THE POLITICS OF THE 'UNPOLITICAL GERMAN': LIBERALISM IN GERMAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 1860–1880

JAN PALMOWSKI
Christ Church, Oxford

ABSTRACT. *Contrary to the widespread assumption that in imperial Germany urban affairs were conducted by a homogeneous 'unpolitical' notable elite until around 1900, a review of recently published case studies suggests that politics had entered local government by the 1870s. Frequent causes for the politicization of local affairs included confessional divisions, territorial change, or simply the wish of local elites to buttress their own positions. The ways in which liberals in particular took advantage of this emergence of political discourse at the urban level is highlighted by the case of Frankfurt am Main. The city's three liberal parties developed in competition with each other. Each managed to address and articulate the citizens' peculiar grievances with differing degrees of success. By 1880, public life inside and outside the town hall was conducted according to political ground rules, and this was accepted by every party. Against the still prevailing view of a rigid liberalism which after 1874 was in evident terminal decline, the decade after 1866 needs to be recognized as the period in which liberals took charge of municipal government across most of Germany, through the politicization of often highly individual local concerns with astonishing sophistication and flexibility.*

I

The notion of the 'unpolitical German', the docile *Bürger* happy to leave the conduct of politics to the ruling elites in order to focus on business and culture, has been at the heart of the German *Sonderweg*, the assumption of a German 'peculiar path' to modernity, ever since its inception.[1] Indeed, the *Sonderweg* debate of the 1980s and early 1990s has largely focused on this supposed political weakness of the bourgeoisie.[2] Of similar interest has been the associated

[1] For a classic account of this bourgeois self-understanding in the late imperial era, see T. Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Frankfurt, 1956), esp. p. 108. See also F. Stern, 'The political consequences of the unpolitical German', in F. Stern, *The failure of illiberalism* (New York, 1972), pp. 3–25; R. Dahrendorf, *Society and democracy in Germany* (2nd edn, New York, 1979), esp. pp. 314–27; H.-U. Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (7th edn, Göttingen, 1994), pp. 64–7.

[2] D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, *The peculiarities of German history: bourgeois society and politics in nineteenth-century Germany* (Oxford, 1984); J. Kocka, *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (3 vols., Munich, 1988), especially J. Kocka, 'Bürgertum und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert. Europäische Entwicklungen und deutsche Eigenarten', in ibid., I, pp. 11–76; J. Kocka, 'German history before Hitler: the debate about the German *Sonderweg*', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), pp. 3–16; D. Blackbourn, 'The German bourgeoisie: an introduction', in D. Blackbourn and R. J. Evans, eds., *The German bourgeoisie* (London, 1991), pp. 1–46.

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assumption of a spineless liberalism which, like its main social carrier, was mesmerized by a charismatic leadership in government and rendered ineffective by a conservative ruling elite and increasingly powerful interest groups.[3] As a result of this debate, a much more nuanced picture of German liberalism has emerged. Given that popular support for the liberals at national elections actually increased from 1874 to 1912 in absolute terms, the history of liberalism is no longer one of terminal decline.[4] In fact, liberals began to react positively and with some success to the advent of mass politics from the 1890s.[5] Recent studies which have turned their attention away from the power elites in Berlin to the constituencies confirm that by 1912, liberals had made significant gains in popular support. In Saxony, for instance, after 1900 the fledgling liberals emerged from the shadows of their conservative rivals to be a self-confident, aggressive movement fully attuned to the demands of mass politics.[6]

This debate about German liberalism in the Empire has been largely confined to its viability at the national level. Only very recently have historians shifted their focus to a discussion of liberalism at the state level, and even of liberalism in its regional context.[7] Even so, the one level at which the evolution of liberal politics has been virtually uncharted is that of urban local government. In their concern to show the weakness of liberalism against the manipulation of elites and interest groups in Berlin, *Sonderweg* historians had little time for a consideration of liberalism in the locality.[8] Given that, through a restricted franchise, local affairs were determined by a supposedly 'unpolitical' bourgeoisie, it followed by implication that politics had little place inside the town council. In fact, this assumption of local government being the

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[3] Wehler, *Kaiserreich*, pp. 78–83, 90–5; D. Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks: Parteien und Verbände in der Spätphase des Wilhelminischen Deutschlands* (Cologne and Berlin, 1970); H.-J. Puhle, 'Parlament, Parteien und Interessenverbände 1890–1914', in M. Stürmer, ed., *Das kaiserliche Deutschland: Politik und Gesellschaft 1870–1918* (Düsseldorf, 1970), pp. 340–77. The classic account of this 'charismatic leadership' is M. Stürmer, *Regierung und Reichstag im Bismarcktaat 1871–1880* (Düsseldorf, 1974).   [4] D. Langewiesche, *Liberalismus in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1988), p. 133.

[5] G. Eley, 'Notable politics, the crisis of German liberalism, and the electoral transition of the 1890s', in K. H. Jarausch and L. E. Jones, eds., *In search of a liberal Germany: studies in the history of German liberalism from 1789 to the present* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 187–216; D. Langewiesche, 'Liberalismus und Bürgertum in Europa', in Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, III, pp. 384–6; B. Fairbairn, 'Political mobilization', in R. Chickering, *Imperial Germany: a historiographical companion* (Westport, CT, 1996), pp. 303–42.

[6] By far the best summary of the by now burgeoning research on Saxony is S. Lässig and K. H. Pohl, eds., *Sachsen im Kaiserreich: Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Umbruch* (Weimar, Cologne, and Vienna, 1997). See also the forthcoming J. Retallack, ed., *Saxony in German history: culture, society, and politics, 1830–1933* (Ann Arbor, MI), and the special issue on 'Saxon signposts' in *German History*, 17 (1999).

[7] L. Gall and D. Langewiesche, eds., *Liberalismus und Region* (Munich, 1995). See especially D. Langewiesche, 'Liberalismus und Region', ibid., p. 15. For an argument in favour of putting the local context 'at the centre of research on German liberalism', see also K. H. Pohl, '"Einig", "Kraftvoll", "Machtbewußt". Überlegungen zu einer Geschichte des deutschen Liberalismus aus regionaler Perspektive', *Historische Mitteilungen im Auftrage der Ranke-Gesellschaft*, 7 (1994), pp. 61–80.   [8] Local government is not considered at all in Wehler's *Kaiserreich*.

bastion of the 'unpolitical German' only confirmed the observations of a number of urban historians in the late 1950s and 1960s. According to the seminal works by Wolfgang Hofmann, Helmuth Croon, and Wolfgang Köllmann, until about 1900 local affairs were dominated by the bourgeois elites who consistently emphasized the unpolitical nature of their activities.[9] Even if they were liberals in the broadest sense, what was decisive in local government was not politics, but social status and membership of local elite societies. Politics only entered the city council once a growing number of workers passed the threshold for the municipal franchise, and once the SPD gave up its own reservations about participation in local affairs. Only from around 1900 did liberal city councillors cease to be amongst themselves, 'unter sich'.[10] Yet at the same time, the rapid pace of urbanization necessitated a further fundamental change in local decision-making. The growing complexity of local government gave rise to the importance of the local bureaucracy, whose technical competence gave it an important practical advantage over a city council composed of voluntary politicians in the day-to-day running of local affairs. According to this view of local government, then, the overall influence of politics in local government remained strictly limited, as the effect of the politicization of council affairs was held in check by the simultaneous professionalization of local government and the rise of the unpolitical 'expert'.[11]

This article challenges this view about the reign of the 'unpolitical' in German local government. It argues that local affairs in the majority of the larger German towns had become politicized by 1880. This will be highlighted in the first instance by a review of current research that sheds light directly or indirectly on the evolution of politics in the city. There are still almost no

[9] H. Croon, 'Die Stadtvertretungen in Krefeld und Bochum im 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Selbstverwaltung der rheinischen und westfälischen Städte', in R. Dietrich and G. Oestreich, eds., *Forschungen zu Staat und Verfassung: Festgabe für Fritz Hartung* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 289–306; W. Hofmann, *Die Bielefelder Stadtverordneten: ein Beitrag zur bürgerlichen Selbstverwaltung und sozialem Wandel* (Berlin, 1964); W. Köllmann, *Sozialgeschichte der Stadt Barmen* (Tübingen, 1960).

[10] This was emphasized in the first important study to highlight the prominence of liberalism in local government, J. Sheehan, 'Liberalism and the city in nineteenth-century Germany', *Past and Present*, 51 (1971), pp. 116–37, here p. 130.

[11] J. Reulecke, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1985), pp. 131–9; W. R. Krabbe, *Die deutsche Stadt im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1989), pp. 147–8; H. Matzerath, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Preußen 1815–1914* (Stuttgart, 1985), p. 361; H. Pogge von Strandmann, 'The liberal monopolies of power in the cities of imperial Germany', in L. E. Jones and J. Retallack, eds., *Elections, mass politics and social change in modern Germany: new perspectives* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 93–117, here pp. 102ff; W. Hardtwig, 'Großstadt und Bürgerlichkeit in der politischen Ordnung des Kaiserreichs', in L. Gall, ed., *Stadt und Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1990), pp. 40–6; M. Niehuss, 'Party configurations in state and municipal elections in southern Germany, 1871–1914', in K. Rohe, ed., *Elections, parties and political traditions: social foundations of German parties and party systems, 1867–1987* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 101–3; H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. 3. Band: Von der 'Deutschen Doppelrevolution' bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849–1914* (Munich, 1995), pp. 1053–4.

studies on the development of liberal politics in local government during the
imperial era as such. Yet individual studies on other aspects of the city, such as
urban society or urban labour movements, collectively undermine the notion
that the social, territorial, and political changes after the mid-1860s left the
conduct of local affairs unaffected. Local affairs became politicized in the wake
of the politicization of state and national politics, territorial change, religious
conflict, and/or simply the desire of those who dominated local affairs to
buttress their power.

