

# *Social Conflict and Political Protest in Industrializing Saxony, 1840-1860*

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*Saxony's rapid industrialization in the 1840s hastened the decline of its traditional manufacturing trades and thus contributed to social unrest throughout the kingdom. Overpopulation and economic recession complicated the modernization process, giving rise to the protest movements which culminated in the Revolution of 1848. In the following decade, economists in the interior ministry sought a means of smoothing the transition to an industrial society by gradually dismantling the guild organization of labour. Saxony modernized its economic institutions under the leadership of Albert Christian Weinlig, an enlightened bureaucrat determined to protect those workers threatened by technological change. After the unification of Germany, Bismarck followed a course similar to Weinlig's, enabling a conservative social order to assimilate peacefully the industrial revolution.*

*L'industrialisation rapide de la Saxe dans les années 1840 accéléra le déclin des métiers traditionnels et ne fut donc pas étrangère au climat d'agitation sociale qui secoua tout le royaume. La surpopulation et la récession économique compliquèrent ce processus de modernisation en favorisant la montée de mouvements de protestation dont le point culminant fut la Révolution de 1848. Au cours de la décennie suivante, les économistes du ministère de l'Intérieur recherchèrent les moyens de rendre moins brutale la transition à une société industrielle en démantelant graduellement le système des corporations. La Saxe modernisa ses institutions économiques sous le leadership d'Albert Christian Weinlig, un ministre éclairé déterminé à protéger les travailleurs menacés par les changements technologiques. Après l'unification de l'Allemagne, Bismarck suivit une voie semblable à celle de Weinlig, ce qui permit à un ordre social conservateur d'assimiler pacifiquement la révolution industrielle.*

During the two middle decades of the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Saxony experienced what might be called a "crisis of modernity". Rapid industrialization, particularly in textile manufacturing, altered the country's economic structure by gradually replacing the skilled craftsman with the factory operative. Mechanization created a new working class which, for a number of years, coexisted with traditional artisan labour. Competition from the factories further eroded the position of the guilds, organizers of the production of manufactured goods from time immemorial. Handworkers, who had customarily matured in their trades within the guild system, found their progress blocked both by the large numbers of journeymen seeking master status and by the unemployment inflicted on the weaving trades by machines. As an industrial economy supplanted the traditional one, Saxony entered a period of social conflict punctuated by violence and the clash of ideologies. The

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ferment sprang from circumstances which, if not unique, were more pronounced in Saxony than elsewhere in the German Confederation because of the kingdom's rapid industrialization.

Between 1830 and 1848, a period called the "pre-March" by German historians, Saxony experienced artisan protest, quarrels between conservatives and modernizers and general unrest on all levels of society. These currents eventually converged in the Revolution of 1848-49, the last great battle of which was the May Uprising in Dresden. Following this confused and sometimes violent interlude, the Saxon government resumed its efforts to assimilate the industrial revolution into an essentially conservative social order. When unified Germany confronted a similar set of problems a generation later, useful precedents already existed. In the 1880s, Bismarck's Reich followed a path pioneered in Saxony as the Elbian kingdom grappled with the cumulative effects of modernization on its social and political institutions.

Always loath to acknowledge the sources of his inspiration, the Iron Chancellor resented Saxony as "the 'intellectual creator' of all opposition to the Reich."<sup>1</sup> Yet Saxon statesmen had something to teach their Prussian counterparts. Baron Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust, whom Bismarck soon came to detest, conducted a brilliantly devious foreign policy from 1849 until Prussia's military victory in 1866.<sup>2</sup> Albert Christian Weinlig devised an economic strategy which assumed the inevitability of modernization, thereby teaching Berlin how to keep an industrial revolution from becoming a political one. The Saxon industrial law of 1861 thus served as a model for similar legislation in the North German Confederation in 1869.<sup>3</sup> By example, in both foreign and domestic affairs, a relatively powerless state contributed significantly to the evolution of imperial Germany.

With an area of only 14,960 square kilometers occupied in 1849 by slightly less than two million people (one-third of whom were urban dwellers), Saxony's population density was the highest in Europe except for Lombardy.<sup>4</sup> A demographic revolution began about 1750, producing an 82 percent increase in the population over the next century; 57 percent of this growth occurred after 1815. Between 1834 and 1910, the annual rate of expansion was 14.6 percent, compared with 9.8 percent in the rest of Germany.<sup>5</sup> This population explosion quickly overtaxed the resources of an economy which, early in the nineteenth century, was still agriculturally based

1. Hans PHILIPPI, "Preussisch-sächsische Verstimmungen im Jahrzehnt nach der Reichsgründung", in *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* (1966), p. 253.

2. Bismarck's diplomacy during the unification period strongly resembles that of Beust in 1849-50. See Richard J. BAZILLION, "Saxon Liberalism and the German Question in the Wake of the 1848 Revolution", *Canadian Journal of History*, XIII (April 1978): 61-84 and Helmut RUMPLER, *Die deutsche Politik des Freiherrn von Beust, 1848-1850. Zur Problematik mittelstaatlicher Reformpolitik im Zeitalter der Paulskirche* (Vienna: Verlag Hermann Böhlhaus Nachf., 1972).

