

## Institutions of Mass Deception: The Arrival of Mass Politics and the Perversion of the Public Sphere

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It is a widely held belief that the public sphere spread far more smoothly in the countries along the European Atlantic Rim than on the Continent. This article points out that while this may be true with respect to the initial rise of the public sphere, the expansion of the public sphere into mass politics presents a far more nuanced and complicated picture. Comparing Britain and Germany towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows that despite considerable differences between the two countries, the expansion of the public sphere into mass politics had similarly problematic effects. In both countries, the state deliberately sought to accommodate the introduction of mass politics by catering to the dreams and delusions of imperialism and national grandeur of the masses, emptying politics of genuine content and shying away from difficult domestic political issues. In both cases, this led to a weakening and a perversion of the public sphere that it took decades to recover from.

**Key Words :** Public Sphere, Mass Politics, Great Britain, Germany, Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### INTRODUCTION

We often think about the public sphere as spreading far more easily along the Atlantic Rim than on the European Continent. In countries like the Netherlands and Great Britain, the public sphere rose earlier than elsewhere. It was more stable, it suffered from less disruption from the state, and it had the quality of blending the population together in a socially cohesive whole, rather than breaking down the fabric of the state as in France in the decades preceding the French Revolution.

The public spheres of the Netherlands and Britain were of distinctly higher quality than those on the Continent. What was initially an elitist phenomenon rapidly spread to comprise the wealthier parts of the bourgeoisie and even fairly seamlessly to the working classes – originally through newspapers catering to the lower classes, but eventually also by including them in the electoral franchise, providing them with the right to vote, to organize, and to vote for their own parties. Not so the European Continent. In countries like Germany and France we think of the public sphere as spreading through strife and conflict, with the working

classes not really permanently integrated in a socially cohesive whole until far into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In these, mass politics produced conflict, strife, attempts at revolution and government suppression.

Is however this somewhat black-and-white story accurate? If we shift our focus from the rise of the public sphere some time around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the rise of mass politics a few centuries later, I argue that there are at least as many similarities between the British and the German experiences as there are differences. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inclusion of the masses led to fragmentary tendencies in both countries and to the reliance on foreign politics, colonial politics, and of the politics of Empire to divert attention away from the domestic scene. Granted, Britain enjoyed calmer waters than Germany, and Britain's attempt at including the masses took place far more within the already existing political framework. Also, the already existing British institutional and political framework was more open and parliamentary, and far more conducive to the seamless inclusion of new parties and viewpoints. Yet, there is no doubt that this process in Britain, as in Germany, led to a deterioration of the public

sphere, to a shift away from domestic political issues with foreign politics being actively used to increase working class support for the existing political institutions. It was the end to the relative calm of the elitist consensus of the Concert of Europe and the fruition of a foreign policy paradigm where mass politics and nationalism created a far more volatile foreign policy environment. Hence, Britain and Germany: different but same.

## THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The public sphere is a notion familiarized primarily through the work of Jürgen Habermas (1971 [1962]), starting in the 1960s, but the core condition of the public sphere can be traced far back in time. Machiavelli for instance tells the prince that in order to receive good advice, he needs to let his advisers speak freely, not having to be fearful of the consequences. While this is not much of a public sphere, the logic is similar: The good argument stands the test of time, in the process driving the bad ones out. And this can only be achieved through a frank exchange of ideas and opinions, through the open and public discourse, probing arguments against each other.<sup>1</sup>

However, lately *civil society* has been far more of a buzzword than the public sphere. Civil society is a social arena independent of the institutions of the state, an arena located between the state and the private sphere, “where self-organizing groups, movements, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities and advance their interests” vis-à-vis the state (Linz & Stepan 1996:9). A healthy civil society is commonly considered a precondition for solving conflicts, establishing democracy and developing ailing economies. Compared to this, the public sphere is a distinct (while related) concept. It consists of institutions of information and communication that people rely on when they interact – when they exchange views, formulate opinions, express identities and formulate rules of conduct. Such institutions have a long history in the West. Schools, universities, newspapers, publishing houses, libraries, unions, scientific societies and similar institutions, evolved early in the seafaring nations along the north-Atlantic rim (Knutsen 1997; 1999). While no public sphere can exist without civil society, civil society does not in itself imply a public sphere. A

society may have its fair share of self-organizing, relatively autonomous groups, advancing their own interests, but this does not necessarily imply a free and public political discourse, open discussion of political issues and institutions, political norms or values. The suggestion made here is that it is the public sphere rather than civil society that has been instrumental with respect to creating the growth, development and prosperity seen in the Western world. The free and public political discourse of a well-functioning public sphere helps build substance to the groups and associations that we normally think of as civil society.

However, while a healthy and vibrant public sphere may be the key to long-term success and prosperity as a nation, it is not a given that we linearly and by necessity move from a less to a more sophisticated public sphere. Rather, the ride may easily have been distinctly bumpy, and it would be naïve to overlook the possibility that secular macro trends have affected the development and quality of the public sphere across countries. This article uses a combination of historical and comparative methods to trace and compare the development of the public spheres of Britain and Germany towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My suggestion is that the introduction of mass politics is one such secular macro trend, and that it had considerable impacts on the public sphere. While Britain had a far more developed and sophisticated public sphere than Germany, and was thus better able to deal with the shock to the system that the introduction of mass politics was, the impacts felt by both states were of a fairly similar kind. The task of the historical method is to trace the hypothesized causal connection. This is combined with Mill’s (1904 [1843]) comparative methods to seek out the strategic differences and similarities between Britain and Germany.

While generalizing from such a small sample should only be done with considerable caution, the conclusions are suggestive. Britain and Germany started out from very different vantage points, yet the impact of the independent variable – the introduction of mass politics – was fairly similar, although obviously tempered by their different starting points. While there are undoubtedly numerous reasons for this, the relationship seems credible. While no conclusive test, it increases the theory’s plausibility and strengthens its prospects ahead of more rigorous testing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is an argument that can also be found with for instance Kant (1991 [1784]) and Hegel (1952 [1821]).