The assumptions derived from a general survey of the available literature on
urban affairs will be examined in greater depth through an investigation into
one particular case, to show the way and the extent to which liberalism could
come to dominate local affairs and public discourse in the city. The example
chosen for this purpose is Frankfurt am Main. Frankfurt is particularly suitable
for a case study of this kind, because it is generally recognized as one of imperial
Germany's most liberal cities,[12] while it has been identified simultaneously as
a good example for the reign of the 'unpolitical' as far as local government was
concerned.[13] Moreover, the strength of liberalism in Frankfurt during the
Empire has obscured the fact that, before 1866, Frankfurt was far from a
notable stronghold of liberalism.[14] The evolution of liberal politics in Frankfurt
after 1866, therefore, highlights particularly well the ways in which liberals
came to politicize local government and dominate its affairs. Both parts of this
study complement each other and paint the same picture. Without denying the
continuing importance of social connections, during the period of the
foundation of the Empire, from the mid-1860s to the mid-1870s, politics
emerged as the crucial determinant of public life in the cities. Of all the
accomplishments of the German liberals during this period, their initiation and
control of the politicization of urban government needs to be recognized as one
of their most enduring and significant.

Central to the argument about the unpolitical *Bürger* in local government is
an assumption of bourgeois social cohesion and stability which made possible

[12] One of the rare case studies of urban liberalism anywhere in imperial Germany is, in fact,
S. Wolf, *Liberalismus in Frankfurt am Main: vom Ende der Freien Stadt bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg
(1866–1944)* (Frankfurt, 1987). Unfortunately, Wolf assesses Frankfurt liberalism almost exclusively
in its local context, and most of the book is narrative, rather than argumentative.

[13] Note the different titles of the successive volumes of the official history of the Frankfurt city
council. K. Maly, *Die Macht der Honoratioren: Geschichte der Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1867–1900*
(Frankfurt, 1992); K. Maly, *Das Regiment der Parteien: Geschichte der Frankfurter Stadtverord-
netenversammlung 1900–1933* (Frankfurt, 1995). The persistence of notable politics until the advent of
the SPD in 1900 has been maintained by one of the best works on Frankfurt local government:
J. D. Rolling, 'Liberals, socialists, and city government in imperial Germany, 1900–1918' (Ph.D.
thesis, Madison, 1979), p. 208.

[14] This study's main argument is thus fundamentally opposed to Ralf Roth's work on the
Frankfurt bourgeoisie and its politics. R. Roth, *Stadt und Bürgertum in Frankfurt am Main: ein
besonderer Weg von der ständischen zur modernen Bürgergesellschaft 1760–1914* (Munich, 1996); R. Roth,
'Liberalismus in Frankfurt am Main 1814–1914. Probleme seiner Strukturgeschichte', in Gall and
Langewiesche, eds., *Liberalismus und Region*, pp. 41–85.

the absence of political strife in local affairs and the appearance of bourgeois unity. As one of the central issues of the *Sonderweg* debate, the German bourgeoisie received ample attention in the historiography of the late 1980s and 1990s. In their endeavour to understand and define bourgeois behaviour and attitudes in their full complexity, scholars connected to the University of Bielefeld, for instance, have transformed the previous image of a relatively one-dimensional social group eager to deny its own culture. Instead, they have emphasized the bourgeoisie's self-consciousness vis-à-vis all other social groups while providing it with sharper contours through considerations of gender, confession, profession, nationality, and geography.[15] A methodologically different approach was taken by Lothar Gall in Frankfurt, whose closely co-ordinated research group on the *Stadt und Bürgertum* focused on bourgeois interactions in different types of cities with the social, economic, and cultural transformations of its urban environment.[16] Thus far, the project's results highlight the ability of the local *Bürgertum* to respond to considerable challenges to its social cohesion, notably the immigration of new bourgeois groups, economic change, and political upheavals. Still, in most cities the different ways in which sections of the bourgeoisie sought to respond to these problems caused many frictions, and it appears that one way of maintaining social cohesion was through diverting disagreements on to the political sphere. The gradual evolution of bourgeois engagement at the local level in affairs which were often controversial suggests the need for clearer definitions of different types of political activity,[17] and calls into question the traditional view of the sudden bourgeois entry into politics around 1900. In particular, the question emerges about the extent to which the bourgeois ability and readiness to adapt to change led to the formation of a progressive and dynamic liberal movement in urban politics. Thomas Weichel's study on Wiesbaden demonstrates that, by the 1890s, politics at the local level were enmeshed in contrasting bourgeois conceptions of local, cultural, and social identities within the bourgeoisie.[18]

[15] The number of important works produced in this context seems exhaustive, but a good starting point is Kocka's three-volume edition of the *Bürgertum* cited above, which is available in English in a shortened version: J. Kocka and A. Mitchell, eds., *Bourgeois society in nineteenth-century Europe* (Oxford and Providence, 1993). Other important work includes W. Conze and J. Kocka, eds., *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (4 vols., Stuttgart, 1985–9); U. Frevert, *Bürgerinnen und Bürger: Geschlechterverhältnisse im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1988); T. Mergel, *Zwischen Klasse und Konfession: Katholisches Bürgertum im Rheinland 1794–1914* (Göttingen, 1994); J. Breuilly, *Labour and liberalism in nineteenth-century Europe: essays in comparative history* (Manchester, 1992).

[16] An introduction into the project's central aims and methodology is L. Gall, 'Stadt und Bürgertum im Übergang von der traditionalen zur modernen Gesellschaft', in L. Gall, ed., *Stadt und Bürgertum im Übergang von der traditionalen zur modernen Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1993), pp. 1–12. Unfortunately, Frank Möller's study on Augsburg and Gisela Mettele's work on the Cologne bourgeoisie have been published too late to be considered in this survey.

[17] A first attempt to arrive at a clearer understanding of different types of political activity is Dieter Hein, 'Partei und Bewegung. Zwei Typen moderner politischer Willensbildung', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 236 (1996), pp. 69–97.

[18] Thomas Weichel, *Die Bürger von Wiesbaden: von der Landstadt zur 'Weltkurstadt' 1780–1914* (Munich, 1997), pp. 324–33.

The emergence of politics in response to different bourgeois reactions to ongoing political, social, and economic change well before the advent of the SPD on the local political scene is supported by other studies which suggest the importance of the late 1860s as a watershed in local affairs. At that point, a local community in which public life had been dominated by personal, informal networks of citizens through clubs and associations was transformed into a society in which local affairs became increasingly politicized, as a result of economic change, confessional conflict, and a changing national environment.[19] A striking example of this is Hans-Werner Hahn's study on Wetzlar, which illustrates how even before 1866 local affairs were becoming polarized between a liberal city council and a conservative *Magistrat*.[20] This is despite the fact that Wetzlar could be considered a relatively static place in which traditional structures were unusually persistent.[21] Similarly, Karin Schambach has suggested that in Dortmund, too, the city council became politicized from the 1860s.[22]

The case of Dortmund suggests further that traditional assumptions which consider local government as dominated either by social elites or by political parties are off the mark. Evidence from Dortmund shows that the politicization of local government could complement the government by social elites.[23] This is supported by a number of different studies which demonstrate that the preservation of power by an existing social elite was a common and effective agent of politicization in the city. For the middling Hanoverian town of Harburg, Peter-Christian Witt has emphasized the socially exclusive nature of the ruling elite. Politics entered the local scene despite the absence of rival parties in local affairs which could usually be held responsible for the politicization of local government. From the late 1860s support of the National Liberals became the sine qua non for membership in Harburg's ruling elite.[24] In her important study of Augsburg, Ilse Fischer makes a related point for a city in an entirely different historical, confessional, regional, economic, and social context. For in Augsburg, the political battles which erupted in the 1860s reinforced and expressed pre-existing social and confessional fissures.[25] It follows that many local elites accepted the advent of politics not simply as an evil to be tolerated. It served as an instrument to buttress and increase their

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[19] R. Zerback, *München und sein Stadtbürgertum: eine Residenzstadt als Bürgergemeinde 1770–1870* (Munich, 1997), pp. 293–4, 299.

[20] H.-W. Hahn, *Altständisches Bürgertum zwischen Beharrung und Wandel: Wetzlar 1869–1870* (Munich, 1991), pp. 447–72, esp. pp. 459–60.

[21] In many ways, Wetzlar fits Walker's descriptions of the German 'home towns'. M. Walker, *German home towns: community, state, general estate, 1648–1871* (Ithaca, 1971).

[22] K. Schambach, *Stadtbürgertum und industrieller Umbruch: Dortmund 1789–1870* (Munich, 1996), pp. 338–41.   [23] Schambach, *Stadtbürgertum*, pp. 325–7, 335–42.

[24] P.-C. Witt, 'Kommunalpolitik in Harburg zwischen Interessen lokaler Eliten und Entstehung einer modernen Leistungsverwaltung (1967–1914)', in J. Ellermeyer et al., eds., *Harburg: von der Burg zur Industriestadt* (Harburg, 1988), pp. 219–49, here pp. 228–30.

[25] I. Fischer, *Industrialisierung, sozialer Konflikt und politische Willensbildung in der Stadtgemeinde: Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte Augsburgs 1840–1914* (Augsburg, 1977), p. 232.

own power against rival elites, or even, in the absence of rival groups vying for power, as an increasingly important mark of distinctiveness and self-definition.

A significant agent of politicization at the local level was confessional differences within the local population. In Augsburg, such divisions triggered off the emergence of a Roman Catholic, conservative camp, against the liberals who tended to enjoy disproportionate Protestant support. This division dominated local government from the 1860s. It continued to underline local politics in Augsburg after unification, as the liberals narrowed their social base, and became the party of the well-to-do, engaged in banking and commerce.[26] In other cities, confessional tensions led not so much to a rift within the bourgeoisie, but between the bourgeoisie on the one hand, and a popular majority on the other. In Regensburg and Munich confession separated a Roman Catholic popular majority, and a bourgeois Protestant, liberal local government elite. Following the granting of effective local self-government through the 1869 *Gemeindeedikt*, latent confessional tensions led to a rapid politicization of local government, for which the Roman Catholic Patriotic party, founded in 1869, proved an important stimulus. Once again, events in state politics had repercussions on local politics. For the Patriotic party allowed Roman Catholics to articulate their grievances not just at the state, but also at the local, levels.[27]

Apart from confessional tensions, local government could become politicized by the coincidence of conflicting territorial or regional loyalties. In the city of Hanover, it appears that the city council was drawn into politics, albeit reluctantly, owing to the king's persistent attempts to limit its powers. After 1866, the kingdom's annexation as a Prussian province gave the local notables such a political jolt that political dialogue within the council between supporters and opponents of the annexation stopped almost completely. In the absence of a meaningful provincial parliament, the council of Hanover and other cities became the most important popular forums in which the Guelphs could obtain a majority and acquire bastions of protest against their new rulers. Against the national trend, for most of the following two decades, the liberals were in a minority in the city council, against the dominant Guelphs.[28]

[26] Fischer, *Sozialgeschichte Augsburgs*, pp. 231–4, 255–60. On Augsburg's confessional divisions, see E. François, *Die unsichtbare Grenze: Protestanten und Katholiken in Augsburg 1848–1866* (Sigmaringen, 1991).