3. As one of Saxony's delegates to the *Bundesrat*, and as *Referent* for the draft of the 1869 industrial law, Weinlig was able personally to introduce a number of refinements. Karl BRÄUER, "Albert Christian Weinlig. Ein deutscher Volkswirt und Staatsmann des 19. Jahrhunderts", in *Lebensbilder sächsischer Wirtschaftsführer*, ed. Erich DITTRICH (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner Verlag, 1941), p. 413; Richard LIPINSKI, *Die Geschichte der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung in Leipzig* (Leipzig: Verlag der Leipziger Buchdruckerei, 1931), p. 183.

4. Karl GROSSE, *Geschichte der Stadt Leipzig von der ältesten bis auf die neueste Zeit* (Leipzig: C.B. Polet, 1842), p. 704.

5. Karlheinz BLASCHKE, "Industrialisierung und Bevölkerung in Sachsen im Zeitraum von 1830 bis 1890", *Historische Raumpforschung*, V (1965): 69.

and relatively unproductive. After 1815 Saxon farmers could no longer produce enough food to meet domestic needs and the country came to rely on imports, for which it had to find a means to pay. The requirement to cultivate an export market became a powerful stimulus to industrial development, reinforced in Saxony's case by a set of fortunate circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

An enlightened government known for its ties with Leipzig's merchant community pursued a successful mercantilist policy from the 1760s into the industrial age.<sup>7</sup> This regime, slowly evolving toward a constitutional system, began the long process of dismantling guild control over the economy. Independent entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to compete with the various textile monopolies, readily borrowing foreign technology and thus laying the foundations of an industrial infrastructure. Abundant labour supplies and water power, together with the willingness to import raw materials as well as foodstuffs, had placed the economy firmly on the road toward modernization by the end of the eighteenth century. Less than fifty years later, commerce and industry supplanted agriculture as the mainstay of Saxony's economy.<sup>8</sup> The inexorability of technological change also had become an accepted fact among the middle class. As mechanization surged ahead in the years after Napoleon's defeat, one chronicler of the industrial revolution proclaimed: "Any kind of opposition is fruitless, even dangerous; progress is indispensable, and to facilitate it no means may be spared and no measures rejected."<sup>9</sup> Serious obstacles nevertheless stood in the path of continued economic development.

The resumption of competition from English textiles following the end of the Continental system resulted in a marked deterioration in Saxony's economic position by 1817. To make matters worse, Prussia raised a protective tariff in 1818 in order to weld its widely separated territories into a unified trading area. Saxony consequently lost its markets in north Germany and found its access to seaports impeded by high transit tolls. For the next ten years, hard times afflicted the Erzgebirge and Vogtland regions where the kingdom's largest textile industries were situated.<sup>10</sup> As an exporter of manufactured goods to highly competitive international markets, Saxony fell victim to circumstances almost entirely beyond its control. Yet the country's political and economic élites managed to respond creatively to an adverse situation.

Government and private enterprise joined forces to stimulate technological innovation as a means of improving manufacturing processes. A state-sponsored

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6. Sources for the foregoing population data are: Sidney POLLARD, *Peaceful Conquest: The Industrialization of Europe, 1760-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 357, n. 27; Hubert KIESEWETTER, "Bevölkerung, Erwerbstätige und Landwirtschaft im Königreich Sachsen, 1815-1871", in *Region und Industrialisierung: Studien zur Rolle der Region in der Wirtschaftsgeschichte der letzten zwei Jahrhunderte*, ed. Sidney POLLARD (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), pp. 91ff.; BLASCHKE, "Industrialisierung und Bevölkerung", p. 71.

7. Frank B. TIPTON, Jr., *Regional Variations in the Economic Development of Germany during the Nineteenth Century* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), p. 31; Richard DIETRICH, "Zur industriellen Produktion, technischen Entwicklung und zum Unternehmertum in Mitteldeutschland, speziell in Sachsen im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung", *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, XXVIII (1979): 261.

8. BLASCHKE, "Industrialisierung und Bevölkerung", p. 70.

9. Friedrich George WIECK, *Die Manufaktur- und Fabrikindustrie des Königreichs Sachsen* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1845), p. 2.

10. Herbert PÖNICKE, *Sachsens Entwicklung zum Industriestaate, 1830-1871* (Dresden: Wilhelm Volkmann Verlag, 1934), pp. 9-10.

organization fostering technical education began operating in 1828. Polytechnic institutes and Sunday schools, both supported by the government, attracted young artisans wishing to acquire advanced skills. The economic reformers also founded industrial organizations, mounted product exhibitions and dispatched agents abroad to bring back the latest techniques. In 1825, the royal house itself invested in the economy by helping to finance the Elbe-West Indian Company, which exported 450,000 thaler worth of linen and cotton goods during its first year of operation. Though quite successful at first, this venture collapsed in 1826-27 because of foreign competition and political instability in its trading areas. Without access to internal German markets, all of Saxony's efforts to become economically self-sufficient eventually proved fruitless.<sup>11</sup>

With *Zollverein* membership in 1834 came the large, accessible and stable trading area that provided Saxony with the opportunity to capitalize on its main assets: technical ingenuity, entrepreneurial skill and a virtually inexhaustible labour supply. Industrialists applied steam power to manufacturing and transportation, locating factories just outside the cities and shipping in raw materials from elsewhere. The Leipzig to Dresden railway (1839) became a model for similar enterprises at home and abroad. The country's transportation revolution thus coincided with and reinforced its industrial revolution. By combining the latest technology imported from Western Europe with easily exploited natural resources and cheap domestic labour, Saxon industry reached new levels of prosperity by 1840.