<sup>2</sup> In Eckstein’s (1975:108) terminology, this is a *plausibility probe*. The results of the study are not conclusive, but sufficiently rooted in data to warrant more rigorous testing.

## THE EARLY PUBLIC SPHERE

There is very little doubt that an English/British public sphere developed considerably earlier than in most other countries. As early as 1746, London alone had 18 newspapers, the first one established as early as 1702.<sup>3</sup> By the 1730s, there were half a dozen dailies in addition to a host of tri-weekly papers, and by the end of the century 50 different newspapers in the provinces and 9 in Scotland (Colley 1992:41). Britain also had a considerably greater variety of outlooks than other countries. There were numerous middle-class journals and radical pamphlets, many of which at times extraordinarily hostile toward the government. Some of the newspapers and journals for the growing working-class readership had a circulation of 40,000-50,000.<sup>4</sup> By 1780, the weekly sale of British newspapers was 340,000, compared to 80,000-90,000 in for instance France (Evans 1983:185; Knutsen 1999:110; Melton 2001:61pp).

However, compared to France, Germany too (to the extent that there was yet a Germany) was far better positioned with respect to the rise of a public sphere – due to the sheer fragmentation of the German areas. The Holy Roman Empire consisted of some 300 semi-sovereign principalities, which led to a diversity of political and confessional cultures. Censorship varied from territory to territory, and thus political diversity contributed to a varied network of newspapers and periodicals, far more so than in France. And German pamphleteers enthusiastically contrasted the vices of France with the virtues of the German world. For instance, almost every German pamphlet after 1648 refers to German liberties and how no other people love liberty more than the Germans (Blanning 2008:309; Melton 2001:132).<sup>5</sup> However, German writers and intellectuals to a far greater extent than in Britain depended on direct ties to the state, as they would often be hired by the civil service, the universities, as pastors or as princely officials (Melton 2001:135). This made the German public sphere somewhat statist. It was not as carefree and informal as in Britain, yet at the same time not as slanderous and gossipy as in France.

In terms of coffeehouses England was running ahead with London getting its first coffeehouse in

the 1650s, and they also spread more rapidly, so that by 1739, London alone had more than 500. However, German cities were also doing quite well, cosmopolitan Vienna especially so, but also cities like Hamburg, Frankfurt, Leipzig and Berlin.<sup>6</sup> The coffeehouses developed into politicized spaces of public discussion. These were space where matters of state were discussed and dissected in surprisingly frank manners. They were places that contained large amounts of newspapers, some times even editing their own newspapers (as in the case of the Hamburg Patriot in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century). French contemporaries were stunned as to the openness of discussion and the lack of discretion with which politics was discussed. While these coffeehouses may have become more closed and segregated as the amount of German states declined, it is not at all obvious that the German public sphere was miles behind Britain at this early stage (Blanning 2008:331; Melton 2001:243pp).

However, the above applies primarily to the enlightened classes. Britain had newspapers catering to the lower classes, and foreign visitors were surprised as to the social mix of people visiting the coffeehouses. Yet, coffeehouses both in Britain and in the German states were frequented primarily by men of learning and of business rather than by workers. The public sphere was still mainly an elite phenomenon, as was political activity. However, Britain differed from the German states in one vital aspect. It was already a united and socially cohesive whole. To Knutsen (1999:107) 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain was experiencing “a robust social consensus anchored in a distinct and relevant political mythology...forged on the anvil of large-scale war, this consensus rendered England self-confident, productive and strong”. British nationality was forged by war, primarily with France – almost continually from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the fall of Napoleon, in what has sometimes been labeled the Second Hundred Years War (Blanning 2008:311; Colley 1992:1).<sup>7</sup> The French Revolution caused enormous stir and nervousness in the British ruling class, which was not convinced that the same could not happen there. However, there is scant evidence of pro-Frenchness or revolutionary activity

3 One of the reasons why we actually have data on British unrest, whereas it is much harder to find reliable data on France, is the growing abundance of newspapers in Britain reporting on such unrest.

4 The *Political Register* was probably the most popular. Other lower class journals: *Black Dwarf*, *Weekly Political Register*, *Republican*, *Register*, *The Sheffield Independent*, *Manchester Guardian* (Evans 1983:186).

5 These were liberties that to a great extent had to do with the peculiar relationship between the many German states, which had the right to participate in the governing of the Holy Roman Empire, but were otherwise quite independent of it.

6 Vienna got its first coffeehouse in 1683. By 1784 it had 64. Hamburg got its first as early as 1671 (Blanning 2008:331).

7 Wars against France: 1689-97, 1702-13, 1743-48, 1756-63, 1778-83, 1793-1802, 1803-15 (Colley 1992:1).

in Britain once the Revolution had occurred. Britain experienced few problems recruiting people for military duty against France, with social class having very little impact on volunteering. Britain apparently had reservoirs of latent cohesion in its populace to draw upon (Best 1982:132p; Colley 1992:287; Evans 1983:81).<sup>8</sup>

Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by the amazing openness of British society compared to his own France, for instance making the point that although particular aristocrats were hated and despised, aristocracy as such was not. The middle class was ripe with aristocratic values. Toward the 1830s, protest was instead channelled into accepted political forms, ending in parliamentary reform and the extension of the electorate (Evans 1983:218). The British public sphere improved and cemented itself to such an extent that by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it had been firmly institutionalized. The right to form associations had been highly contested in 1780, but was a routine affair 50 years later (Tilly 1995:12). Tilly (1995:341pp) concludes quite assertively that there was a substantial change in the nature of 'contentious gatherings' between 1789 and 1833, in the sense that the proportion of *non-violent* interactions increased dramatically. The public meeting was almost instituted as an official political instrument, as a way for those not being part of the electorate to be heard.