[27] W. Chrobak, 'Politische Parteien, Verbände und Vereine in Regensburg 1869–1914. Teil II', *Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Oberpfalz und Regensburg*, 120 (1980), here pp. 214–40; Zerback, *München*, pp. 278–95; R. Zerback, 'Unter der Kuratel des Staates – Die Stadt zwischen dem Gemeindeedikt von 1818 und der Gemeindeordnung von 1869', in R. Bauer, ed., *Geschichte der Stadt München* (Munich, 1992), pp. 274–306; E. Angermair, 'München als süddeutsche Metropole – Die Organisation des Großstadtausbaus 1870–1914', in ibid., esp. pp. 327–8. As in Freiburg, the Kulturkampf gained added ferocity in Munich through the realization of non-denominational schooling at the local level. Stefan Fisch, *Stadtplanung im 19. Jahrhundert: das Beispiel München bis zur Ära Theodor Fischer* (Munich, 1988), pp. 36–43.

[28] D. Brosius, 'Die Industriestadt. Vom Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des 1. Weltkriegs', in K. Mlynek and W. R. Röhrbein, eds., *Geschichte der Stadt Hannover. Band 2: Vom*

The defence of local peculiarities also served the Conservatives well in the kingdom of Saxony. They came to contrast their own, 'Saxon' roots with the nature of National Liberal politics, which they portrayed as a Prussian import. This tactic proved extremely successful in state and national elections, but it also translated into success at the level of local government. It ensured an unusual win for the 'Patriotic' Conservatives in Leipzig, and ensconced more permanently the Conservatives' hold on power in Dresden – another large city which thus defied the national trend of liberal predominance in local politics.[29]

In fact, the tendency for politicization at the local level was particularly strong when these two triggers of politicization overlapped, i.e. where denominational tensions were underlined by conflicting national or regional identities. This explains the importance of politics in Westfalia and the Rhineland, areas which were taken over by the Prussians in 1814. In Münster, Düsseldorf, and Koblenz, local life was dominated by popular perceptions about a Roman Catholic majority who were the traditional (and, by implication, rightful) inhabitants, but who were deprived of their rights and their way of life by a small exogenous Prussian Protestant elite which came to dominate the bureaucracy and local politics.[30] These tensions were underlined by the insistence of the Rhenish bourgeoisie upon the maintenance of legal equality between town and country as well as other elements of an administrative order going back to Napoleon. It was precisely the French origins of the Rhenish local administrative system which made it so suspicious in Prussian eyes, especially when the indigenous Roman Catholic bourgeoisie

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Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in die Gegenwart (Hanover, 1994), pp. 273–404, esp. pp. 305–13, pp. 340–6.

[29] J. Retallack, '"Why can't a Saxon be more like a Prussian?" Regional identities and political culture in Germany, 1866–67', in *Canadian Journal of History*, 32 (1997), pp. 28–55, esp. pp. 39–40.

[30] P. Hüttenberger, 'Die Entwicklung zur Großstadt bis zur Jahrhundertwende (1856–1900)', in *Düsseldorf. Geschichte von den Ursprüngen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Band 2: Von der Residenzstadt zur Beamtenstadt (1614–1900)* (Düsseldorf, 1988), esp. pp. 589–608; P. Hüttenberger, 'Vom ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs', in *Düsseldorf. Geschichte von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Band 3: Die Industrie- und Verwaltungsstadt (20. Jahrhundert)* (Düsseldorf, 1989), pp. 82–8; H.-J. Behr, 'Zwischen Vormärz und Reichsgründung', in F.-J. Jakobi, ed., *Geschichte der Stadt Münster. Band 2: Das 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1993), pp. 79–130, esp. p. 82; H. Gründer, '"Krieg bis auf's Messer" – Kirche, Kirchenvolk und Kulturkampf (1872–1887)', in ibid., esp. pp. 133, 147–51; J. Herres, 'Das Preussische Koblenz', in *Geschichte der Stadt Koblenz. Band 2: Von der französischen Stadt bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1993), pp. 49–102. This 'Protestant Prussian' milieu contrasted sharply with the 'indigenous traditional Roman Catholic' milieu in all three towns. However, its implications for local politics as such are only clear in the articles on Münster. It is also discussed, albeit in a more summary manner, in the study on Düsseldorf. Local politics as such are not investigated in the Koblenz history, but given the similar social and denominational circumstances, it seems reasonable to assume that national controversies such as the Cologne church dispute of 1837 had similar politicizing effects for local politics there as they did in Münster. See also T. Mergel, *Zwischen Klasse und Konfession: Katholisches Bürgertum im Rheinland 1794–1914* (Göttingen, 1994), pp. 132–3.

appeared to be so susceptible to revolutionary impulses. In Trier, for instance, the closeness to France and the distance to Berlin encouraged a series of self-conscious political acts of defiance, for instance in support of the 1830 Revolutions in France and Belgium or in protest against the heavy-handedness of the Prussian military.[31] Questions of local autonomy and local government thus crystallized conflicting concepts of local identity and the role of the state, so that the position of towns in the constitutional structure took centre stage in the formation of a liberal worldview, and not just in the Rhineland.[32]

In the kingdom of Hanover, too, confessional and regional allegiances often overlapped. In Osnabrück, for instance, liberal Protestants and Calvinists happy with their previous Westfalian identity found it difficult to support a Guelph dynasty which had shown such blatant disregard for liberal principles with its expulsion of the Göttingen seven. By contrast, the city's Roman Catholic population supported the Hanoverian monarchy, especially following its restoration of the city's see in 1857. Tensions ran so high that during the early 1860s local government was often close to coming to a standstill. After the province's annexation by Prussia, confessional differences continued to underline those of regional identity, though, increasingly, orthodox Lutherans switched their allegiance to the Guelphs, in shared anger with the Roman Catholics against liberal support for the *Kulturkampf*.[33]

If confessional tensions were an important factor underlying the politicization of local government in themselves, their importance was much inflated by the *Kulturkampf*. The political consequences of the conflicts between Roman Catholicism and a liberal, Protestant establishment has found much attention for the state level.[34] Their impact for the local level, however, has been all but hinted at. And yet, political battles sparked off by the *Kulturkampf* often gained an added dimension in the local sphere. In Freiburg, the Badenese *Kulturkampf* became most tangible when the liberals in charge of local government attempted to put into practice the new state regulations for the supervision of schools, the *Schulaufsichtsgesetz* of 1864. In protest, 2,000 Roman Catholics held a rally in support of the church, against the state and the liberal city council.

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[31] Emil Zenz, *Geschichte der Stadt Trier im 19. Jahrhundert*, I (Trier, 1979), pp. 94–104.

[32] For the example of Trier, see ibid., pp. 64–73. Outside the Rhineland: Hahn, *Altständisches Bürgertum*, pp. 355–97. In general, see Karl-Georg Faber, 'Die kommunale Selbstverwaltung in der Rheinprovinz im 19. Jahrhundert', in *Rheinische Vierteljahresblätter*, 30 (1965), pp. 132–51. The fight for self-government as an important catalyst of bourgeois politicization is the main theme in Gisela Mettele, 'Verwalten und Regieren oder Selbstverwalten und Selbstregieren?', in Gall, ed., *Stadt und Bürgertum*, pp. 343–65.

[33] M. John, 'Kultur, Klasse und regionaler Liberalismus in Hannover 1848–1914', in Gall and Langewiesche, eds., *Liberalismus und Region*, pp. 178–83; R. Lembke, *Johannes Miquel und die Stadt Osnabrück unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Jahre 1865–1869* (Osnabrück, 1962), pp. 8–10.

[34] The catalyst for this attention was D. Blackbourn, *Class, religion and local politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London and New Haven, 1980). See also the pioneering L. Gall, 'Die partei- und sozialgeschichtliche Problematik des badischen Kulturkampfs', in A. Schäfer, ed., *Neue Forschungen zu Grundproblemen der badischen Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe, 1973), pp. 93–132.

A few days later, the liberals responded with their own mass rally in support of the separation of church and state, and in opposition to ultramontanism. Interestingly, the local divisions that emerged were not so much about inter-confessional divisions, as the liberal proponents for the new law were mostly Roman Catholics, too. The battle lines in Freiburg affairs were drawn between an ultramontane popular majority and a Roman Catholic, socially more exclusive, liberal minority. Such divisions did not just affect politics inside the city council. In state elections, the city became a bastion of the Catholic People's party from its foundation in 1869 – an interesting example of how local politics could be galvanized by state politics, and in turn add to the political tensions at the state level.[35]

The effects of the *Kulturkampf* were similar in the predominantly Roman Catholic areas of Prussia. In Münster, it prompted the local Centre party to take its opposition to the liberal establishment into local government. The imprisonment of the bishop of Münster in 1875–6, and the local nobility's support of the church, gave the *Kulturkampf* its particular local slant, and resulted in heated debates in the realm of local politics.[36] As in Freiburg, local matters politicized perceptions of state and national affairs. Münster was usually known for its extremely low levels of electoral participation, but the high turnout in the local elections during the *Kulturkampf* triggered off greater participation in state and national elections.[37]

It appears, then, that in the Roman Catholic-dominated towns of the Rhineland and Westfalia, local government was an important agent of politicization in its own right. In these cities, a Centre party victory was all but assured in state and national elections. Consequently, the persistence of the liberals in local government with its highly restrictive franchise was all the more contentious, and a strong incentive for both liberals and Catholics to exploit new avenues for galvanizing electoral support at the local level. This is why in Trier, in which an assured Centre party victory at state and national elections from 1871 yielded moderate levels of interest, there could be astonishing rates of electoral participation at local elections of up to 80 per cent at times when the Centre party decided to challenge National Liberal domination of the local council.[38] From 1848 political Roman Catholicism acquired the erstwhile

[35] G. Blod et al., 'Unruhe im "Pfaffenstädtchen"', Reaktion, "Neue Ära" und Kulturkampf (1850–1870)', in H. Haumann and H. Schadek, eds., *Geschichte der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau. Band 3: Von der badischen Herrschaft bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 135–41. In general, see Gall, 'Problematik', pp. 104–11.