In that year the *Landtag* passed a law removing many ancient restrictions on trade and industry in the countryside. This statute carried forward a process begun in 1827, when Eduard von Wietersheim, who served as minister of culture from 1840 to 1848, submitted a memorandum calling for the exemption of factory production from guild regulation.<sup>12</sup> Enterprises, such as linen weaving, that had operated outside the jurisdiction of urban guilds, were now permitted to move into rural areas and to recruit a labour force locally. Such regulated trades as weaving and stocking-making also gained the right to migrate beyond the cities. On the other hand, in order to protect cobblers, saddlers, carpenters, bakers, smiths and other artisans from proletarianization, the law imposed limits on the number of tradesmen who might set up shop in a given territory. Perceiving immediately the new legislation's bias in favor of the factory, "the petty-bourgeois urban guilds" opened a campaign which delayed the implementation of full-scale industrial freedom for a generation.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the guilds' spirited defence of their ancient privileges, it was clear in 1840 that a modern economic system had taken root in Saxon soil. Although the industrial component still appeared insignificant when contrasted with the size of the traditional manufacturing sector, a profound change was underway. According to an open letter from a group of Leipzig artisans, published in 1848, "two-thirds

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11. PÖNICKE, *Sachsens Entwicklung*, pp. 10-11; Rudolf FORBERGER, "Zur Wandlung der gewerblichen Betriebsweise Sachsens in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Der Übergang von Manufaktur zur Fabrik im Textilgewerbe", in *Probleme der Ökonomie und Politik in den Beziehungen zwischen Ost- und Westeuropa von 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Karl OBERMANN (Berlin: Rutten & Loening, 1960), pp. 125-37.

12. Gerhard SCHMIDT, *Die Staatsreform in Sachsen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1966), p. 99.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

of the inhabitants of our cities consist of handicraft workers and their dependents."<sup>14</sup> Some fourteen years earlier, Saxony's urban population already numbered 528,725, or 33 percent of the kingdom's 1,596,206 people.<sup>15</sup> Thus, some 317,000 Saxons had a direct stake in the fate of the guilds at a time when scarcely one-tenth that number derived their living from the factories. Of the 230,000 factory and handworkers in Saxony, 74 percent of whom were employed in textile manufacture, only 30,000 (13 percent) belonged to the industrial proletariat which already predominated in England.<sup>16</sup> Most of Saxony's industrial labour force worked the 35,000 looms, four hundred of which were mechanized, scattered throughout the Erzgebirge, Vogtland and Oberlausitz districts.<sup>17</sup> Until the onset of recession later in the decade, handloom weaving occupied growing numbers of cottage labourers producing textiles for the export market. For this reason, the manufacturing population of Saxony in the pre-March period contained the highest percentage of handicraftsmen in Germany: one in every 13.4 Saxons was a handworker, while in Prussia the figure was one in every 20.5.<sup>18</sup>

The presence of a dynamic modern sector in an economy still dominated by artisan manufacture heightened the contrast between the old and new methods of production, and between the social and political institutions that existed to organize the provision of goods and services. Urban guilds and rural factories came face to face in the 1840s in a conflict that grew more acrimonious as the economic crisis deepened. In this struggle between the modern and traditional organization of labour, the guilds possessed a substantial power base. Not surprisingly, the clash between artisan manufacture and mechanized industry expressed itself in social and political unrest when, half-way through the 1840s, Saxony's economic fortunes declined, unemployment rose and the voices of protest became louder.

Appalled by the spreading poverty caused by the recession, middle-class liberals now debated among themselves a phenomenon which they called "the social question". They inevitably disagreed over the proper solution. Those who applauded the economic reforms initiated in 1840 could easily agree with the analysis offered by Peter Franz Reichensperger, a Catholic liberal from industrializing Rhenish Prussia: "Germany's sickness is not a result mainly of overpopulation [as the Heidelberg historian, Werner Conze, believes] or of mechanization and excess factory industry, but is directly attributable to the lack of those very same machines and factories which should produce work and gain for *our* labourers instead of the English."<sup>19</sup> Another Rhinelander, the industrialist Friedrich Harkort, agreed that the factory system held the answer to the social question. Most liberals, however,

14. Quoted in Theodore S. HAMEROW, "The German Artisan Movement, 1848-49", *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XXI (July, 1961): 136.

15. BLASCHKE, "Industrialisierung und Bevölkerung", p. 78.

16. ROLF WEBER, *Die Revolution in Sachsen 1848/49: Entwicklung und Analyse ihrer Triebkräfte* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970), pp. 3, 6. In 1845 F.G. Wieck distinguished between cottage industry and "the system of closed establishments (i.e., factories), [which] is the route to a correct division of the proceeds of industry proportional to their respective factors, the physical and intellectual capacity and the power of capital." *Manufaktur- und Fabrikindustrie*, p. 5.

