is at odds with Kessler's formula of 1896, according to which centralist and localist models of trade union organization in late nineteenth century Germany developed as responses to the laws of association. If neither Yorck, the main driver of trade union centralization before 1875, nor the national carpenters' union, the *Zimmerergewerk*, afterwards, nor Knegendorf later in

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<sup>9</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Volksstaat*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1875; *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1875.

<sup>11</sup> The minutes of the Gotha trade union conference of February 1878 contain no reference to the laws of association. 'Protokoll über die am 24. und 25. Februar 1878 zu Gotha stattgefundene Gewerkschaftskonferenz', *Der Pionier*, 13<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1878. Reprinted in Bringmann, op. cit., pp. 385-405.

<sup>12</sup> Bernstein, *Schneiderbewegung*, p. 217.

1884, cited the laws of association as an impetus to centralization, then those laws clearly did not have the impact on the centralist side which Kessler attributed to them. On the localist side the evidence is incontrovertible that their organizational form equally clearly *had* been chosen with the laws of association in mind and at the first congress of the Free Trade Unions at Halberstadt in 1892 the localists continued to allude to this. As they left the congress, the thirteen localist delegates who walked out noted that, ‘co-operation between the *Vertrauensmänner* of the individual organizations with the General Commission is certainly possible irrespective of the laws of association of the various states’.<sup>13</sup> This was optimistic. With the exception of Saxony, where the law of association did not permit local branches of national unions, the General Commission had no intention of acknowledging union organization through local representatives. Shortly before the second congress of the Free Trade Unions in Berlin in 1896, it wrote in the *Correspondenzblatt* that it regarded the question of the organizational form as having been dealt with (‘erledigt’).<sup>14</sup>

A neutral observer would have noted, however, that between Halberstadt and Berlin the number of trade unionists which the General Commission by its own figures represented had fallen from 303,519 to 271,141, while in 1895 it was estimated that the local trade unions represented ‘at least 40,000 members, probably more’.<sup>15</sup> At Halberstadt they had numbered 34,477.<sup>16</sup> While Kessler had misinterpreted the main impulse behind trade union centralization (that is, that it was a different response to the laws of association), possibly as a result of his own highly personalised conflict with the former Hamburg craft union, the even-handedness of his description of both sides to the organizational dispute is perhaps reflective of the cul-de-sac which it appeared, in the mid-1890s, the trade union movement in Germany had got itself into. One year after Kessler had written the words at the head of this Conclusion, the localists established their own national organization, the ‘Representatives Centralization’ (after 1903, the

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<sup>13</sup> *Protokoll* Free Trade Unions, 1892 Halberstadt, pp. 61-2: ‘ein Zusammenarbeiten der Vertrauensmänner der einzelnen Organisationen mit der Generalkommission unbeschadet durch die Vereinsgesetze der verschiedenen Bundesstaaten wohl möglich ist.’

<sup>14</sup> *Correspondenzblatt*, 27<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1896.

<sup>15</sup> *Protokoll*, op. cit., p. 10; *Correspondenzblatt*, op. cit.; Troeltsch & Hirschfeld, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup> Ch. 8, note 47.

FVdG), with a declaration of principles which made clear that, ‘in view of the existing laws of association, congress regards the form of organization which the Social Democratic Party adopted at the party congress in Halle a. S. in 1890, to be, for trade union organization also, the most appropriate and best institution (‘die zweckmäßigste und beste Einrichtung’) for the pursuit of all aims of the trade union movement.’<sup>17</sup> For the General Commission, Carl Legien’s interpretation had been somewhat different: ‘In Halle, the necessity of trade union organization was proven and the congress decided accordingly.’ Legien meant of course the necessity for central trade unions.<sup>18</sup>