Hence, Britain saw what Colley (1992:155) describes as "the making of the British ruling class". The second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw an increasingly hostile attitude towards the aristocracy. With respect to the endemic corruption of British politics, "...everyone in the British Establishment had his hand in the till, advanced his own male and female relations and was closely related by blood or marriage to everyone else in high office" (Colley 1992:152). However, towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a very rapid fusing of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish elites through marriage and inheritance saw a convergence of perspectives that clearly increased the cohesion of the ruling class, be they Whigs or Tories, and which led to an overarching consensus on issues of for instance industrialization. And faced with threats

from Continental turmoil – i.e. the French Revolution – ruling elites credibly redefined themselves as patriotic and heroic, authentically and enthusiastically *British*. The ruling class was no longer seen as parasitic. It had managed to restore its authority and legitimacy, and in the process helped shape a reformed British identity (Colley 1992:177-93).<sup>9</sup>

Such developments were peculiar to Britain. There was still no united Germany. Rather, politically, Prussia and Austria were fighting hard for hegemony over an area that since the Napoleonic Wars had been reduced from over 300 to 39 states. Attempts at creating a German state followed the uprisings in 1848-49. Revolutionary movements overthrew the governments of numerous German states. In the end, liberals and democrats favoring a united and reformed Germany lost out. A German Confederation and a National Parliament was set up in Frankfurt, with a Habsburg archduke as nominal head and Provisional Executive, but with powers residing with the states, this was a weak Provisional Executive. Without the powers to impose or collect taxes, no social policies could be enacted, and military power rested solely on the member states, for all practical purposes Prussia and Austria. When both Austria and Prussia elected to go it alone, the Confederation was powerless. An impotent German Confederation continued to exist until 1866, including Austria's German territories (Fulbrook 1992:117; Horstmeyer 1998:243; Kindleberger 2000:113; Tipton 2003:52,90).

No firm and common German identity developed until the unification. German national identity was at one and the same time subnational and supranational. In Prussia, which emerged as the dominant German state, national identity was subnational, and in principle antinational. National identity had nothing to do with blood or heritage, but with being subject to the Prussian king. Considering how the Prussian state comprised a major Polish majority, an ethnocultural approach to nationality would have been tricky. Further, the very hierarchic structure of Prussia, with so much power vested in the hands of the Junkers makes class a more useful concept

8 However, the French Revolution also led to levels of repression not seen in Britain since the civil war. Hence, the absence of riots to some extent stems from this. In 1794, politically oriented movements inspired by the French Revolution were closed down. Mass-membership affiliations were held under tight government control. 1792 saw the 'Proclamation against Seditious Writings and Assemblies' restricting the freedom of the press. In 1793, people were prosecuted for circulating radical literature. The 1795 'Treasonable Practices Act and Seditious Meetings Act' banned meetings with more than 50 people, and anyone speaking or writing in criticism of the constitution could be prosecuted. The restrictions on military and police intervention in riots were eased and *habeas corpus* temporarily suspended. Still, compared to France, Britain was far from repressive (Pugh 1999:23p, 38pp; Tilly 1995:10,419pp).

9 Colley (1992:189) emphasizes that changes were not just a matter of appearance. Where politics had earlier been something along the lines of a landed leisure activity, around the turn of the century, politicians became genuine workaholics. And while during most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it had been possible for important politicians to be more or less openly promiscuous, the image of the 19<sup>th</sup> century statesman was that of having an impeccable private life.

than nation with respect to understanding Prussian nationalism. But nationalism was also supranational, deriving from the fact that there was yet no Germany, but a host of German states that for all their rivalries and differences were distinctly German, even if there was disagreement as to what extent for instance Catholic and proudly independent Bavaria belonged in the same category as the Protestant states in the north. As the unified German Reich of 1871 remained a federal state (under Prussian leadership), German national identity continued to struggle with these two conceptions of nationalism, and the issue was never ultimately resolved even if significant progress toward nation-statehood was made between 1871 and 1914 through the construction of nation-wide institutions and the efforts of the state to create a national consciousness. But as Brubaker states (1992:13): “two generations were not sufficient to create a consolidated, ‘*selbstverständlich*’ taken-for-granted national consciousness, within the frame of the new state” Also, unlike Britain, German national identity was not derived from any notion of popular sovereignty. Granted, Wilhelm I was a fairly benevolent Emperor. Yet, he was also patriarchal and conservative and perceived of the relationship between people and emperor in quite old-fashioned terms. He had his duties towards his subjects and they had theirs (between themselves and) towards their ruler and master. But this did not imply popular sovereignty. He did not derive his power from the people. Rather, the people were *his* subjects, and as their ruler, master and father, he had his fatherly duties towards his people (Brubaker 1992; Melton 2001).

### NATION-BUILDING AND THE ARRIVAL OF MASS POLITICS

In most countries politics had been a distinctly elite affair. Britain was a partial exception, with Tilly (1995) asserting how as early as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century protest was channeled into institutional forms, for practical purposes implying that compared to other countries there were institutional outlets for the complaints and grievances of the down-and-outers. But this should not be taken as evidence of British calm and tranquility, or of the successful integration of the lower classes. The integration of the lower classes created a number of problems, some of

which were overcome, some of which lingered on. It required institutional change, in the shape of franchise extensions, and it required changes to the party structure as the established political parties (Tories/Conservatives, Whigs/Liberals) struggled to gain control over the working class vote.

The 1832 franchise extension did not take place in any atmosphere of calm and tranquility. Most scholars readily agree that Britain had never been closer to a social revolution. Quoting Hobsbawm (1969:72): “At no other period in modern UK history have the common people been so persistently, profoundly and desperately dissatisfied.” Despite strong growth, for most manual laborers, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of hardship. The average annual rate of increase in real earnings between 1790 and 1840 was a measly 0.1%. Real wages for manual laborers fluctuated up and down, and may even have fallen during the 1830s. They did not start pointing decidedly upwards until the 1840s (Feinstein 1995:32; Hobsbawm 1969:77,93p). Pugh (1999:48) suggests that without the 1832 election reform, the result would have been popular armed resistance.