17. WIECK, *Manufaktur- und Fabrikindustrie*, p. 41.

18. WEBER, *Revolution in Sachsen*, p. 4.

19. Quoted in Werner CONZE, "Vom 'Pöbel' zum 'Proletariat'. Sozialgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen für den Sozialismus in Deutschland", in *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans-Ulrich WEHLER (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1968), p. 133.

blamed the modernization process itself for urban overcrowding, artisan unemployment and labour unrest, and defended the placing of some limitations on industrial development.<sup>20</sup> The businessmen, professionals and academics whom Donald Rohr has called “social liberals” tempered their enthusiasm for economic progress with concern for the working-class victims of industrialization.<sup>21</sup> They insisted that worker self-help, encouraged by an enlightened government policy, could relieve much distress among the lower classes and enable society to weather the crisis.<sup>22</sup>

The social liberals’ concern for factory workers, day labourers, journeymen artisans and small master craftsmen who composed the mid-nineteenth-century “proletariat” arose from their desire to banish the “red spectre” conjured up by the social question.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps they realized, as one East German historian has asserted, that “without the masses, their constitutional aims could not be achieved.”<sup>24</sup> There is some truth in this verdict, since the primary goals of all liberals were constitutional monarchy, parliamentary rule and a significant role for educated and propertied men in the political process. They wished, above all, to replace legislative representation based on traditional estates with an arrangement that recognized the changes which had occurred in the structure of society. To accomplish this required the creation of a party system on the English model.<sup>25</sup> So great were the obstacles to be overcome, that political reform commanded more of the liberals’ attention than did the pursuit of social justice.

To the displaced handicraftsmen themselves, liberalism, with or without its social conscience, appeared remote and superfluous. The victims of technological change derived little consolation from a philosophy closely attuned to the life experiences of society’s most favoured members. For the journeyman artisan, in particular, the factory system championed by Harkort and Reichensperger posed a threat both to social standing and to economic survival. Opponents of industrialization among the traditional working class therefore ignored liberalism and other political ideologies until late in the 1840s. They turned instead to the most familiar of their social institutions, the church. Small producers of all kinds abandoned mainstream religion after 1844 and flocked to an amazingly popular anti-ecclesiastical movement called German Catholicism.

East German historians identify German Catholicism with the protest against industrialization by declining occupational groups. The movement was indeed extraordinarily strong in Saxony, where the lower middle class (*Kleinbürgertum*)

20. James J. SHEEHAN, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 28ff.

21. Donald G. ROHR, *The Origins of Social Liberalism in Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

22. Wolfram FISCHER, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung: Aufsätze—Studien—Vorträge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 227ff.

23. Hans KRAUSE, *Die Demokratische Partei von 1848 und die soziale Frage. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der ersten deutschen Revolution* (Frankfurt a.M.: Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei, 1923), pp. 24-25.

24. Siegfried SCHMIDT, “Bürgerliche Parteien und Volksmassen vom Vormärz bis 1871”, *Jenaer Beiträge zur Parteiengeschichte*, XL (1977): 19.

25. Hans BOLDT, “Zwischen Patrimonialismus und Parlamentarismus. Zur Entwicklung vorkonstitutioneller Theorien in der deutschen Staatslehre des Vormärz”, in *Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung. Zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland*, ed. Gerhard A. RITTER (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1974), pp. 87-88.

constantly faced the prospect of proletarianization.<sup>26</sup> Early in the history of the protest movement, religious nonconformity acted as a surrogate for political action and helped to accustom future organizers of the democratic party, such as Robert Blum, Franz Wigard, F.X. Rewitzer and E.A. Rossmässler, to their leadership roles. Although economic hardship undoubtedly motivated a large number of their followers, these men opposed the Saxon regime for several reasons, among them its bureaucratic arbitrariness, secret administration of justice, aristocratic values and suppression of dissent. Consequently, they sought allies among the middle-class liberals, led by the political journalist, editor and university professor, Karl Biedermann. By 1847, German Catholic democrats and Protestant liberal reformers presented a united front to the pre-March government, their common foe.

Robert Blum, the democrats' charismatic leader, channeled religious, economic and political protest into a single movement. Blum and Wigard organized the *Vaterlandsverein*, the large democratic party of the revolutionary period, which had attracted more than 11,000 members by April 1848.<sup>27</sup> Fully one-third of the German Catholic congregation in Dresden belonged to the *Vaterlandsverein* in 1848-49; in the period just before the outbreak of revolution, democratic and German Catholic strength in the industrializing centers of the Erzgebirge grew apace. Located in this region, where more than 30,000 workers were unemployed, were the majority of Saxony's twenty-two German Catholic congregations.<sup>28</sup> Religious revivalism, which flourished in the economically-depressed climate of the late 1840s, thus contributed significantly to the emergence of a united political opposition at the end of the pre-March period.

As editor of the *Sächsische Vaterlandsblätter*, published in Leipzig and read by democrats throughout the kingdom, Blum helped to secularize the values of German Catholicism and thereby to make its cause respectable among the liberal bourgeoisie.<sup>29</sup> Freedom of conscience, anti-clericalism, social consciousness, political self-determination, scientific rationalism and a desire for German unification in some form comprised the aims shared by Saxon democrats with the German Catholics and, in large measure, with the liberals. "No wonder", wrote Biedermann in 1846, "that Protestant Saxony saw in the victory and progress of German Catholicism the triumph of its own Protestant principle."<sup>30</sup> Liberals and democrats would part company soon enough, mainly over the issue of popular sovereignty;<sup>31</sup> but from 1845 to the March Days their interests coincided. Their joint efforts to achieve religious toleration and other reforms grew out of a dissatisfaction with the kingdom's

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26. Günter KOLBE, "Demokratische Opposition in religiösem Gewande: Zur Geschichte der deutschkatholischen Bewegung in Sachsen am Vorabend der Revolution von 1848/49", *Zeitschrift für Geschichts-Wissenschaft*, XX, no. 9 (1972): 1102, 1105.