The same party congress had produced two irreconcilable interpretations. In 1907, the localist *Einigkeit* attributed the decision of the fourth congress of the Representatives’ Centralization in Pankow in 1900, that is, at its first congress following the national raising of the ban on political association, to stand by its founding principles of 1897 to the refusal of the Free Trade Unions to shift from their position of ‘political neutrality’. This, in their own words, was the reason why trade union localists in Germany did not disband their organization following the promulgation of the new law of 11<sup>th</sup> December 1899, the ‘Law pertaining to Clubs and Societies’ (*Gesetz betreffend des Vereinswesens*), which guaranteed freedom of association and combination for workers’ organizations, including trade unions.<sup>19</sup> Such a refusal by the central unions, however, should have been obvious from 1892 at the latest and certainly by 1899 as the centrally organized trade unions finally began to recruit new members in large numbers with the ending of economic recession; from their point of view, it was a better strategy to stay as they were and to wait for the more ‘sensible’ elements among the localists to ‘hive off’. This, to an extent, is what subsequently happened with Heinrich Rieke and the metalworker Albin Körsten although Fritz Kater in November 1907 notably refused offers of paid positions in the SPD and central unions and shortly afterwards resigned

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<sup>17</sup> *Einigkeit*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1897. The ‘first congress’, later claimed by both the FVdG and the FAUD, took place at Halle from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May 1897.

<sup>18</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1893 Cologne, p. 181: ‘In Halle wurde die Notwendigkeit der gewerkschaftlichen Organisation nachgewiesen und der Parteitag beschloß demgemäß.’

<sup>19</sup> *Einigkeit*, 5<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1907. See Ch. 6, note 44, for the background to the new law of 1899.

from the party.<sup>20</sup> Just as unlikely as it was that the central trade unions would have changed their position because of a change in the law, one has to also ask how likely was it that the localists *per se* (as opposed to individuals among them) would have been able to reach an accommodation with the central trade unions after 1900?

In 1897 the Representatives' Centralization at its founding congress stated that, 'a separation of the trade union movement from the conscious politics of Social Democracy is impossible without paralysing and rendering forlorn the struggle for an improvement to the situation of the workers on the basis of the present system.'<sup>21</sup> It had not plucked this nor its other founding principles out of thin air. Paul Grottkau had shown no reluctance before 1878 in identifying the General German Bricklayers Association, while its president, with the social democratic ideal.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Kessler after him, he had been lucky enough not to incur the wrath of his contemporaries for his views on union organization; the 'centralism' which he practiced was in any case 'of its time' in that the earliest national trade unions in Germany were tolerant of local strike autonomy when it made no financial demands on them.<sup>23</sup> One decade later, recriminations over the outcome of the Berlin bricklayers' strike of 1885 constituted one aspect of the divisions within unionised bricklayer ranks which gave birth to the first localist building workers' movement. The actions of the Hamburg agitation committee in reproaching their trade colleagues in Berlin for having taken strike action without informing them, as did those of the executive committee of the Federation of Carpenters who expelled their Magdeburg branch one year later after it had taken joint strike action with the city's bricklayers, represented a tighter centralism after the model of Yorck rather than that of Grottkau who would have applauded a local strike, such as that in Berlin, which emerged with a financial surplus. The 'localist' model of industrial campaigning, which drew on long-established practices which Grottkau would have

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<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Ein Leben für den revolutionären Syndikalismus: Biographie von Fritz Kater*, Hamburg 1985. See online at <http://www.anarchismus.at/anarchistische-klassiker/rudolf-rocker/7695-rudolf-rocker-biographie-von-fritz-kater>.

<sup>21</sup> *Einigkeit*, 19th June 1897: 'Eine Trennung der gewerkschaftlichen Bewegung von der bewußten sozialdemokratischen Bewegung ist unmöglich, ohne den Kampf um die Verbesserung der Lage der Arbeiter auf dem Boden der heutigen Ordnung aussichtslos zu machen und zu lähmen.'

<sup>22</sup> Ch. 1, note 49.

<sup>23</sup> Introduction, note 64.

recognised of the open public meeting and the wage committee, did not protect the Berlin bricklayers' craft union from being banned following the 1885 strike but what it demonstrably did do was to help to bring on board non-union members when industrial action was being conducted. This remained localism's trump card while national union membership remained low.