[36] U. Olliges-Wieczorek, *Politisches Leben in Münster – Parteien und Vereine im Kaiserreich (1871–1914)* (Münster, 1995); Gründer, '"Krieg bis auf's Messer"', esp. p. 131.

[37] Electoral participation rose from 8 per cent in the third class in 1870 to 43·5 per cent in 1872, to 52 per cent in 1874, and to 67·5 per cent in 1876. In 1874, 80 per cent of the electorate in the first and second class participated in the local elections. By contrast, electoral participation in national elections moved from 19·9 per cent in 1871 to 58·2 per cent in 1874, to 53·0 per cent in 1876. Olliges-Wieczorek, *Politisches Leben in Münster*, pp. 31–5, 324–30.

[38] E. Zenz, *Die kommunale Selbstverwaltung der Stadt Trier 1814–1959* (Trier, 1959), pp. 59–61; E. Zenz, *Geschichte der Stadt Trier im 19. Jahrhundert* (Trier, 1979), pp. 107–33. Cf. the rates of

liberal mantle with its popular demands for an extension of the urban franchise and an increase in local self-government, whereas liberals emphasized with obstinate ferocity the exclusive nature of local government.[39] It was no accident that in Düsseldorf, the liberals set up a permanent election bureau in the mid-1870s initially not with national, but with local elections in mind.[40]

Even without the galvanizing factors of denominational conflict and territorial change, there was a close connection between politics at the local and at the state levels. Recent work suggests that politics in Württemberg and Baden were as unusually pronounced in local affairs as in state and national matters. In Ulm and most other Württemberg towns, one of the major issues of controversy and agents of politicization was the practice of lifelong tenure of local office (*Gemeinderäte*).[41] Given public perceptions of the corruption, arbitrariness, and favouritism of local officials, this debate about the principle of public accountability of government became an extremely emotive political issue, both in local and in state politics. Raimund Waibel's penetrating and subtle analysis of Stuttgart politics before 1866 has shown how in the Württemberg capital local government became politicized chiefly on this issue from the 1830s.[42] Eventually, the formation of a liberal bourgeoisie opposed to the local and state authorities led in turn to the organization of a coalition of 'traditionalists' (e.g. artisans and winegrowers) and pro-establishment conservatives.[43]

For Baden, Paul Nolte has coined the term of *Gemeindeliberalismus* to describe a particular form of liberal politics which evolved in the towns and communities during the 1830s and 1840s.[44] Liberal community politics in Baden arose from the state's successful efforts to form a sense of bourgeois unity and cohesion around its new political institutions. This was so successful that in both states the pioneering constitutional framework whose protection the *Bürgertum* enjoyed, coupled with the granting of a local government ordinance (*Gemeindeordnung*), enabled the creation of a political consciousness at the local level. In Württemberg, liberals and democrats in the towns were encouraged by

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electoral participation at Prussian state elections in T. Kühne, *Handbuch der Wahlen zum preussischen Abgeordnetenhaus 1867–1918* (Düsseldorf, 1994), p. 778.

[39] Faber, 'Die kommunale Selbstverwaltung', p. 147. For the example of Trier, see Zenz, *Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 62–5.

[40] N. Schlossmacher, *Düsseldorf im Bismarckreich: Politik und Wahlen, Parteien und Vereine* (Düsseldorf, 1985), p. 90. Pohl, 'Überlegungen', pp. 69–70.

[41] For Stuttgart and Württemberg in general, see Waibel, *Frühliberalismus*, pp. 79–107. For the example of Ulm, see H. E. Specker, ed., *Ulm im 19. Jahrhundert: Aspekte aus dem Leben der Stadt* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 292–300.

[42] Within Württemberg, Stuttgart was no exception in the formation of opposite local political camps. R. Waibel, *Frühliberalismus und Gemeindewahlen in Württemberg (1817–1855): das Beispiel Stuttgart* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 14–5.   [43] Waibel, *Frühliberalismus*, pp. 274–358.

[44] P. Nolte, *Gemeindebürgertum und Liberalismus in Baden 1800–1850* (Göttingen, 1994); P. Nolte, 'Gemeindeliberalismus. Zur Entstehung und sozialen Verankerung der liberalen Partei in Baden 1831–1855', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 252 (1991), pp. 57–93.

Germany's most generous local franchise (in operation 1822–85),[45] while in Baden the introduction of the *Gemeindeordnung* 1831 and the subsequent local elections of 1832–3 had a similarly galvanizing effect on the conduct of local affairs.[46]

It is important to be careful about drawing a straight line between politics before 1848 and after. Both Paul Nolte and Lothar Gall argue that in the 1860s, a new type of democrat and liberal politics emerged which had some continuities with pre-Revolution politics, but which pursued largely a new agenda.[47] Still, in Württemberg, politics had become sufficiently established in local government for it to persist in the face of state repression during the 1850s.[48] And in Baden, politics in local government was no longer a principle waiting to be established when liberals took the initiative in local politics from 1860 in Freiburg, Mannheim, and Constance.[49]

The interconnectedness between local and state politics appears to be confirmed by the evolution of local politics in an area with totally different economic and political traditions, east Elbian Prussia. At this time, in Prussia's east Elbian cities there was little confessional conflict, and territorial change was also absent as a factor of politicization.[50] Yet in the run-up to the 1848 Revolution, and during the constitutional crisis of 1862–6, Prussia's major cities developed into centres of left-liberal opposition to the conservative regime. Despite the paucity of the evidence available, it is likely that in the majority of these cities, the formation of liberal demands against the state had repercussions for local government, too. Given the liberals' powerlessness at the state level, the local councils could become major forums for liberal debate. Notwithstanding the difficulties of pursuing liberalism at the local level before 1848,[51] at least after the Revolution the Berlin city council became a major left-liberal stronghold and an example to liberals in local government elsewhere.[52]

[45] For a detailed analysis of the operation of the franchise, see Waibel, *Frühliberalismus*, pp. 53–78.　　　　　　　　[46] Nolte, *Gemeindebürgertum*, pp. 103–14.

[47] L. Gall, *Der Liberalismus als regierende Partei: das Grossherzogtum Baden zwischen Restauration und Reichsgründung* (Wiesbaden, 1968). Nolte, *Gemeindebürgertum*, pp. 415–31.

[48] Specker, ed., *Ulm*, p. 300; Waibel, *Frühliberalismus*, pp. 445–54.

[49] L. Gall, *Bürgertum in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1989), pp. 365–73; Blod et al., 'Unruhe im "Pfaffenstädtchen". pp. 130–64; G. Zang, ed., *Provinzialisierung einer Region: Regionale Unterentwicklung und liberale Politik in der Stadt und im Kreis Konstanz im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1978).

[50] Only towards 1900 did national and religious conflict increase in east Elbia, whereupon the cities assumed a critical role. Ruled by the Protestant German bourgeoisie, the cities were often regarded as social, cultural, and economic 'bastions' in an increasingly hostile Roman Catholic, Polish environment.

[51] J. Knudsen, 'The limits of liberal politics in Berlin, 1815–48', in K. H. Jarausch and L. E. Jones, eds., *In search of a liberal Germany: studies in the history of German liberalism from 1789 to the present* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 111–31.

[52] In particular, the city council formed an important stronghold from whence leading left liberals such as Virchow and Mommsen created the German Progressive party in 1861. G. Richter, 'Zwischen Revolution und Reichsgründung (1848–1870)', in W. Ribbe, ed., *Geschichte Berlins. 2. Band: von der Märzrevolution bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1988), pp. 678–8; M. Erbe, 'Berlin im

Berlin retained this model function throughout the duration of the Empire, not least because early SPD advances in the third class of the franchise forced Berlin liberals to articulate and realize their policies with model sophistication and aggressiveness. Given the proximity of the capital's city council and the state authorities, Berlin also became a laboratory for a liberal evaluation of the value of local self-government vis-à-vis the state. The most prominent academic liberal on self-government, Rudolf Gneist, started his political career in the Berlin city council in 1845.[53] His work as a member of the city council, and his subsequent position as a member of the Prussian House of Deputies (1859–62, 1862–93), gave him invaluable experience and motivation to write his classic liberal expositions on local self-government from the 1850s onwards.[54] Towards the end of the century, activity in the city council proved a similar complement to Hugo Preuß's composition of the major left-liberal critique of Gneist's work. A few years after the publication of his first major work on the relationship between local government and the state, Preuß entered the Berlin city council in 1896. Subsequently, this experience provided the basis for his prolific political and academic activities.[55] Berlin was clearly exceptional, but in Breslau, too, local politics became dominated by left liberalism from 1861. Although the main emphasis of left-liberal activity appears to have been on state politics, in the 1860s and 1870s liberals co-operated in local affairs to dominate this sphere of politics.[56] In similar vein, it is highly probable that the strong left liberalism which developed in Königsberg did not stop outside the city hall.[57]

Kaiserreich (1871–1918)', ibid., pp. 759–63. Particularly in the 1870s, Frankfurt left liberals frequently pointed to Berlin as a model of the ways in which left-liberal politics could be conducted. See, for example, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 22 Nov. 1872 (1. Blatt).

[53] E. J. Hahn, 'Rudolf von Gneist (1816–1895). The political ideas and political activity of a Prussian liberal in the Bismarck period', (D.Phil. thesis, Yale, 1971), here p. 21.

[54] In addition to Hahn, 'Rudolf von Gneist', see also G. A. Pope, 'The political ideas of Lorenz Stein and their influence on Rudolf Gneist and Gustav Schmoller' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1987). Among his central works are R. Gneist, *Selfgovernment: Communalverfassung und Verwaltungsgerichte in England* (3rd edn, Berlin, 1871); R. Gneist, *Geschichte und heutige Gestalt der englischen Communalverfassung oder des Selfgovernment* (Berlin, 1863); R. Gneist, *Verwaltung, Justiz, Rechtsweg: Staatsverwaltung und Selbstverwaltung nach englischen und deutschen Verhältnissen mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Verwaltungsreformen und Kreis-Ordnungen in Preußen* (Berlin, 1869).