Parliamentary reform had been a demand from both workers and businessmen and industrialists. Yet, the Reform Act did not pass easily. The Duke of Wellington (Tory), appointed PM in 1827, refused to consider parliamentary reform. However, the French July Revolution (1830), which replaced the Bourbon king Charles X, inspired working-class and middle-class reformists in Britain, also alarming prominent Tories as to the potential revolutionary power of the masses. The Wellington cabinet fell, and King William IV appointed a Whig cabinet, headed by Earl Grey, on a platform of reforming to prevent revolution. In 1831, Earl Grey introduced a reform bill. It passed by *one* single vote, but was rejected in the House of Lords. The reaction to the rejection was widespread violence, especially against houses of peers and bishops voting against the bill. The problem was not solved until 1832, when William IV appointed a number of new peers to the House of Lords, so as to secure majority for reform. And so, the 1832 Reform Act finally passed (Lloyd-Jones 1990:591; Pugh 1999:48pp; Quinault 1993:197).

The Reform Act effectively doubled the size of the franchise, to roughly 18% of all adult males.<sup>10</sup> It for all practical purpose enfranchised the middle

<sup>10</sup> The figure hovered between 17 and 20% until 1868 (rising because of inflation), when the next franchise extension was passed by Parliament, extending the franchise to roughly 35% of adult males. In absolute figures, the 1832 Reform Act increased the electorate to 650,000-700,000 voters out of an adult male population of about 3.5 million, at a time when the French electorate was less than 200,000 out of a male population more than twice as large. Further reforms followed in 1866, 1869 and 1884 (Evans 1983:352; Justman & Gradstein 1999:119; Price 1993:166; Pugh 1999:48p).

classes, but not the numerous workers, who had also fought for the franchise extension. Ironically, as Chartism threatened the political system in the 1840s, the middle class would now instead come down on the side of the traditional elites, for social and political stability, against anything vaguely resembling revolutionary working-class demands. The middle class would play a crucial role in maintaining the social and political stability of the regime, providing it with a legitimacy that was sorely lacking in other countries (Hobsbawm 1969:77; Pugh 1999:48pp,71pp; Tilly 2004:163).

By mid-century, Britain was again a calmer place, in particular when compared to the Continent. France underwent no less than two *actual* revolutions, in both 1830 and 1848, and present-day Germany underwent a number of revolutions during that same year. In Britain, protest and dissent were slowly institutionalized, with previously revolutionary movements now working within the system rather than trying to bring it down from the outside (Perkin 1969:393; Tilly 1995:12).

By mid-19<sup>th</sup> century politics was calm. The Mid-Victorian period is usually considered one of growth and stability. Problems of national identity were long resolved, with Ireland the only real problem. Organized workers favored radical Liberalism rather than more revolutionary movements, the middle class was healthy, all classes took part in economic growth and no particular class seemed to dominate (Colley 1992:12pp; Landes 1998:219; Pugh 1999:71pp,103).

Two more franchise extensions followed, in 1867 and 1884-85. A mid-1860s economic slump led to discontent and to people flooding onto the streets. Hence, a bill extending the franchise was considered wise by all the parties. In 1866, the Liberal Party, under William Gladstone proposed a very cautious bill, for practical purposes extending the franchise to some 100,000 people – primarily artisans and shopkeepers, already mostly pro-Liberal. It was turned down, resulting in a minority Conservative government by Benjamin Disraeli the following year pushing through a far more comprehensive bill, increasing the electorate from 1.3 to 2.45 million, followed by the 1872 Secret Ballot Act. After 1870, it was overwhelmingly evident that mass participation would arrive, like it or not. Britain was a country of workers,<sup>11</sup> and the reforms of 1867 and 1884-85 based the electoral system on the working class vote, with the 1885 Third Reform Act extending the franchise to 5.7 million, or roughly 60% of the

adult male population. Yet, the same parties stayed in power. Socialism emerged during the 1880s, but the British Labour Party (founded in 1900) took a moderate stance on most issues. Urbanization and industrialization did put great strains on British society, but the working class was not to any great extent considered revolutionary. Socialist organizations were weak, as were trade unions, whose membership numbers for a while actually *decreased*, down to 750,000 in 1888 from around a million in 1874, or around 15% of manual workers, despite the fact that union membership did not suffer any legal repression. No strong class consciousness existed. Many workers were opposed to state intervention and enthusiastically supported free trade. Attempts at strikes were few and unsuccessful (Evans 1983:351; Gilbert & Large 2002:39; Hobsbawm 1969:126,238; Hoppen 1998:649; Pugh 1999:98pp,123pp; Thompson 1999:27p).

In Germany, the integration process was far rougher. In Britain, much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been a process of integration (if not always successful); in Germany it was one of integration by disintegration. When Bismarck in 1871 succeeded in unifying Germany, the newly created Reich was not nearly as homogeneous as Britain. Or at least, it did not perceive itself as equally homogeneous, and this lack of perceived homogeneity was a problem. One of the problems of German unification was that to a considerable extent this could be viewed as Prussia conquering the rest of Germany. Prussian king Wilhelm now became Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany (while still remaining king of Prussia). The capital remained in Berlin. And while Prussia had formerly been the overwhelmingly dominant part of the North German Federation, the victory in the Franco-Prussian war meant that the southern German principalities, like Bavaria and a few others – culturally and religiously distinct – had now joined the new Reich.