27. WEBER, *Revolution in Sachsen*, p. 28.

28. KOLBE, "Demokratische Opposition", p. 1107; WEBER, *Revolution in Sachsen*, p. 28; Karl BIEDERMANN, "Das Königreich Sachsen vom Rücktritt des Märzministeriums bis zum Schluss des Landtages 1849-50", *Die Gegenwart*, VI (Leipzig, 1851): 581.

29. Blum himself founded the German Catholic congregation in Leipzig in February 1845. LIPINSKI, *Geschichte der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 28.

30. Karl BIEDERMANN, "Sächsische Zustände", *Unsre Gegenwart und Zukunft*, I (1846):310-11.

31. BOLDT, "Patrimonialismus und Parlamentarismus", p. 97.

condition so profound that it was able to bridge the rather vague class lines separating the liberal and democratic constituencies.<sup>32</sup>

A sharp downturn in the economy in 1846 shifted attention away from the campaign for civil rights and toward more basic issues such as unemployment and the social question. Saxony was a net importer of food in the best of times. But when the harvest failed, rising food prices soon outpaced wage levels and many workers in the marginal trades, especially weaving, faced the possibility of starvation. In 1847, for example, three hundred of Dresden's eight hundred master tailors were receiving welfare payments from their guild. Only workers in the machine-building factories earned the subsistence wage of three thalers a week.<sup>33</sup> The government, realizing very well that its efforts amounted to little more than a temporary expedient, tried to relieve unemployment by financing railway construction. A comprehensive economic strategy suited to the needs of both factory industry and the traditional crafts remained unwritten. At this stage in Saxony's industrial revolution, it was still too early to address the structural problems in the economy, the causes of which remained obscure.

No one doubted by 1847 that the social question had become even more pressing, though many liberals missed the significance of the factory worker as a new type of "proletarian". "Only a few", wrote James J. Sheehan in his history of German liberalism, "saw industrial workers as the central element in the social question because the distinction between industrial and artisanal categories was only gradually emerging."<sup>34</sup> One of those who did appreciate the transformation wrought by industrialization in the structure of the working class was Karl Biedermann, leader of the Saxon liberal party from 1845 until the demise of the last democratically-elected *Landtag* in June 1850.

A native of Leipzig, Biedermann (1812-1901) was the illegitimate son of a Prussian officer and a parson's daughter. Robert von Mohl, a prominent liberal politician in Württemberg and, like Biedermann, a member of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848-49, once speculated that his Saxon colleague was "the natural brother of [Baron Friedrich Ferdinand von] Beust."<sup>35</sup> The relationship, if it existed, was certainly ironic, since the two men were bitter political enemies for years and it was Beust who dismissed Biedermann from the Leipzig faculty in 1855.<sup>36</sup> Whatever Biedermann's antecedents, thanks to intellectual ability and his foster father's assistance he graduated from the universities of Heidelberg and Leipzig with a doctorate in philosophy. He taught in the University of Leipzig during the 1830s, but turned to

32. In the 1840s and later, it was difficult to locate the social or ideological boundary between liberalism and democracy. A clear split of course developed in 1849 during the constitutional debate in Frankfurt over the merits of republicanism and monarchy. Toni OFFERMANN, *Arbeiterbewegung und liberales Bürgertum in Deutschland 1850-1863* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1979), pp. 26-27.

33. WEBER, *Revolution in Sachsen*, pp. 6-7.

34. SHEEHAN, *German Liberalism*, p. 32.

35. Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, Handschriften- und Inkunab. Sammlung, Md. 613/100. Although the biographical sketch is unsigned, it is written in the first person and is found in a file containing several letters from Biedermann addressed to Mohl in Heidelberg. Authorship is attributed to Mohl in Joachim MÜLLER, "Karl Biedermann und die preussische Hegemonie in Deutschland. Vom Liberalismus zum Bonapartismus" (phil. diss., Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig, 1972), pp. 13-14.

36. Richard J. BAZILLION, "A Scholar in Politics in Pre-March Saxony: the Biedermann Case", *Societas—A Review of Social History*, V, no. 3 (1975): 215-16.



journalism and independent historical research in the next decade. A proponent of the *kleindeutsch* (i.e., pro-Prussian) solution to German unification in 1849 and thereafter, Biedermann devoted his attention during the pre-March period to the social implications of industrialization.

Biedermann's analysis of the social question took the dichotomy between artisans and factory workers into account.<sup>37</sup> In a series of lectures on socialism, given before several hundred listeners in Leipzig and Dresden during the difficult winter of 1846-47, Biedermann treated the movement as a "menacing spectre" basically hostile toward modernization.<sup>38</sup> This warning echoed the words of Lorenz von Stein, a distinguished authority on French radicalism who had used similar language to describe the socialist threat.<sup>39</sup> Although Biedermann defended the idea of private property as "belonging necessarily to the notion of human personality and independence",<sup>40</sup> he cited British social legislation as an example of the need to place external controls on some individuals and groups in order to prevent their selfish misuse of economic power. No champion of unrestricted *laissez-faire*, Biedermann cautioned against the sudden introduction of industrial freedom. As one who "saw the causes which actually called forth a worker's movement",<sup>41</sup> he understood that the two working classes, one composed of artisans and the other of factory labourers, had legitimate grievances which society ignored at its peril.