[55] H. Preuß, *Gemeinde, Staat, Reich als Gebietskörperschaften: Versuch einer deutschen Staatskonstruktion auf Grundlage der Genossenschaftstheorie* (Berlin, 1889; repr., Aalen, 1964). In general, see S. Grassmann, *Hugo Preuß und die deutsche Selbstverwaltung* (Lübeck and Hamburg, 1965), here pp. 6–12.

[56] M. Hettling, 'Von der Hochburg zur Wagenburg. Liberalismus in Breslau von den 1860er Jahren bis 1918', in Gall and Langewiesche, eds., *Liberalismus und Region*, pp. 253–76.

[57] It is difficult to gain an impression of the importance of politics in local government from F. Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg in Preussen. 2. Band: Von der Königskrönung bis zum Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Cologne and Graz, 1968), pp. 507–55, 562–9. In early 1868, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* tried hard to convince a sceptical audience that elections to the *Magistrat* were, in fact, political, since the *Magistrat* needed political astuteness in its dealings with the state authorities. As examples where the *Magistrat* had already been chosen on such political grounds, the newspaper

All the individual cases which have been outlined thus far were, in their own ways, exceptional. The precise manner in which local government became politicized was a highly complex and individual process, as will be shown below for the case of Frankfurt. Yet taken together, these 'exceptional' cases clearly challenge the assumed 'normality' of the unpolitical conduct of local government before 1900. For instance, given the mounting evidence for the spread of politics in the Rhineland communities before that time, it would be tempting to turn the tables on the more traditional studies of urban history and query the extent to which two of the showcases for notable, unpolitical city government before 1900, Elberfeld and Barmen, were 'typical'. After all, these were the two Protestant enclaves in an otherwise predominantly Roman Catholic governmental district of Düsseldorf.

The sheer number and diversity of towns whose public affairs had become politicized by the 1870s suggest that politics in local government had become widespread and common in the decade of the Empire's foundation. In the light of this, it is highly doubtful whether it is justified to regard the politicization of public affairs at the national, state, and local levels as such different and unrelated phenomena. If it was during the 1848 Revolution that a 'national' political system first emerged through the formation of broad labour, liberal, conservative, and Roman Catholic movements,[58] it is questionable whether local affairs could have been completely isolated from this; after all, this was essentially an 'urban' revolution.[59] Moreover, clashes in, and changes of, territorial identity were often most pronounced in the localities, where people of different cultural backgrounds and mentalities lived in close proximity. As we have seen, this also applies to the politicizing effects of confessional disputes. While the laws and ordinances of the *Kulturkampf* were passed at the state level, it was its implementation at the local level which gave the conflict its greatest impact. If the locality was the prism through which state and national politics were reflected at the popular level,[60] it is difficult to believe that local affairs themselves remained unaffected by this process.

In the absence of detailed monographs on the evolution of liberal politics in local government, the above survey has been confined to an evaluation of the recent surge in 'official' local histories (usually sponsored by the relevant town

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singled out the cities of Berlin, Cologne, Königsberg, and Breslau. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 19 Jan. 1868 (1. Blatt).

[58] D. Langewiesche, 'Die Anfänge der deutschen Parteien. Partei, Fraktion und Verein in der Revolution von 1848/49', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 4 (1978), pp. 324–61.

[59] D. Langewiesche, 'Frühliberalismus und Bürgertum 1815–1849', in L. Gall, ed., *Bürgertum und bürgerlich-liberale Bewegung in Mitteleuropa* (Munich, 1997), pp. 90–3, 116–20.

[60] P. Steinbach, 'Politisierung und Nationalisierung der Region im 19. Jahrhundert. Regional-spezifische Politikrezeption im Spiegel historischer Wahlforschung', in P. Steinbach, ed., *Probleme politischer Partizipation im Modernisierungsprozeß* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 321–49; P. Steinbach, *Die Politisierung der Region: Reichs- und Landtagswahlen im Fürstentum Lippe 1866–1881* (Passau, 1989), esp. pp. 972–3.

councils), works on urban society, studies on local politics before the Empire, and surveys on other, non-liberal urban political movements. To provide a more detailed example of the way in which local government could become politicized in the period of the foundation of the Empire, the remainder of this article will discuss one example in greater depth, the emergence of liberalism in local government in Frankfurt am Main.[61]

I I

Even though it was the seat of the National Assembly, around 1848 the Free City of Frankfurt was not a centre of unusual liberal or democrat activity, in marked contrast to the neighbouring towns of Gießen and Darmstadt.[62] The 1847 elections to the Frankfurt city diet were won by conservative candidates. After the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution, Frankfurt citizens were the last in the area to demand comprehensive political rights.[63] Eventually, politics became radicalized by the September uprisings,[64] whereupon the democrats became the city's strongest political force. After the failure of the Revolution, the democrats retreated from all political activity until 1856. It is from this point only that Frankfurt life became marked by the introduction of widespread and lasting reform, culminating in 1864 with the complete emancipation of Jews, and the introduction of freedom of trade. Yet innovations such as these simply imitated similar legislation in other southern and western German states, and in that sense reflected the economic and social realities of the post-revolutionary era.[65] As far as its results are concerned, it is difficult to see Frankfurt domestic politics as an outstanding example of liberal and democrat political activity.[66]

Even if Frankfurt was not peculiarly progressive, it is nevertheless the case that from the late 1850s public affairs had become much more political. Whereas before, candidates had been elected on an individual basis, from the 1850s a candidate only stood a realistic chance of being voted into the electoral college if his name appeared on a nomination list. Moreover, upon their entry into the political fray in 1856, the democrats broke all precedent by instructing

[61] The following discussion of Frankfurt liberalism includes liberals as well as democrats. The democrats are treated as liberals in the broadest sense because they regarded themselves as belonging to the 'liberal' ('freiheitlich') movement. Against the National Liberals, the Democrats also argued repeatedly that they alone represented liberalism in its 'true', undiluted form.
[62] M. Wettengel, *Die Revolution von 1848/1849 im Rhein-Main Raum: Politische Vereine und Revolutionsalltag im Großherzogtum Hessen, Herzogtum Nassau und in der Freien Stadt Frankfurt* (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 195–212.
[63] Wetengel, *Revolution*, pp. 50–62; Roth, *Stadt und Bürgertum*, p. 418.
[64] T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich, 1983), pp. 633–4.
[65] H.-U. Wehler, 'Die Geburtsstunde des deutschen Kleinbürgertums', in H.-J. Puhle, eds., *Bürger in der Gesellschaft der Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1991), pp. 199–209, esp. pp. 203–5.
[66] This is opposed to the line taken by Roth, who insists that Frankfurt followed 'a peculiar path' to modernity. Roth, *Stadt und Bürgertum*, passim.

their followers in the electoral college to vote *en bloc* for approved candidates to the legislative assembly. Democrats also contributed to the politicization of local affairs through the staging of a large 'popular' gathering before each election, to discuss local politics and to voice public concerns. In practice, this was a meeting of supporters whose main function was to sanction the actions of the democrat elite,[67] but it nevertheless introduced a notion of public accountability that was quite new.[68] In this way, from 1857 the democrats managed to gain control over the legislative assembly. Support by the democrat establishment had become the sine qua non for being elected into the electoral college and then on to the legislative assembly. Local affairs also accumulated in significance as democrats and liberals increasingly realized their powerlessness at national level. The active newspaper press encouraged the city's political groups to focus their attention on domestic issues, while the newspapers' own increasing coverage of local affairs spurred public interest even further.[69] In response, electoral participation reached new heights. With the exception of 1848, from 1816 to 1855 it typically varied between 15 per cent and 20 per cent. In the period 1856–66, average political participation was closer to 25 per cent, with the rate being above an unprecedented 30 per cent in four elections during the period.[70]

Local affairs in Frankfurt, then, gained an important political dimension before 1866. And yet, the advent of politics in local affairs was neither exceptional nor pervasive. One would expect local politics to gain greater attention in the independent Free City of Frankfurt than elsewhere, because the city government effectively combined authority over city and state matters. Despite this, political participation reached similar levels to that of towns which, if anything, have been considered examples for the unimportance of politics at the local level, such as Barmen and Dortmund.[71]

The decade before the city's annexation by Prussia saw not only all-time highs in electoral participation, but also all-time lows as in 1865, when a paltry 6·3 per cent took part in the local elections.[72] Plebiscites saw similar fluctuations in turnout. In 1855, one third of the electorate voted on a controversial

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[67] *Volksfreund*, 23 Oct. 1863.

[68] The view that these meetings encouraged popular political participation is expressed in *Frankfurter Reform*, 11 Oct. 1865. *Frankfurter Reform*, 8 Oct. 1865.

[69] In 1851, the *Frankfurter Volksbote* gave up reporting on national events because these were beyond the control of the bourgeoisie anyway. Thereafter, it concentrated on local affairs. *Frankfurter Volksbote*, 31 Dec. 1856. See also *Frankfurter Volksbote*, 16 Nov. 1856.

[70] U. Bartelsheim, 'Die Politisierung und Demokratisierung der kommunalen Selbstverwaltung. Kommunalpolitik in Frankfurt am Main 1850–1900' (D.Phil. thesis, Frankfurt, 1995), p. 373 (Table 1).

[71] In Dortmund, electoral participation rose from 17 per cent in 1851 to 25·7 per cent in 1859, and to as much as 42 per cent in 1863. In Barmen, over 50 per cent of the electorate voted in 1863. In Frankfurt, participation never reached 40 per cent or more. If Schambach, then, comes to the conclusion that participation levels in Dortmund before 1870 were low, they were still higher than those of Frankfurt. Schambach, *Stadtbürgertum*, pp. 327–30.

[72] Bartelsheim, 'Politisierung', p. 373 (Table 1).

constitutional change involving far-reaching administrative reforms. By contrast, only one eighth of citizens voted on the partial emancipation of Jews in 1853,[73] and less than 9 per cent of voters bothered to turn up to the vote on the full emancipation of Jews in 1864.[74] Political activity was limited to the run-up to elections and to certain plebiscites on constitutional change, but even then it clearly failed to galvanize the population with any degree of consistency. Politics, such as it was, existed in a state of flux.