Along the lines of Stein Rokkan (1987), the higher number of political cleavages in Germany made the integration process tenuous and conflictual. In Britain, questions of national identity were long resolved, religious problems insignificant, and sociocultural and territorial cleavages only minor. Hence, the only cleavage of significance was the labor market cleavage – the introduction of the masses onto the political scene. Granted, the Celtic fringes of the kingdom would fire up from time to time, but in terms of their economic power and significance, and their political influence, they were unproblematic. In Germany, unification ran into problems right away,

<sup>11</sup> In 1867, 77% of Great Britain's population belonged to the "manual labor class" (Hobsbawm 1969:154).

accentuated by the fact that national euphoria within two years gave way to a major economic depression.

Bismarck's way of unifying the country was by uniting what he considered the core of the nation against the minorities. Hence, the new German public sphere was filled with strife, with the *Kulturkampf* for all practical purposes being an anti-Catholic crusade. In the Reichstag, the National Liberals was the biggest party. However, Bismarck allying with the National Liberals came at a cost. Catholics were considered inner enemies, and a threat to true unification. Also, Catholicism was part of a cosmopolitan tradition, and thus inherently anti-nationalistic. This became particularly relevant as the newly annexed areas of Alsace and Lorraine were Catholic, with the share of Catholics in the Reich rising to as high as 36%. A tendency for religious identities to become ever more unyielding, and especially the tendency to identify German national identity with Protestantism led to laws against religious (read: Catholic) influence on education (1871-72), as well as the breaking off of diplomatic relations with the Vatican (1872).<sup>12</sup> The confrontation with the Catholics was framed in terms of bombs and swords, and Catholic riots were heavily suppressed. The obvious result was Catholics actively resenting the new state and the formation of separate Catholic organizations and networks. Hence, rather than consolidating the Empire, the split deepened. For the remainder of the century, the Catholic Center Party (*Zentrum*) would take roughly 100 seats in the Reichstag, comprising a hostile and resentful permanent minority of around 20% (Schulze 1998:160p; Tipton 2003:163pp,230).

The other permanent minority was the Socialists. Catholics were seen to jeopardize German culture, the Socialists German society. Like the Catholics, the lower classes were refused entry into government, and they were not integrated into the civil society and public sphere of the *Bürgertum*. Hence, they developed separate networks and organizations, starting with labor unions and moving on to political parties. Bismarck's response was twofold. His second response was remunerative: Through programs that would improve the quality of life of the lower classes, like the social insurance laws, the workers would become loyal to the government, as they would see that they had a stake in the system (Tipton 2003).

However, his first response was punitive, seeking a ban against socialist parties. After 1878, Bismarck allied with the conservative parties to pass the anti-Socialist Laws, banning organizations supporting "activities designed to subvert the existing political and social order in ways that threaten the public order and particularly the harmony of the social classes" (Tipton 2003:167). The first attempt at a law was put forth after an assassination attempt on Wilhelm I, but was rejected in the Reichstag. But when the second assassination followed shortly after (although not by a Socialist and unconnected to the first), Bismarck dissolved the Reichstag, launched a campaign against the Socialists and the Liberals and successfully pushed through an anti-Socialist law that would have to be reviewed and renewed every three years. For practical purposes, the law failed, as it did not prevent voters to vote for socialist candidates, and since parliamentary immunity saw to it that even socialists were protected as long as they sat in the Reichstag. Socialist parties increased their share of the votes in every election, with the SPD becoming the biggest party at the 1890 election (although only getting 35 seats due to election rules heavily favoring Junker candidates and districts). During the 1880s, Bismarck tried to counter the growing socialist influence by implementing social insurance legislation.<sup>13</sup> While this was a partial success in many ways, it did not win him the working class vote, or halt the socialist parties. In 1877 the SPD received 500,000 votes, increasing to 1.4 million by 1890 and 4.2 million by 1912. In 1912 they even became the largest party in the Reichstag, with 110 seats (Born 1976:28; Fulbrook 1992:134; Klug 2001:225; Schulze 1998:163pp; Tipton 2003:150, 167pp, 234; Wehler 1985:132).

A final major cleavage was the urban—rural one. In Britain, the rural fringes were exactly that – fringes.<sup>14</sup> In Germany, this was where power was located. As late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a country industrializing at breakneck speed, where cities experienced explosive growth, and where the working class was growing by the minute, the locus of power was the agrarian, arch-conservative and industrially quite backward eastern part of Prussia, home of the Junkers. The Army swore allegiance to the King of Prussia, not the Emperor of Germany. There was no German minister of war. Rather, there was a Prussian Minister of War. The constitution of the Reich was highly authoritarian,

<sup>12</sup> The first steps to reestablish relations did not take place until Leo XIII became Pope in 1878 (Tipton 2003:169).

<sup>13</sup> Bismarck and Germany pioneered this kind of legislation in Europe: sickness insurance legislation (1883), accident insurance (1884), and old age and disability insurance (1889) (Fulbrook 1992:134).

<sup>14</sup> Granted, rural aristocrats had long been disproportionately represented in Parliament even if less so than in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Quinault 1993). But unlike in Germany, the least industrialized areas were not politically the most powerful.

with the Emperor holding extremely wide-ranging powers. The core of the German apparatus of state was derived from the Prussian Junker class, people who were fiercely proud – not of their “Germanness”, but of their status as Junkers, essentially of being German but better, of belonging to a class and a nation of their own, but of the class and nation that had created Germany. Here again, we see that strange combination of sub- and supra-nationality embedded in the Prussian Junkers. German, and at the same time not.