Sympathy for the downtrodden reinforced Biedermann's longstanding conviction that change was inevitable, and that the best way to avoid upheaval was to reform social institutions before the pressure from below became too intense.<sup>42</sup> Biedermann shared with his fellow liberals the belief that constitutional rule, once achieved, would inspire a host of improvements in society generally. One substantial benefit would be an orderly transition to a modern industrial economy capable of ensuring peace and prosperity by converting the population surplus into a national asset.<sup>43</sup> Because Biedermann regarded the modernization process as irreversible, he commended to readers of his weekly newspaper, *Der Herold*, the "practical view of an experienced businessman" (Heinrich Bodemer, a Grossenhain cotton manufacturer) that "cottage industry struggles against machines and the factory like a doomed rearguard against an overwhelming foe."<sup>44</sup> The solution to structural unemployment was therefore to move the manufacturing process entirely into the factory, where wages, though low, were at least dependable even during economic crises that reduced cottage

37. Winfried SCHULZE, "Sozialistische Bestrebungen in Deutschland," *Bemerkungen zu einer Aufsatzfolge Karl Biedermanns (1846)*", *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, I (April 1970): 96.

38. BIEDERMANN, *Mein Leben und ein Stück Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Breslau: Druck und Verlag von S. Schottlaender, 1886), p. 159. He published the lectures as *Vorlesungen über Sozialismus und die soziale Frage* (Leipzig: Biedermannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1847).

39. CONZE, "Vom 'Pöbel' zum 'Proletariat'", p. 119.

40. BIEDERMANN, "Sozialistische Bestrebungen in Deutschland", *Unsre Gegenwart und Zukunft*, IV (1846): 327.

41. Ernst SCHRAEPLER, *Quellen zur Geschichte der sozialen Frage in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 25-26, quoted in ALBERT Herzog zu Sachsen, "Die Reform der sächsischen Gewerbegesetzgebung (1840-1861)" (phil. diss., Universität München, 1970), p. 101.

42. BIEDERMANN, *Vorlesungen*, p. 274. He explained his evolutionary philosophy in *Fundamentalphilosophie* (Leipzig: Gebrüder Reichenbach, 1838), and in *Deutsche Philosophie von Kant bis auf unsere Zeit*, 2 vol. (Leipzig: Mayer und Wigand, 1842-43).

43. BIEDERMANN, *Vorlesungen*, pp. 74-81; 65-66.

44. *Der Herold*, 9 July 1845, p. 216.

weavers to penury. Until the transition was completed, social insurance funded by private contributions could help to reduce the hardships suffered by workers in the declining trades.

While liberal intellectuals and entrepreneurs, such as Biedermann and Bodemer, offered their advice, desperate handicraftsmen flocked into the democratic *Vaterlandsverein*.<sup>45</sup> Unable to stem the tide of popular opposition, Saxony's aristocratic cabinet fell victim on 13 March 1848, "to the spirit of the new age which it opposed so long and so vehemently."<sup>46</sup> Power now passed to a group of liberal bureaucrats whose purpose was to create a modern constitutional state. Among them was Albert Christian Weinlig, a physician who had abandoned medicine for economics, taught for a year in Erlangen and finally joined the Saxon civil service in 1841. He proved to be exactly the type of enlightened bureaucrat with whom moderate liberals hoped to forge an alliance against "guild pressures and mercantilistic restrictions."<sup>47</sup>

During the 1840s Weinlig headed the interior ministry's department of commercial, industrial and agricultural affairs. His interest in technological development and national economy led him to concentrate on the problems associated with industrialization. Shortly before the outbreak of the 1848 revolution, he devised plans for a new statistical bureau and for the establishment of commercial and agricultural schools. Though his activity at this time was almost entirely of a technical, administrative nature, events soon took him much further afield; ultimately he became the architect of Saxony's industrial society.<sup>48</sup>

The March Ministry assigned Weinlig to study the kingdom's economic situation, a task he began by obtaining information from factory owners, master artisans and workers of every kind. He chaired the "Commission for the Discussion of Business and Labour Conditions", whose membership included manufacturers, handicraftsmen, academics and technical experts. The 58-man commission set up some 700 local committees to consider proposals for "a reform of the industrial system (*Gewerbeverfassung*) in the broadest sense of the term."<sup>49</sup> According to an East German historian, the duty of operating these committees "absorbed . . . all the energies of the Saxon workers' movement" after April 1848.<sup>50</sup> If so, then the government had good reason to be satisfied, though in the end the commission failed to solve the social question.

Weinlig and his colleagues nevertheless made a magnificent attempt, collecting empirical data by means of a questionnaire containing 384 items distributed throughout Saxony.<sup>51</sup> Respondents were asked, among other things, to declare themselves for or against industrialization and to suggest improvements in factory operations,

45. In May 1848, membership in the republican clubs outnumbered that in the liberal *Deutsche Vereine* by about 12,000 to 8,000. See WEBER, *Revolution in Sachsen*, pp. 28, 30.

46. BIEDERMANN, "Königreich Sachsen", p. 601.

47. Gerhard A. RITTER, "Entwicklungsprobleme des deutschen Parlamentarismus", in *Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung*, p. 25.

48. Biographical details are taken from Paul DOMSCH, *Albert Christian Weinlig: Ein Lebensbild nach Familienpapieren und Akten* (Chemnitz: Druck von J.C.F. Pickenhahn, 1912), pp. 9-19.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

50. Karl OBERMANN, *Die deutschen Arbeiter in der Revolution von 1848* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1953), p. 207.