This transience is further highlighted by the fact that there were no permanent political organizations. In early 1866, democrats eventually founded a political organization, the *Frankfurter Verein*, but since democrats were unwilling to let themselves be pinned down on particular issues,[75] the association's statutes remained without any specific policy commitments.[76] In the absence of permanent political organizations, the bourgeois clubs continued to serve as the main meeting place for politically like-minded citizens.

Before 1866, an ad hoc political leadership was complemented by an electorate which could be mobilized by specific issues, but whose commitment to public affairs was still only sporadic. Frankfurt citizens had become politicized in the sense of becoming open to political debate. At the same time, they were not yet 'political' in the Weberian sense of mass participation in public life. Nor, indeed, did Frankfurt citizens have anything other than extremely vague and fluctuating political ideas, be it about German unification at large, or be it about 'liberal' (*freiheitlich*) progress in local affairs.

The tenuous nature of the democrat hold on local affairs is evident from the events following Frankfurt's invasion by Prussian troops in June 1866, and its subsequent annexation. For the following year, conservative candidates operating on the basis of the new status quo were remarkably successful. On 12 February 1867 the conservative Carl Meyer von Rothschild was elected the city's representative to the diet of the North German Confederation with over 90 per cent of the vote. Perhaps even more surprising is the high degree of participation in this election, which at around 35 per cent[77] was double the statewide average for the 1867 elections.[78] Similarly, in the city council elections of July 1867, around 30 per cent of eligible voters turned up to elect

[73] Ibid., pp. 32, 34.

[74] 920 out of an electorate of almost 11,000. *Frankfurter Reform*, 5 Oct. 1864.

[75] This applies even to the democrats' main battlecry of the time, the abolition of life tenure for senators. *Frankfurter Reform*, 20 Dec. 1865.

[76] Paragraph 1 of the statutes committed the members to work for a democratic and liberal ('freiheitlich') development mainly of local affairs. Apart form this, the statutes were concerned with regulations on membership. *Frankfurter Reform*, 10 Oct. 1866.

[77] W.-A. Kropat, *Frankfurt zwischen Provinzialismus und Nationalismus: die Eingliederung der 'Freien Stadt' in den preußischen Staat (1866–71)* (Frankfurt, 1971), pp. 38–9. 7,368 votes were cast, out of about 20,000 eligible voters – the latter figure is an estimate made on the assumption that the number of people eligible for the vote would be roughly proportional to the total population, which remained static from 1867 to 1871. In 1871, 20,151 were eligible to vote. Wolf, *Liberalismus*, p. 175.

[78] G. A. Ritter, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch: Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreichs 1871–1918* (Munich, 1980), pp. 142–3.

a city council in which left liberals in particular turned out to be noticeably absent.

The instability of the local political environment was underlined by the political confusion among the city's former political elite. While most democrats were appalled at the way in which the city was being treated by its Prussian occupiers, some were happy to accept the new political situation. Perhaps the most influential young democrat before 1866, Friedrich Ernst Passavant, who had led the fight for the introduction of freedom of trade, was happy to accept Frankfurt's new territorial condition. In spite of this, Passavant was put up by the opposing, anti-annexation camp as its candidate in the elections to the North German parliament.[79] The left liberals' disorientation about the support they could count on reached such depths that even the otherwise astute *Frankfurter Zeitung* was unable to determine with any precision the political allegiance of the first town council.[80]

The political ineptness of the left-liberal elite and the success of the conservatives is completely at odds with the general mood prevailing in the city. As Frankfurt was treated very badly by the Prussian troops during the period of its occupation,[81] public resentment against Prussia ran high. At the official ceremony marking the city's annexation, Frankfurters of all political persuasions – with one exception – refused to join in the toast to their new king.[82] In April 1868, the *Polizeipräsident* in Wiesbaden still complained that Frankfurt's high society persisted in its 'grumbling' against the Prussian administration. The Prussians living in the city were isolated socially, and were not admitted into the prominent bourgeois associations. Resentment was not limited to the upper echelons of Frankfurt society. It extended to the popular level, as expressed by numerous, 'almost childish' (*fast kindischen*) anti-Prussian demonstrations whenever the opportunity arose.[83] On the anniversary of the death of Robert Blum, the martyr of the 1848 Revolution shot in the streets of Vienna, the Prussians woke up to discover a large black flag waving from the top of the *Pfarrkirche* in the centre of the town, which the Prussian military

[79] Passavant soon became a member of the *Magistrat* and entered the local National Liberal Association upon its foundation in 1873. Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Frankfurt (IfSG) S2/3066; R. Jung, 'Dr. Ernst Passavant', in *Alt-Frankfurt*, 1 (1909), pp. 125–8; N. M. Hope, *The alternative to German unification: the anti-Prussian party: Frankfurt, Nassau, and the two Hessen 1859–1867* (Wiesbaden, 1973), pp. 33–4; Bartelsheim, 'Politisierung', p. 118.

[80] '…as a result of last year's events, the various liberal parties have changed so much in character that it is virtually impossible to classify people [i.e. candidates] according to their previous party label'. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 18 June 1867 (2. Blatt). *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 29 Sept. 1867 (1. Blatt).

[81] See the account of the events of 15 to 21 July 1866 in IfSG S3/A 4.770. The Prussian Annexation of Frankfurt in 1866: Chronicles.   [82] Kropat, *Frankfurt*, p. 23.

[83] Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden (HStAW) 405 n. 40 fos. 47–52; *Zeitungsberichte*, January to March 1868. This is but one example of the police president's appreciation of the general aversion felt by the citizens to Prussian rule. In fact, it was the main theme of virtually all his quarterly reports until 1869. See, for example, the following reports of that year, HStAW 405 n. 40 fos. 75–7 and fos. 112–14; *Zeitungsberichte*, 18 May 1868 and 28 Nov. 1868. On this subject, see also Kropat, *Frankfurt*, pp. 46–9.

struggled for several hours to remove.[84] Beyond pathos, resistance was articulated effectively though humour. Anger at the Prussian confiscation of Frankfurt property was expressed in a satire of the Lord's prayer:

> Our William, who art in Berlin
> Perished be Thy Name
> Thy kingdom become a Republic
> Thy will never be done
> Thou willst not give us this day our daily bread, anyway
> Pay what thou owest us as we had to pay what we owed thee
> And lead us not into Bismarckian Politics
> But deliver us from the evil of Thy magnificence
> For Thine is neither the Power nor the Spirit nor the Glory
> Away with Thee for ever and ever
> Amen[85]

The fact that this widespread and popular resentment was not politicized immediately speaks volumes for the total inadequacy for the new conditions of the way local affairs had been conducted by the pre-1866 democrat elite. Before 1866, this elite had been uninterested in responding to sustained public sentiments. Clearly, it required a new style of politics with a new leadership to express and politicize the popular resentment of 1866.

The gap left by the absence of an effective political opposition was soon filled by an active democrat newspaper press. So effective was its opposition that the authorities sometimes considered it almost solely responsible for the persistence of Frankfurters in their hostility towards Prussia.[86] The newspapers themselves did everything to encourage this impression, and developed a self-under-standing as a guardian of the city's interests. After the elections to the first *Magistrat* in 1867, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* declared that now that left liberals were effectively in a minority in both the *Magistrat* and the city council, it would continue to feel obliged to subject both chambers to public scrutiny.[87] In this capacity, the newspaper published a detailed list before the second elections to the city council showing how many times each member had been absent in the previous forty-two sessions, lest the most notorious absentees be re-elected.[88]

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[84] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 10 Nov. 1868 (1. Blatt); *Frankfurter Journal*, 9 Nov. 1868.

[85] 'Heiliger Wilhelm, der Du bist in Berlin, / Vertilgt werde Dein Namen auf Erden. / Dein Reich werde eine Republik / Dein Wille geschehe Nimmer mehr / Unser täglich Brod gibst Du uns doch nicht / Bezahle unsere Schulden wie wir die Deinigen bezahlen mußten / Führ uns nicht in die Bismarcksche Politik / Sondern erlöse uns von dem Übel Deiner Herrlichkeit. / Denn Du hast weder Kraft noch Saft noch Herrlichkeit / Fort mit Dir in Ewigkeit. / Amen'. IfSG S1/11.4. This is only one of several versions of this satire which have survived, many of which can be found in IfSG S3/A4769.   [86] HStAW 405 n. 1065 fo. 14; *Zeitungsbericht*, 28 Feb. 1869.

[87] 'We have done our duty before the elections, and, now that the new *Magistrat* has been chosen, we will exercise our due journalistic control on both councils firmly and rigorously.' *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 21 Jan. 1868.

[88] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 31 Oct. 1868. In principle, the *Frankfurter Journal* agreed. *Frankfurter Journal*, 19 Nov. 1868 (1. Beilage).

Frankfurt's left-liberal newspapers became the principal motors behind the foundation of the *Demokratischer Wahlverein*, the Democrat Electoral Association, in February 1868.[89] Initially, membership was limited to a small elite owing to its high membership fee of two guilders per year, but the *Frankfurter Zeitung* encouraged at the same time the foundation of popular ward assemblies. These were designed to be regular meetings for citizens of each electoral ward to discuss local affairs. Ostensibly, they were founded as 'unpolitical' organizations. Yet their permanence, openness, and frequency were a clear challenge to the pre-1866 political establishment. Indeed, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* openly declared that the ward assemblies were to introduce a politics 'from below'.[90] They were to take away the power from the old 'cliques' to nominate and control the nominees for the local parliament, and serve as a school for municipal government in the same way that municipal government was a school for state politics.[91] In this way, by 1869 the new Democrats had gained complete control of the ward assemblies which thus functioned as their rather effective popular organization.