While the Reich sought to promote a feeling of “Germanness” among its citizens, this did not derive from the Junkers (even if the Emperor was a Prussian and the Chancellor a Junker), but from the urbanized *Bürgertum*. The monuments erected to celebrate the nation did not derive from the aristocracy or the military, but from the city-dwellers (even if these monuments tended to celebrate the aristocracy and the military), and they were funded locally, not nationally. Ironically, amongst the German elites, the tendency to see urban people as actual or potential criminals, was widespread. Obviously, this applied primarily to the workers, who should not ever be trusted, but the attitudes towards city-dwellers in general was one of skepticism. The aristocracy worried about the middle class, the middle class about the working class. People in the rural societies saw themselves as living by a code of duty and sacrifice, with the city characterized by egotism and ambition and an unhealthy desire for material goods. The *Gemeinschaft* of the traditional community, with dense webs of relationships was being tossed aside by the *Gesellschaft* of the modern society, where the traditional network had been lost, and where individuals only cared for themselves, seeing other human beings merely as means to something else. But conservative power rested on the power of Prussia, and industrialization meant that Prussia was becoming economically less important and the financial situation of the Junkers more precarious. The unresolved position of Prussia remained with Germany as one of its greatest structural problems, and was not resolved until World War I: Reactionary politically and economically, and holding on to its dominant position within Germany as the world and Germany changed before it, and as the Junkers and Prussia itself became ever more of an anachronism – a semi-feudal political center in an industrialized country where the Social Democrats had now become the biggest political party (Tipton 2003:132,150,157,215pp,238p).

## THE RESPONSE OF THE STATE

While the inclusion of the masses took place in a far friendlier and more harmonious atmosphere in Britain than in Germany, some of the policy outcomes are similar enough with Germany to deserve mentioning. My suggestion here is that the inclusion of the masses had essentially the same effect on both countries, but taking the far more moderate policy environment of Britain into account the British response was predictably more moderate than the German.

However, in both countries we see an ever stronger tendency towards the late 19<sup>th</sup> century towards policies and rhetoric of empire, with the explicit purpose of pushing thorny domestic political issues to the side. The British Conservative Party had been split ever since the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), and had been out of power for 20 years by the time of the 1867 franchise extension. By the 1860s, British politics was centering around a fairly radical Liberal party under the leadership of William Gladstone.<sup>15</sup> The Conservatives, under Benjamin Disraeli, had only to a very moderate extent managed to adjust to mass politics. Extending the franchise further would only worsen this, unless something drastic was done. Hence, the party changed its tactic, consciously trying to win the vote of the lower classes. It now became the party of traditional values, of benevolent paternalism and protection against brutal *laissez-faire*. Against a radical Liberal Party, the Conservatives put up a staunch defense of private property, against radicalism, Irish nationalism and socialism. The party also courted the trade unions far more eagerly than Gladstone, and rejected the puritanism and asceticism of the liberals with respect to for instance alcohol. Above all, the Conservative Party became the party of patriotism, Imperial ambition and pride, and of British supremacy and superiority. While this did not work during the first post-1867 election it did bring the party back to such an extent that in 1874, with a far larger franchise, Benjamin Disraeli could form a Conservative cabinet that lasted until 1880. From 1886, headed by Lord Salisbury,<sup>16</sup> the Conservative Party would go on to dominate British politics for the next 20 years, even through an 1884-85 third franchise extension granting more than 60 per cent of the male population the right to vote (Hoppen 1998:645; Pugh 1999:92pp; Thompson 1999:27p).

1886 signaled a shift in British politics. Previous decades had been decades of domestic politics; free

<sup>15</sup> Taking over from Lord Palmerston, who had headed Liberal cabinets in 1855-58 and 1859-65.

<sup>16</sup> Lord Salisbury led three conservative governments: 1885-86, 1886-92, and 1895-1902.



trade, peace, retrenchment and reform. But defending traditional causes like the Union with Ireland, the monarchy, the Empire, the Church of England, religious education and private property had brought the Conservatives significant amounts of voters. Thus, the following decades would be dominated by fears of external threats – colonial rivalry, naval race, the fear of invasion.<sup>17</sup> Conservatives actively pushed domestic issues off the agenda, pushing foreign policy, and staying away from thorny issues like free trade and schooling. Gladstone, the Liberal leader, was already strongly free trade, and beyond that had no view of the economy as a whole. From the far left, there was not much to fear, as unions had become weaker over the previous decade and a half. Despite both Gladstone and Salisbury being deeply reluctant over colonial policies, what was especially striking towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the increased enthusiasm towards the Empire by ordinary citizens. Britain had a duty to save the world. Missionary zeal, jingoism and moral imperialism went hand in hand as Britons extremely eagerly took on “the white man’s burden”. Hence, Imperialism not only provided a source of pride and purpose in the sense of gaining territory and international prestige, but also by providing these poor Africans religious salvation as well as liberating them from the clutches of Arab colonialism and the consequence of this colonialism, namely slavery. Hence, late 19<sup>th</sup> century British politics would to a great extent focus on Imperial triumphs and fiascoes, not on free trade vs. protectionism and education reform (Hoppen 1998:649; Pakenham 1991; Phillips 2007:230pp; Pugh 1999:107pp,129-36).

Free trade is one of the areas in which one might have expected the Conservative party to try to reverse previous policies. The Conservatives had split on the repeal of the Corn Laws, with two thirds of the party going against their own PM. But this was one area of domestic politics that was pushed aside. Beyond a few futile attempts at re-introducing protectionism immediately following the repeal, in a remarkably short time protectionism became political suicide. It was associated with high food prices, starvation and the selfish interests of the landed aristocracy. The skilled workmen – that is, the major new group to receive voting rights with the 1867 franchise extension – were strongly pro-free trade. While things would change somewhat towards the very end of the century, there was a strong alliance between Liberals and the

organized working class (and supported by most of the manufacturing industry) (Hobsbawm 1969:120; Judd 1996:58pp, 65; Pugh 1999:101).

Although sympathetic to the reintroduction of tariffs, Conservative governments chose to keep quiet, testament to how sure they were that it would lose them the next election. Even with British industries struggling and the economy in obvious decline, in 1906 when the tariff issue was raised, the Liberals scored a landslide election victory, postponing any notion of reform into an indefinite future (Judd 1996:150,187pp; Klug 2001:221; Pugh 1999:115,145). For political reasons, rather than economic, tariffs could and would not be discussed. A combination of strong anti-protectionist sentiment amongst the voters and the political dominance of the pro-free trade Liberal Party, made any upwards tariff revisions for all practical purposes impossible.