The first national congress of bricklayers in 1884 had eschewed centralization of their craft unions, citing the lack of a unified law of association for all of Germany. Anticipating problems in particular with the laws in Saxony and in Prussia, the congress resolution stated that this was because centralization in individual states was in part impossible, in part very difficult.<sup>24</sup> While such considerations had not prevented carpenters from establishing a national union which then left Saxony's carpenters unrepresented, the decision of the bricklayers proved prophetic in an unintended way. Between September 1885 and May 1886, the Prussian police proceeded to close down eight local bricklayer craft unions following the arrest in Altona of Knegendorf with correspondence in his possession between the Hamburg bricklayers 'control committee' and seven of the unions in question. This enabled the police to claim the existence of a *de facto* 'political association' in contravention of the Prussian law. Kessler's subsequent advice that 'everything should be avoided which appears to constitute a connection to other organizations and note at the same time that committees also are organizations in the sense of the Prussian law' constituted the 'legal' basis of trade union localism.<sup>25</sup> Of greater long-term significance, however, was the remit, clearly influenced by Kessler which he published in the *Bauhandwerker* on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1886, which the recently elected pottery workers' control committee laid down for the craft unions: in addition to regulatory functions, they were 'to promote intellectual clarification and education in economic matters', 'to nurture an independent mode of thinking on industrial questions ('in gewerblichen Fragen'), and 'to promote solidarity'.<sup>26</sup> Kessler's later programme in essence consisted of these two elements, the legal and the intellectual, combined with long-established methods of wage campaign

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<sup>24</sup> *Protokoll* Bricklayers, 1884 Berlin, pp. 9-10, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Schmöle, Vol. 2, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> *Bauhandwerker*, 21st Mar. 1886. Cited in Drunsel, p. 117.

organization. The *Vertrauensmänner* system, which trade union localism shared with the Social Democratic Party, provided the means for national co-ordination.

At the Mannheim congress of the SPD in 1906, Albin Körsten, one of the thirteen localists who had walked out at Halberstadt fourteen years earlier and now a *Reichstag* deputy and firmly in the centralist camp, raised the question, ‘What still divides the central unions from the localists?’, to which he answered, ‘Not the law of association’.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the ‘legal question’ had become irrelevant long before the secession of individual localists such as himself. As this study has shown, irreconcilable differences between the two organizational concepts on such questions as local control of strikes and the place of politics in union meetings were firmly in place by 1892. One has to assume that Kessler’s apparent equanimity in 1896 was genuine but the effect of the founding of the Representatives’ Centralization one year later was to set these differences in stone – two years before the raising of the ban on political association. What lay at the heart of the differences between the two sides were differing interpretations of the nature and functions of a trade union. These could not be reconciled by a change in the law. Neither the centralists nor localists (before they turned to syndicalism after 1904) believed in the possibility of a large politicised trade union organization while the laws of association remained in effect. Legien may have stated at Halberstadt that, ‘the trade unions will not bring about the solution of the social question’, but as a Social Democrat himself he hoped, like Yorck, that union activity would give workers a gentle push in the direction of support for the party.<sup>28</sup> While they would not have disagreed with these words of Legien, the localists were more direct and believed that it was one of the roles of the craft unions to educate their members politically in the direction of the SPD. The abolition of the laws of association revealed a more fundamental difference between the two sides: the General Commission did not believe in the possibility of large political trade unions at all. Faced with this ‘rejection’ (in reality, a reiteration of ‘political neutrality’ as formulated by Yorck almost thirty years earlier), the localists were left with two alternatives after 1900: either to join the

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<sup>27</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1906 Mannheim, p. 318.

<sup>28</sup> *Protokoll Free Trade Unions*, op. cit., p. 11. For Yorck, see Ch. 2.

‘non-political’ central unions or to carry on as they were. The Representatives’ Centralization chose the latter.