Before 1866, the democrat political leadership consisted not so much of one individual, but of a group of people, most of them from long-established local backgrounds. By 1869, the new Democrat leadership was dominated by the editors and sub-editors of the three main democrat newspapers, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the *Frankfurter Beobachter*, and the *Frankfurter Journal*. Increasingly, however, one person came to dominate and lead this group, Leopold Sonnemann. Sonnemann was of Jewish faith, and had arrived in Frankfurt only in the wake of the 1848 Revolution. He was clearly not part of the democrat leadership before 1866, and his active interest in workers' issues did little to improve his standing among the city's 'high society'.[92] Yet after 1866, his influence grew in proportion to that of his newspaper, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, whose circulation increased from 3,100 copies in 1866 to 8,500 in 1867.[93] In 1867, he still failed even to get nominated for the city council elections. The following year, he chaired the relevant ward meeting himself and was duly nominated and then elected to the city council. In 1871, Sonnemann was nominated by the Democrats as their candidate to the Reichstag. Within five years, Sonnemann and his newspaper had become the principal representatives of Frankfurt Democrats. It is not that Sonnemann had become all-powerful amongst Democrats, but he did acquire an importance which no single person had had before 1866.

[89] For an introduction to the *Democratischer Wahlverein*, see Wolf, *Liberalismus*, pp. 21–5.

[90] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 18 June 1867 (2. Blatt). See also *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 30 June 1867 (1. Blatt).

[91] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 8 July 1867 (1. Blatt).

[92] In 1864, for example, it was J. A. Hammeran, editor of the rival newspaper *Frankfurter Journal*, not Sonnemann, who was among the twenty-nine signatories of the democrats' call for the annual electoral meeting. *Frankfurter Reform*, 7 Oct. 1864, p. 473. See also *Frankfurter Reform*, 8 Oct. 1865.

[93] H. Heenemann, 'Die Auflaghenhöhe der deutschen Zeitungen. Ihre Entwicklungen und ihre Probleme' (D.Phil. thesis, Berlin, 1929), p. 49.

Access to the newspaper press and to a popular political organization enabled Frankfurt left liberals to politicize the general resentment against Prussia quickly and effectively. A hostile rhetoric was created which contrasted Frankfurt 'right' to Prussian 'wrong'. Frankfurt citizens were presented as upright, proud, and humorous, who were now subjected to Prussian militarism and barbarism. Moreover, since the German emperors had been crowned in the former imperial city of Frankfurt, the historical destiny of Frankfurt was equated with that of Germany as a whole. To the city's new-found historical importance was added a democratic twist. As the National Assembly had taken place in Frankfurt, the 1848 Revolution now placed the city at the heart of a democratic tradition going back to the Hambach Festival of 1832. Frankfurt's subjection had thus destroyed the historical legitimacy and the democratic hopes for a united Germany. Frankfurt's sufferings were those of a free Germany, and vice versa.[94] In local matters, a tradition was created whereby Frankfurt had been blessed with its schools, admired for its independent judiciary, and generally imbued with liberalism.[95] Of course, this was a complete fabrication. As shown above, Frankfurt did not have a particularly strong liberal or democrat tradition. Moreover, the quality of its public schools had been appalling, its churches poorly organized, and its judicial system was generally acknowledged to have required urgent reforms.[96] Its conservative Senate had been the target of democrat attacks throughout.

Apart from the conventional democrat newspapers, a particularly effective vehicle for communicating this new image of Frankfurt was the *Frankfurter Latern*, a satirical newspaper edited by the veteran local poet, Friedrich Stoltze. In this Frankfurt version of the *Simplicissimus*, Stoltze published caricatures, poems, and articles, significantly many of them written in local dialect. There could be no better way of translating this new image into local folklore, and Leopold Sonnemann, for one, was quick to appreciate this. His regular financial contributions kept the *Frankfurter Latern* afloat, and many of his editors wrote (anonymously) for the newspaper.[97]

The new rhetoric to politicize popular resentment was also employed in petitions, and at popular gatherings, often organized by the Democrats. One case in point was the Democrat exploits from the negotiations between local representatives and the Prussian state about the transfer of state assets from the

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[94] See the outcry by the Democrat Eduard Fay, who wanted nothing but the destruction of the 'brutal yoke of Prussiandom', which was the 'curse' for Frankfurt and for Germany as a whole. IfSG S1/11. See also the democrat commemoration of Robert Blum's death. The martyr for a democratic Germany was simply adopted as a martyr for a democratic Frankfurt. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 13 Nov. 1868 (2. Blatt). For a fuller discussion of this rhetoric, see J. Palmowski, *Urban Liberalism in Imperial Germany: Frankfurt am Main, 1866–1914* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 56–64.

[95] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 16 July 1867 (1. Blatt).

[96] This was, on a rare occasion, even admitted by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 25 Nov. 1866 (1. Blatt).

[97] P. Alexandre, '"Die Frankfurter Latern". Une Publication Satirique editée par Friedrich Stoltze' (Ph.D. thesis, Metz, 1980), pp. 48–50. C. Funck, *Lebenserinnerungen: Mit einer Einführung von Ludwig Heilbronn* (Frankfurt, 1921), pp. 53–4.

former Free City to Prussia. Even though the deal that was finally struck was the best that the representatives of the city authorities could have bargained for, Democrats continued in their relentless criticism of both the Prussians and the local representatives. To Democrats, any compromise was a betrayal of Frankfurt's righteousness.[98] The Democrat rhetoric of principled resistence was, of course, completely unrealistic in practice. But then, it was not meant to be practical. The Democrats' vociferous opposition was designed to stir up and appeal to the public mood, and in this aim, they were extremely successful. For instance, the gatherings in which Democrats rejected the settlement drew each an audience of more than 1,000 people. In this way the Democrats managed to politicize the Frankfurt population to unprecedented levels.

What is most astonishing is that the Democrat rhetoric survived the enthusiasm surrounding the Franco-Prussian War, and the consequent unification of Germany. Unsurprisingly, the explicitly anti-Prussian elements of this rhetoric disappeared rather quickly during the 1870s. What remained was the emphasis on Frankfurt liberal traditions. Elections at the local, state, or national levels became statements of Frankfurt's identity and its 'special' character.[99] To be a good Frankfurter, one had to vote Democrat. Voting Democrat became an act of civic pride.

The Democrats' efforts at organization, the creation of a popular, political rhetoric, and the politicization of the electorate clearly paid off. After the first local elections which they contested in 1868, the Democrats provided twelve out of fifty-four town council members. Thereafter, they went from strength to strength until in 1876 they possessed an overall majority in the town council. Meanwhile, in the national elections of 1871, Sonnemann secured a narrow victory over the conservative von Rothschild.[100] Sonnemann had thus become the only representative of the German People's party in the first German Reichstag. These successes convinced even the last old-style Democrats who had tried to resist the new, popular way of conducting politics, to join the 'new' Democrats. As a result, in 1873 the *Demokratischer Wahlverein* was re-founded as the *Demokratischer Verein* (Democratic Association), which continued to set the agenda for liberal politics in Frankfurt until 1918. In reaction to the Democrat superiority, a Frankfurt branch of the National Liberal party was founded in 1873. Finally, after a dismal performance in the 1874 national elections, in which their candidate polled a meagre 275 votes, the Progressives followed suit and founded a local Progressive Liberal Association.

By 1874, a political framework had been created which formed the basis of public affairs in the city until 1900, and in many ways until 1918. Political life flourished throughout the year, and through newspaper reports and regular public party meetings it remained in the public eye. The Democratic

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[98] See, for instance, the *Frankfurter Journal*, 18 Feb. 1869; *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 14 Nov. 1868 (2. Blatt).

[99] See M. Reinganum's speech in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 24 Nov. 1874 (Abendblatt).

[100] In the 1871 run-off elections, Sonnemann received 3,758 votes against 3,679 for his rival.

Association held public meetings, attended by between 50 and 150 people (1879), at one- to two-week intervals from early autumn to late spring.[101] They were forums for debate on any subject relating to local, state, or national politics. Yet they were also regarded by many members at the grass roots as meetings to which Democrat representatives were accountable. The most popular gatherings were always those in which a Democrat member of the Reichstag or the Prussian Chamber of Deputies gave their half-yearly report. These would draw an audience of between 200 and 300 people.[102] In the sphere of local politics, Democrat councillors took little notice of these meetings, but this disregard for the grass roots was much resented. In the words of one Democrat member, councillors clearly 'considered themselves above participating in the meetings of those who had made them to what they were'.[103]

The Progressive Association tried to respond to the Democrat flurry of activity by holding monthly meetings of its own,[104] but the relative lack of interest betrayed by low attendance figures of between twenty and forty people forced these meetings to be held at much greater intervals in practice. In 1878, the National Liberals, too, tried to hold regular speaker meetings and discussions, but again these attempts were frustrated by the lack of interest among the rank and file. Still, these efforts show that the leadership of the Progressives and of that archetypal of notable parties, the National Liberals, tried very hard to copy the Democrats' organizational efforts. Both parties were similarly concerned about the importance of cultivating popular opinion. The Progressives were painfully aware that their greatest weakness was the absence of an affiliated newspaper in Frankfurt.[105] Efforts at supporting a Progressive Liberal newspaper failed repeatedly, so that the Progressives continued to rely on the newspapers allied to the other two liberal parties for support. The National Liberals, by contrast, had access to the quite successful *Frankfurter Presse*, which developed into the *Frankfurter Zeitung*'s main local enemy in the 1870s and 1880s. Much more interesting was the establishment, in 1878, of a National Liberal *Preßcomite*, whose function was to promote newspaper reports favourable to the party and to defend it quickly and efficiently against any printed attacks.[106]

What emerges, therefore, is a party system in which the Democrats set the pace to which its two challengers, the National and the Progressive Liberals,

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[101] Wolf, *Liberalismus*, pp. 48–51. Wolf's number of forty-three 'gatherings' in 1878, taken at face value from a report in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, is slightly misleading, in that it is not clear what form these gatherings took. Many of these may have been just private committee meetings. The first available complete set of police reports from 1879 shows that there were twenty-three principal gatherings that year. Reports from subsequent years suggest similar levels of frequency.

[102] See, for example, HStAW 407 n. 138² fos. 55, 58–60: Democratic Association meetings in September and October 1882.

[103] HStAW 407 n. 138¹ fo. 51: Democratic Association meeting, 17 Mar. 1879.

[104] Wolf, *Liberalismus*, p. 61.

[105] The necessity of a party newspaper was constantly outlined as one of its most pressing issues. See, for example, HStAW 407 n. 150¹ fos. 244–6: Progressive Association meeting, 21 Mar. 1887.