51. LIPINSKI, *Geschichte der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 175.

transportation, patent law, the rules of competition and tariff regulations. The commission solicited details about living conditions among the working classes in order to formulate an effective social policy. While some groups, such as dedicated laissez-faire liberals, deplored what they regarded as state interference in the economy, most working-class Saxons greeted the commission as their saviour. The journeymen, whom Rudolf Stadelmann described as "intelligent, uprooted individuals who had innocently fallen between the grindstones of progress",<sup>52</sup> proved to be especially vulnerable to false optimism. When their unrealistic hopes for government restrictions on factory competition collapsed, the revolution lost much of its popular support. Weinlig, for his part, refused to abandon the journeymen to the vagaries of modernization, proposing instead "a middle path between industrial freedom and guild regulation."<sup>53</sup> His plan was to organize craftsmen, factory owners and proletarians along "corporative" lines and thus to apply the notion of "association," current in journeyman and social liberal circles for years, in an essentially conservative manner.<sup>54</sup> Weinlig realized that "chaos would ensue upon the introduction of unlimited industrial freedom"; he therefore favoured "an organic arrangement of society according to natural and thus legitimate estates (*Stände*)."<sup>55</sup>

Although Weinlig based his proposals on an accurate perception of social and economic conditions in Saxony, he underestimated the artisans' hostility toward modernization and their determination to defend the old order. Nothing short of legal controls on the spread of mechanization would satisfy the thousands of handworkers displaced by power looms. Any concession to the factory system provoked the wrath of guildsmen, who had opposed the government's economic policy for years. Stephan Born, leader of the socialist *Verbrüderung* in Berlin, ominously described the connection between social unrest and political protest. ". . . [W]e are different from the majority of German Socialists . . .", wrote Born, "[in] that we do not regard the social question as something independent of the political movement... The more we assert historical grounds in dealing with the social question, the more clearly we want to bring out the recognition of a powerful class struggle in society."<sup>56</sup> Weinlig's purpose, on the contrary, was to neutralize the social question as a political issue. He intended to do so by ending the turmoil that resulted from the increasingly unequal rivalry between modern industry and artisan manufacture.

The dilemma confronting Weinlig found expression in a memorandum from a group of Dresden industrialists to the Pre-Parliament which met in Frankfurt in April 1848. "We wish to announce a competition", wrote the businessmen, "for a prize of 100,000 thaler for the answer to the difficult question: short of encroaching on property and the freedom to earn a living, without constraining talent and industry, without the guild control of business being exercised in such a way that

52. Rudolf STADELMANN, *Social and Political History of the German 1848 Revolution*, trans. James G. CHASTAIN (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1975), pp. 15-16.

53. Fritz HAUPTMANN, "Sachsens Wirtschaft und der soziale Gedanke 1840-1850", *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte*, LIX (1983): 184.

54. CONZE, "Vom 'Pöbel' zum 'Proletariat'", p. 129. Biedermann had spoken approvingly of the "association principle" in his 1846-47 lectures; *Vorlesungen*, p. 99.

55. DOMSCH, *Weinlig*, p. 45.

56. Stephan BORN, "Die soziale Frage", *Die Verbrüderung*, 3 October 1848, quoted in LIPINSKI, *Geschichte der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, pp. 100-1.

whole industrial enterprises are ruined by a single speculator—how can the lot of the worker be improved without destroying the factories?"<sup>57</sup> Unwilling to accept the solution demanded by the artisans and their political organization, the radical republican *Vaterlandsverein*, Weinlig sought a compromise based on the premise that traditional and modern economic institutions could coexist during the transition to industrialism. He prepared a new industrial code (*Gewerbeordnung*) to replace the 1840 ordinance, a draft which the entire cabinet discussed in May 1850. Weinlig hoped that his proposal would remove the causes of working-class opposition to the state, thereby cutting the ground from under the strong labour organizations which had arisen in Leipzig and Chemnitz during the revolution.<sup>58</sup>

Weinlig's design called for the creation of chambers of commerce, industrial councils and courts of arbitration in order to give both employers and labour a voice in business decisions. But irreconcilable conflict between the guildsmen's demand for job security and that of factory owners for a free labour market wrecked his compromise. Handicraft workers insisted on employment guarantees that could not be provided, while the government rejected labour's attempts to alter working conditions. The interior ministry consequently withdrew Weinlig's draft from consideration on May 28, and three days later brought the era of revolutionary reform to a close. With the recall of the pre-March *Landtag*, the guilds regained nominal control over economic policy and the modernizers appeared to have been defeated.<sup>59</sup>

Because Weinlig stayed at his post in the interior ministry during the "reactionary" 1850s, the modernization of economic institutions in fact continued throughout a decade of political repression. Weinlig's strategy, approved by the prime minister, Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust, remained one of gradual evolution toward industrial freedom. Biedermann and the social liberals had advised a similar approach before the revolution, and Weinlig apparently concurred. Thus he combined "technological freedom with social restraint" and moved steadily toward technical innovation within a stable political system.<sup>60</sup> Such retrograde institutions as the guild corporations had to be tolerated during the shift to full-scale industrialization in order to represent the interests of handicraftsmen. Convinced of the need to make the transition to the new system of production as smooth as possible, Weinlig resurrected his 1850 draft a few years later and re-submitted it as his solution to the perennial social question.