How significant, in the end, was trade union localism in Germany? In 1899, the journalist Simon Katzenstein, in his report in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* of that year’s third congress of the Free Trade Unions, noted that in 1891 out of 277, 659 trade union members, ‘around’ 10,000 were members of local unions.<sup>29</sup> This figure was subsequently discounted by the economists Walther Troeltsch and Paul Hirschfeld as an underestimate by a factor of at least four and was only one third of the figure given by the General Commission for local union attendance at Halberstadt the following year, a figure (29,777) which itself did not include the 4,700 members of the ‘loose’ national organization of the pottery workers.<sup>30</sup> If one accepts the combined total for Halberstadt of 34,477, localists nonetheless amounted to no more than 11.5 percent of a total of 303,519 trade union members in 1892. At the beginning of 1896, this figure was 13 percent.<sup>31</sup> The animosity which the localists attracted from the central unions, on the one hand, and their influence in the SPD on the other, was out of all proportion to such figures. Why was this the case? As this study has shown, trade union localism, associated above all with the building industry, had inherited a tradition of industrial militancy which had had a strong link with Social Democracy in the person of Paul Grottkau. The localists of the 1880s carried forward this link in the post-Tessendorf era with a form of organization which mirrored the local organization of the SPD itself. In contrast with Wolfgang Schröder, for whom the localist delegates at Halberstadt represented the past, a conclusion somewhat modified by his own admission that ‘as a result of the activities of the localists, who for a time dominated the trade union movement in Berlin, the central unions were only able to make slow progress’, other historians, for example Hans Manfred Bock and Hartmut Rübner, have given greater

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<sup>29</sup> Simon Katzenstein, ‘Der dritte Kongress der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 6 (1899), 284-9 (p. 285). The congress took place between 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May in Frankfurt am Main.

<sup>30</sup> Troeltsch & Hirschfeld, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Percentage obtained by adding Troeltsch and Hirschfeld’s ‘minimum’ figure of 40,000 for the end of 1895 to that of the 271,141 trade union members represented at the second congress of the Free Trade Unions in Berlin in May 1896. Troeltsch and Hirschfeld did not indicate if their ‘minimum’ figure also included those local unions represented by 11 (of 139) delegates at Berlin. *Ibid.*, p. 178. See also: *Korrespondenzblatt*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1896.



import to localism, post-Halberstadt.<sup>32</sup> Schröder, by his admission, indicated why the central unions, restricted in their expansion in a crucial industrial sector in the German capital (although localism after 1893 was also not just about Berlin), would have been hostile to the localists; in criticising the party leadership's continued loyalty to 'these old, honest comrades' in 1906, the metalworker Körsten drew attention to the reason why the party leadership, in part itself consisting of 'old comrades', at the same time had continued to tolerate them, for Social Democrats such as August Bebel and Ignaz Auer had memories which went back to and before the Anti-Socialist Law.<sup>33</sup> The formative history of the localist movement, when it was seen as having stood by the party during difficult times, stood it in good stead with the SPD in the 'new era' after 1890. At a crucial juncture, when the SPD was finding its feet once more and the Free Trade Unions had barely begun to find them at all, a small minority movement was able to exercise an influence out of all proportion to its numbers due to its demography and past party loyalty. To understand the reasons for both, knowledge of the earlier history of trade union localism in Germany is crucial.

It is conceivable that, but for the FVdG's exposure of the secret pact of February 1906 between the leaderships of the SPD and the Free Trade Unions, supporters of trade union localism could have maintained an existence on the left of the SPD until 1914. But no further. While Bernstein's controversial 'anti-localist' resolution of 1901 had been ignored before Mannheim, the support of many in the SPD for a defensive war against Russia went back longer.<sup>34</sup> Whereas an early militant such as Fritz Hurlemann had been happy to swap imprisonment for conscription into the Prussian army at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, trade union localism in Germany as it metamorphosed into syndicalism came to adopt an anti-militarist position which had

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<sup>32</sup> Schröder, *Klassenkämpfe*, p. 294. At the end of 1903, 11,000 members of localist trade unions amounted to one ninth (11 percent) of the total for the central trade unions in Berlin. Troeltsch & Hirschfeld, p. 80. For Bock, Rübner: see Introduction.