After the turn of the century, Britain experienced problems on an ever larger scale. The imperial enthusiasm dimmed considerably after the Boer War. From now and until World War I, wages stagnated or even fell.<sup>18</sup> Harmony, stability and prosperity gave way to uneasiness and tension. This went together with stronger unions (membership increased to 1.9 million in 1900, and to over 4 million by 1914 (Pugh 1999:125)), labor unrest, strikes, the radicalization of the socialist left and general political breakdown. The union was not particularly radical compared to what was the case on the Continent, and most working-class organizations showed little interest in Marxist ideas. Still, the number of strikes increased from 300-400 a year in 1902-06 to 800-900 in 1911-14, Britain no longer being more peaceful than other European countries. When World War I arrived, it was almost met by relief, as a respite from crisis (Gilbert & Large 2002:41; Hobsbawm 1969:193; Perkin 1969:173; Pugh 1999:127,135,147; Shorter & Tilly 1974:309).

...they were the only years when the stable and flexible mechanism of British political adjustment ceased to function, and when the naked bones of power emerged from the accumulations of tissue which normally concealed them. These were the years when the Lords defied the Commons, when an extreme right, not merely ultra-conservative but nationalist, vitriolic, demagogic and anti-Semitic, looked like emerging into the

17 Between 1871 and 1914 60 books were published by English fiction writers on foreign countries invading Britain. 41 of these invasions were German (18 French) (Phillips 2007:230).

18 The period prior to the downturn had seen the so-called Great Depression. However, impoverishment of British workers was *not* one of the consequences – counterintuitively, the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the period in which the situation of British workers improved the most rapidly.

open, when scandals of financial corruption racked governments, when – most serious of all – army officers with the backing of the Conservative Party mutinied against laws passed by Parliament. They were the years when wisps of violence hung in the English air... (Hobsbawm 1969:193)

In Germany, social cohesion was put to the test in a far more serious manner, and here as well imperial rhetoric became one of the most obvious answers. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became ever more obvious that much of Bismarck's political maneuvering was essentially that: Maneuvering! He had no clear economic policy, no party affiliation and no intentions of relying for support on any one party. Prior to unification, for several years he had governed without a budget, since the Prussian Landtag had refused to approve it. Without any legal provisions he had seen to it that he as Minister-President of Prussia would also become German Chancellor after the unification. Hence, if he encountered resistance in the Prussian Landtag, he could get around it by repeating the process at the national level instead. He had insisted on male suffrage for both the North German Bundestag (prior to unification) and the German Reichstag, as he was confident that the masses would side with him.<sup>19</sup> When this turned out not to be true, he very seriously considered a coup d'état. He was not ideologically opposed to modernization, industrialization and the demands of industry. Then again, he also had no commitment to it. Bismarck's commitment was to himself, to the Junkers and to the Kaiser. His success consisted of striking a precarious balance between powerful social forces, trying to preserve some sort of a status quo, while at the same time the social and political consequences of industrialization being ever more evident. Hence, politics and policy-making was often hamstrung by conflict. Bismarck's commitment to free trade was as fleeting as his later commitment to protectionism, and had more to do with his personal preferences as a Junker, and his perceived need to raise revenue that would be independent of the Reichstag, as it had to do with any change in conviction. The combination of socialist parties

growing in strength and influence and the ascendancy of a new and more hostile Kaiser (Wilhelm II), meant too many interests to balance, Bismarck being removed from power in 1890. While this does not deny the fact that he was successful in preserving for himself and his administration a certain amount of autonomy, it also bears witness of a Germany where, in spite of rapid industrialization, other concerns were more important. Bismarck never cared to build political consensus or formal political alliances, and as the socialists rose, the lack of political consensus became ever more obvious (Rogowski 1989:40; Tipton 2003:159pp; Wehler 1985:57pp).

The post-Bismarck period (the Wilhelmine era) saw tensions rise further. Weak governments based on short-lived compromises meant that pressure groups became more important, with considerable influence on government policy. The popularity of the socialists kept rising after the 1890 abolition of the anti-Socialist Laws – from 1.4 million votes in 1890 to 4.2 million in 1912. With this went union growth from 680,000 members in 1900 to 2.5 million in 1913. Mass strikes and demonstrations are well documented. In order to counter the socialist threat, the Kaiser and his nearest circle of government pursued the so-called Weltpolitik. While undoubtedly to a considerable extent also reflecting the Emperor's personal preferences and delusions of grandeur, more cynically the Weltpolitik was also a very deliberate attempt to draw attention away from social unrest, an ever more powerful Social Democratic Party, and a growing working class.<sup>20</sup> It worked in part, but more so by winning over the anti-aristocratic forces of the bourgeoisie than the working class. Hence, the contradictions between extremely conservative Junkers and a socialist working class in an ever more industrialized society were to a major extent checked by ever more obvious appeals to nationalism and adventurous foreign policies. The middle classes identified themselves with the nation and took pride in foreign politics. It was a widespread attitude that colonies were a matter of life and death. Germany took patriotic pride first and foremost in its military strength and its colonial acquisitions.<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm II was never more popular than when in 1896 he

19 Which is not to say that Germany was a democracy. It was an Empire, with a Kaiser who was not bound by the Reichstag. The Reichstag was in charge of budgetary affairs.

20 Bismarck had earlier advocated a policy of colonialism in order to prevent the relationship with Britain to become too close. Friedrich III, the successor of Wilhelm I, was pro-British. Bismarck figured that a policy of colonialism might bring on conflict with Britain at virtually any time, and was thus a good antidote against pro-British policies in Germany. In any case, Friedrich died from cancer to the throat, only 99 days after being crowned Emperor (Tipton 2003:174).