In the proposed industrial code of 1857, Weinlig suppressed the guilds and replaced them with industrial and craftworker associations established to administer social welfare plans for their members. He recommended such measures as unemployment insurance, profit-sharing plans for workers in smaller enterprises, restrictions on child and female labour, and a number of other remedies for mass suffering. As had happened seven years before, traditionalists denounced him as a revolutionary and modernizers accused him of being too conservative. Guild officials

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57. *Leipziger Tageblatt und Anzeiger*, no. 94, 3 April 1848, p. 958, quoted in OBERMANN, *Die deutschen Arbeiter*, p. 205.

58. ALBERT Herzog zu Sachsen, "Die Reform", pp. 708-9.

59. HAUPTMANN, "Sachsens Wirtschaft", pp. 201-2.

60. Siegfried MOLTKE and Wilhelm STIEDA, eds., *Albert Christian Weinlig in Briefen von ihm und an ihn* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag, 1931), p. xi. Karl BRAUER, "Albert Christian Weinlig", p. 408.

defended their ancient privileges as heartily as ever, while factory owners still called loudly for industrial freedom. Heinrich Bodemer, the industrialist whose defence of the factory had impressed Biedermann in the 1840s, pointed out that the guilds had instigated revolution in 1848 and ought therefore to be uprooted once and for all.<sup>61</sup> Unprepared to impose this radical solution, the government once again postponed a decision and another stalemate resulted.

Weinlig's defeat in 1857 was, however, more apparent than real, for this time he had succeeded in exposing the fatal weaknesses in the guild organization of labour. Once the economic foundation of Saxony's urban life, the guilds could no longer defend their own territory nor adequately protect the interests of their members. Unrelenting industrialization pointed toward a future dominated by factory cities inhabited by overwhelming numbers of wage labourers. At the end of the 1850s, as the "new era" dawned in Germany, increasing pressure for unification reflected a changing economic climate throughout Central Europe. Aided by these developments, Saxony's modernizers soon won the day.

The industrial law (*Gewerbegesetz*) of 15 October 1861 confirmed an understanding between Weinlig and Beust that the time had come to abolish half-measures and to embrace industrial freedom without reservation. By this time, Austria and several other German states, though not Prussia, had espoused industrial freedom.<sup>62</sup> In spite of vigorous opposition from the guilds, the new law suspended their privileges with compensation, leaving them as purely voluntary organizations. Social insurance received less attention than in the 1857 draft, and participation in sickness and accident plans was left a matter of choice.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, child labour in factories was now forbidden though not completely eliminated (children from twelve to fourteen years of age could work only ten hours a day and had to receive some education). The trade councils and tribunals Weinlig had suggested four years earlier now came into existence, intended as a means of arbitrating minor wage disputes. Going beyond the 1857 draft, the ordinance of 1861 conferred the rights of association and strike. It also forbade employers to pay their workers in kind rather than cash.

Weinlig thus constructed a system which removed archaic fetters on economic growth, but which also protected the working class against the depredations of laissez-faire. His industrial legislation remained in force until superseded by the Reich *Gewerbeordnung* of 1869. In that year Prussia adopted industrial freedom on the same paternalistic terms as had Saxony. Building on precedents established in both states, Bismarck subsequently erected a system of social welfare measures and labour codes which provided Germany's factory proletariat with a degree of security unmatched in other industrializing countries. When the Reichstag enacted sickness, accident and old-age insurance between 1883 and 1889, Germany in fact "return[ed] to the old principle of state interference applied to a new economic background."<sup>64</sup> Regardless of the motives that underlay Bismarck's social legislation,

61. ALBERT Herzog zu Sachsen, "Die Reform", pp. 716-17.

62. DOMSCH, *Weinlig*, p. 62; Theodore S. HAMEROW, *The Social Foundations of German Unification, 1858-1871: Struggles and Accomplishments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 92ff.

63. ALBERT Herzog zu Sachsen, "Die Reform", p. 1147.

64. J. TAMPKE, "Bismarck's Social Legislation: A Genuine Breakthrough?", in *The Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany, 1850-1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 73.

in particular his determination to halt the growth of Social Democracy,<sup>65</sup> state solicitude for the welfare of labour had a long history behind it. Biedermann's social liberal philosophy and Weinlig's reform of industrial legislation had strengthened this tradition by emphasizing the state's responsibility for easing the birth of an industrial society.

Saxony's rulers handled the transition in a manner that revealed their concern for those whom the modernization process displaced and dispossessed. Because the imperial government responded in a similarly adroit manner to the problems of massive industrialization later in the century, Germany avoided a repetition of the 1848-49 upheavals. The country's industrialists, academics, bureaucrats and politicians all supported the evolution of a social policy matched to the basic needs of a modern industrial state.<sup>66</sup> Their efforts assisted in achieving impressive economic growth and, the revolutionary rhetoric of the Social Democratic Party notwithstanding, social peace. These accomplishments fostered the illusion that Bismarck's authoritarian Reich, now aspiring to great power status, stood on firm foundations.

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65. H. P. ULLMANN, "German Industry and Bismarck's Social Security System", in *Emergence of the Welfare State*, p. 133.

66. TAMPKE, "Bismarck's Social Legislation", p. 74; CONZE, "Vöm 'Pobel' zum 'Proletariat'", p. 128.