<sup>33</sup> *Protokoll SPD*, 1906 Mannheim, p. 318.

<sup>34</sup> Bebel had spelled this out at Erfurt in 1891: 'We are Germans as good as the gentlemen of the government... The German ground, the German Fatherland, belongs to us, just as well as and more so than to them. If Russia, the cradle of cruelty and barbarism, attacks Germany with the aim of dismembering and destroying us, and that can only be the aim of such a war, then we have just as great, and more of, an interest as those at the top in Germany and we will confront it.' *Protokoll SPD*, Erfurt 1891, p. 285.

much in common with that of anarchism and pacifism and was of greater durability than that of the French syndicalism which had so impressed Kessler. It was far at odds with that of the SPD (with exceptions such as Rosa Luxemburg). Deprived after 1908 of a wider audience in the party, the FVdG seemed destined to join the plethora of ‘anarcho-socialist’ groups, to cite Bebel’s description of them at Mannheim, struggling for breath and existence outside the social democratic mainstream, faced with the twin all-powerful behemoths of the SPD and the Free Trade Unions. If the FVdG and the ideals it represented had been destined to die a slow death, the support of the ‘behemoths’ for the First World War ensured that it and they lived on.<sup>35</sup>

The Introduction to this study has drawn attention to political backdrops in countries other than Germany – those of France, Spain, Great Britain, and Italy - against which trade union syndicalism emerged at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> To this eurocentric picture one could add Argentina, where the public alignment of its trade union confederation, the Argentine Regional Workers Federation (FORA – *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina*), with anarchism before it split in 1915 predated that of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT – *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, founded in 1910) in Spain. In contrast, in another country, Russia, there was no legal trade union movement before the revolution of 1905 with which either anarchists or Social Democrats could align; after that date, the spontaneity of the workers’ councils (Soviets) added another constellation to the palette. Given the variety of such backdrops, one clearly cannot say that any of them – for example, that of France with its divided socialist political landscape – constituted a prerequisite. Syndicalism, a cross-national reaction against trade union bureaucratization, would no doubt have emerged in Germany without the localist movement which preceded it but that movement’s long loyalty to the SPD was not without its effect. German syndicalism up to 1914 clung on to the old localist organisational forms and retained its craft union base among building workers. It was only after the First World War, which the FVdG alone of the German trade union confederations (localist, ‘Free’, Christian, and liberal) had opposed from the beginning, that this changed. Whereas the war weakened French and Italian syndicalism

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<sup>35</sup> For the FVdG during the First World War, see: Thorpe, Wayne, ‘Keeping the Faith: The German Syndicalists in the First World War’, *Central European History*, 33 (2000), 195-216.

<sup>36</sup> Introduction, pp. 15-16.

(which split on the issue), the FVdG emerged strengthened from it to such an extent that shortly after adopting a fully anarcho-syndicalist programme as the FAUD in December 1919, it could claim a membership of some 120,000. This extended far beyond its traditional occupational and geographical bases to embrace many miners and metalworkers in western Germany (the Ruhr, Rhineland) disillusioned with the wartime state collaboration of the General Commission.<sup>37</sup> It is only from this point that one can talk of anarcho-syndicalism in Germany, for the SPD's wartime conduct had also shattered any residual sympathies for it, for example that of Kater, and led such convinced anti-militarists to finally embrace the anarchism of which they had previously been sceptical.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Membership figure in Rocker, *Memoiren*, pp. 287-8. 109 delegates had represented 111,675 members at the 'twelfth congress' in Berlin: *Syndikalist*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1920. For the composition of this membership, see: Rübner, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Rocker, *Biographie von Fritz Kater*, op. cit.; Rübner, pp. 29, 31-2.

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