21 But these attitudes had also spread to the business world. Business was power and economic growth an equivalent of military expansion. The German state conceived of the economy as a national task. Economic nationalism was as important as general German nationalism (Greenfeld 2001:154,218).

(stupidly...) defied Britain and sent a congratulatory telegram to the newly elected Boer president Paul Kruger of Transvaal in southern Africa, after Kruger's forces had defeated an invasion attempt by British raiders in Rhodesia. While nationalism also spread to the workers, several authors argue that the contradictions and tensions in the German Empire could only keep growing, and that the main reason why no revolution, or other discontinuous break, took place, was that World War I came to the rescue.<sup>22</sup> This reveals some of the problems that German chancellors faced. It was not only the matter of securing political majorities in the Reichstag, but the whole empire rested on weak social foundations. In order to engender social cohesion among the masses, and thus increase the relative autonomy of the regime, foreign policy diversions were manufactured in order to take the focus off domestic problems (Fulbrook 1992:117,140pp; Pakenham 1991:490; Schulze 1998:118pp,173pp; Stürmer 2002:45; Tipton 2003:90,186; Wehler 1985:63p,89p,102pp,137,177).

Tipton (2003:175) makes the point that it was very possibly *not* the case that German politics reflected the primacy of foreign policy, but rather the primacy of domestic politics. Foreign policies were actively used to put a lid on domestic problems. He also claims that it would have taken an exceptionally imaginative, sympathetic and focused leadership to have bridged the gaps with respect to Catholics, Socialists, and the rural-urban conflict. Germany was nowhere near having such a leadership.

## CONCLUSIONS

Britain and Germany may have had very different 19<sup>th</sup> century experiences in terms of nation-building, nationalism, democratization, the inclusion of the masses and the evolution of the public sphere. Britain was by far the more developed country, and a country that had successfully been able to deal with most of its economic and social problems, at least compared to other European countries. Germany was the newly unified country riddled with a militaristic, hierarchic and anti-industrial politically dominant Prussia. It was a country that needed to deal with a number of different political, social and economic problems more or less from the

outset. Hence, one might imagine that Britain's and Germany's experiences with respect to the inclusion of the masses might vary wildly. In one respect this is true, in another it is very much not. Britain far more successfully integrated its lower classes through franchise extensions and through a political system that remained comparatively calm and peaceful, not undergoing major changes until after World War I. Germany was plagued with conflict and strife, strikes and demonstrations, the splitting up of the country in essentially three distinct camps, all of which looked at members of the other camps in stereotypes and with mutual suspicion and animosity: Nationalist, Catholics, and Socialists. The national minorities of Schleswig, Alsace-Lorraine, and of Posen in East Prussia tended to define themselves more in terms of their "own" ethnic nations than as Germans, and more so in 1900 than in 1870, all testament to the failed and fairly heavy-handed Germanization policies carried out in these parts (Tipton 2003:225p). The country was held together by a Chancellor whose maneuverings may have been necessary to keep the country stable, but which did not constitute any long-term plan for nation-building or the inclusion of the masses nor did it contribute to long-term stability.

But despite this, despite the very different starting conditions, one similarity between the two countries is still very much evident, and it is a similarity that has to do with the state's response to the challenges brought on by mass politics. In both countries, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was ever more characterized by nationalism (or rather: jingoism), by hostility towards other nations, by aggressive politics of Empire and colonialism. Both the British and the German states used foreign politics to subdue ever greater problems in the domestic arena. Granted, these problems were smaller in Britain, but they were by no means non-existent here either, and they were mounting. In Britain, the Conservative Party knew that it needed to empty out the domestic arena of politics if it were to have any chance of wooing the voters of the newly enfranchised working classes away from the Liberal Party. In order for the Conservatives to do this, they needed a political platform distinctly different from that of the Liberals. They did this by shying away from domestic politics, where they would not

<sup>22</sup> Here it should be added that even as late as the foundation of the German Empire, no distinct German identity existed. People would rather describe themselves as Prussians, Bavarians or Saxons than Germans (although it is clear that a German national consciousness grew as a consequence of war against France). What was conspicuous to most non-Prussians, was that the new state was as much a Greater Prussia as it was a Germany. Thus, Prussian hegemony was met with strong anti-Prussian feelings in parts of the new Empire, especially in the south. Whereas Britain and France were among the first states to form a national identity, in Germany, this developed only slowly. It was triggered by Napoleon's battering of Prussian armies at Jena in 1806, but disappeared when the French troops did. Surges of nationalistic feelings, accompanied by political discontent occurred on numerous occasions during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – 1813, 1817, 1830. But no German national consciousness would start developing until the 1840s.

be able to beat the Liberals anyway, and focus more or less exclusively on foreign politics and on values and morality. This did the trick. In Germany, the need to do similar things rested not primarily with the parties. While elected through universal male suffrage, the Reichstag was for all practical purposes impotent. Power rested with the Chancellor, that is, Bismarck (for as long as he had the Emperor's confidence). Hence, the choice to advocate nationalistic policies lie not with the Reichstag but with Bismarck, and after Bismarck was booted out of power, with Wilhelm II and his advisors. And while Wilhelm II undoubtedly harbored numerous delusions of personal and national grandeur, there is little doubt that his advisors (and to some extent Wilhelm himself) were cunningly using Weltpolitik to guard themselves against social and political domestic problems.

The consequence of all this was a public sphere that towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> became less sophisticated and less evolved, rather than the opposite, in both Britain and in Germany. It became infested with ideals of nationalism and chauvinism, of international battle and strife rather than cooperation, of disintegration rather than integration, of confusion rather than enlightenment. These were decades of nihilism rather than of a republican peace. It took two wars for the inclusion of the masses to become final and for the public sphere to finally start recovering.

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