[106] HStAW 407, n. 160 fo. 99: National Liberal Association meeting, October 1878.

made remarkable efforts to adapt. Party meetings had become permanent, frequent, and popular. In 1879, the Progressive Liberal Association had managed to organize about 259 members. The Democrat Association had 399 members in 1880, while the local National Liberal Association counted 563 members.[107] In other words, by 1880 the Frankfurt liberal parties had enlisted a membership which equalled 10 per cent of the total local electorate and 25 per cent of those who went to the polls for the 1880 municipal elections. These are astonishing figures, by any standards.[108]

Despite the politicization of the electorate, the rhetoric of the 'unpolitical' continued to be important in local elections. Frankfurt was no exception in this regard. Indeed, the unpolitical ideal was sometimes even invoked by the Democrats themselves. For instance, in 1876 they warned against the 'political' alliance of the Progressives and the National Liberals. Instead, the Democrats offered themselves as the 'unpolitical' alterative devoted to the common weal.[109] This was hardly a credible line to take for a party which had introduced the concept of politics into local government, and which, only two years earlier, had pronounced that 'those who insist that the local council could function without politics and party political convictions cannot be serious'.[110] It shows that the use of this 'unpolitical' rhetoric was a political act in itself. In this case, it was a defensive move by a majority party eager to withstand a strong challenge from the minority parties.

More usually, it was the National Liberals and the Progressives who professed allegiance to the unpolitical ideal of local government. At a basic level this was a way of stating their opposition to the growing Democrat domination of local government.[111] For this 'unpolitical' ideal, the Progressives in particular were keen to nominate councillors from other parties on their list. Officially, this was because they believed that local affairs should not be exposed to party politics. Unofficially, the Progressives were forced to admit that they did not possess the financial means to nominate a candidate in every ward.[112] In this vein, all three liberal parties usually nominated candidates

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[107] Ibid., fo. 112: National Liberal Association meeting, September 1879. See also ibid., fos. 122–5: Membership list of the National Liberal Association, 1880; HStAW 407, n. 138² fo. 131: Membership statistics for the Democratic Association. By 1882, that figure had grown to 495 members according to the figures given by the Democratic Association, or 527 according to the figures of the Prussian authorities. HStAW 407 n. 150¹ fo. 5: Progressive Association meeting, 7 Jan. 1879.

[108] Michael Ostrogorski noted for England: 'Even in places where the political pulse has beaten strongly, and where the Caucus has been a decided success, as at Birmingham, the proportion of those affiliated to the party Organizations does not exceed eight or ten per cent of the total number of electors.' M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the organisation of political parties* (London, 1902), I, p. 332. The participation rates for the 1880 council elections have been taken from Wolf, *Liberalismus*, p. 130.

[109] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 22 Nov. 1876 (Abendblatt); *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 23 Nov. 1876 (Mittagsblatt).   [110] Maximilian Reinganum, in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 20 Nov. 1874.

[111] In 1874 despite its opposition to the Democrats' introduction of politics, the National Liberal *Neue Frankfurter Presse* insisted that voters elect the anti-Democrat 'unpolitical' list in its entirety. *Neue Frankfurter Presse*, 24 Nov. 1874 (I. Blatt).

[112] HStAW 407 n. 150¹ fo. 126: Progressive Association meeting, 20 Nov. 1882.

from other parties as a concession to the 'unpolitical' ideal, but only in wards where they did not stand a chance of winning, anyway.[113] Ultimately, National Liberal lamentations at the decline of the 'unpolitical' betrayed a defensiveness against the changing nature of local government. This was identical to the liberal 'unpolitical' rhetoric observed for Frankfurt as elsewhere against the intrusion of the 'political' SPD into local government from 1900.[114] The case of Frankfurt shows that such political behaviour was not intrinsically linked to the rise of the SPD; liberals were quite happy to employ it against each other as early as the 1870s.[115]

Local affairs had thus become subject to party political conflict in the same way that this had occurred with regard to politics at the state and national levels. In fact, state and national elections in Frankfurt were characterized by a high degree of bitterness and personal attacks. National Liberal leaders were lampooned as reactionary turncoats enslaved to Bismarck, while Democrats were accused of treason and betrayal – in 1866, Sonnemann and Stoltze had fled the city for fear of imprisonment from the advancing Prussians. Given that the same people who traded these hurtful and personal insults were also leading figures in the realm of local politics, nothing could be more unrealistic than an image of an 'unpolitical' conduct of local affairs in which all political and personal differences would be put aside for the common weal.

The National Liberals complained about the prevalence of politics not simply with regard to local elections. Their main grievance during the 1870s was the impact of politics inside the city council.[116] Naturally, there was no strict party discipline as such. Given that councillors were only rarely de-selected by their parties, there were very few effective means of enforcing a party line. Still, there is evidence that party groups met before council meetings to discuss their actions, and afterwards reviewed the evening's proceedings over a glass of wine.[117] Most importantly, political argument was relatively rare in the city council itself, because every controversial matter was referred to the council's various committees. This is where councillors got on with the real business of local government. In the absence of any minutes of committee meetings, the best guide to the importance of politics at this level is their composition. In 1875, of the fifty posts available in altogether eight committees, thirty-one were occupied by Democrats, and thirteen by Progressive Liberals.

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[113] The Democrats almost always nominated National Liberals for the fourth electoral district, which was a National Liberal stronghold. See also HStAW 407 n. 150¹ fos. 215–16: Progressive Association meeting, 21 Oct. 1885.

[114] J. D. Rolling, 'Das Problem der "Politisierung" der kommunalen Selbstverwaltung in Frankfurt am Main 1900–1918', *Archiv für Frankfurter Geschichte und Kunst*, 57 (1980), p. 185. In general, see Sheehan, 'Liberalism and the city', pp. 135–7.

[115] For neighbouring Wiesbaden Thomas Weichel has similarly shown how the 'unpolitical' postulate was employed by the different bourgeois political fractions as a political tool. For instance, in marginal districts candidates from other parties were nominated on a party slate so as to increase the acceptability of the list as a whole. Weichel, *Die Bürger*, pp. 328–30.

[116] *Frankfurter Presse*, 27 Nov. 1872; *Neue Frankfurter Presse*, 24 Nov. 1874 (1. Blatt).

[117] IfSG NL Fay, S1/11.6: Sauerländer to Fay, 23 Sept. 1867. There exist guidelines of conduct in the council for Democrats. IfSG NL Fay, S1/11.3 (undated).

A total of four went to the National Liberals, while one councillor without party affiliation stood on two committees. In 1877, in four newly elected committees with a total of twenty-six places, twelve went to Democrats, ten to Progressives and four to National Liberals.[118] The distribution of committee seats shows clearly the existence of a coalition between Progressives and Democrats inside the council at this time. This is why National Liberals complained against the importance of politics inside the city council.

If there is one area of local government which to contemporaries and historians alike has epitomized the importance of the 'unpolitical' in local government, it was the *Magistrat*.[119] This executive body served as a link between local government and the state, by carrying out the wishes of the city council on a daily basis, and ensuring at the same time that the council remain within the bounds set by the state. In their unflinching commitment to the ideal of local self-government, it is obvious that the Democrats would take a close interest in the composition and the actions of the *Magistrat*. To the horror of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the first *Magistrat* elected in 1867 was mostly conservative in composition, as four out of six paid members were former patrician Senators, the main enemy of the pre-1866 democrats.[120] As a consequence of these elections, throughout the 1870s the Democrats were engaged in political trench warfare against the *Magistrat* and its chairman, Frankfurt's First Mayor, Daniel Mumm von Schwarzenstein.[121] The Democrat's frustration and outright hostility to this body is best illustrated by the fact that at one stage. Sonnemann even tried to increase the number of *Magistrat* members in order to swamp it with Democrat members.[122] This rather extravagant scheme failed, but the Democrats did manage to use their council majority during the 1870s to replace a number of outgoing unpaid *Magistrat* members with Democrats.[123]

In fact, the *Magistrat* was fully integrated into the Democrat view of local politics. It is not that Sonnemann expected the *Magistrat* to carry out a Democrat agenda in full. From the 1880s, after the conciliatory Johannes von Miquel had become First Mayor, Sonnemann was quite happy to accept a National Liberal majority in the *Magistrat*. Yet members of the *Magistrat* had to fulfil a number of criteria, the most important of which was a defence of the city's rights against state interference. In the 1870s, the *Magistrat* repeatedly appealed to the Prussian authorities to settle its disputes with the council; to the Democrats, this invitation of state interference was an unforgivable sin. Further

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[118] The composition of the committees is in IfSG, *Mitteilungen aus den Protokollen der Stadtverordnetenversammlung*, 1875 (§§ 1–7) and 1877 (§§ 40–4). Party affiliations for the council members have been worked out from fragmentary membership lists, appearances of candidates in political meetings, and signatures on political pamphlets.

[119] This view is nicely summarized in T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1914, II: Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (Munich, 1992), pp. 158–9; W. Hofmann, 'Aufgaben und Struktur der kommunalen Selbstverwaltung im Zeitalter der Hochindustrialisierung', in K. G. A. Jeserich, H. Pohl, G.-C. von Unruh, eds., *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1984), III, pp. 613–16; Fisch, *Stadtplanung im 19. Jahrhundert*, pp. 49–50.

[120] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 24 Jan. 1868 (1. Blatt).   [121] Bartelsheim, 'Politisierung', ch. 3.
[122] Ibid., pp. 131–2.   [123] Ibid., pp. 212–13.

to the support of local self-government, *Magistrat* members were expected to be broadly in favour of the abolition of indirect local taxation. They should promote the city's economic and infrastructural development, they had to oppose the reintroduction of guilds, and they had to lend unqualified support to non-denominational education.[124] Arguably, the last three demands were easy to fulfil, as they were shared by the other liberal parties.[125] Still, the commitments to taxation and self-government were undeniably Democrat demands. Despite its mainly National Liberal composition, from 1880 until the end of the Empire, the Frankfurt *Magistrat* was, indeed, firmly committed to these ideals.

In 1880, Leopold Sonnemann in particular lobbied hard and successfully for the election of the right-liberal Johannes von Miquel as First Mayor of the city. With his successor, Franz Adickes, Miquel has been hailed by historians as one of imperial Germany's greatest mayors.[126] The fact that Miquel (and Adickes after him) was chosen by one of Germany's most notorious left-liberal councils would appear to be perfect evidence of the unpolitical nature of the mayor's office.[127] And yet, Miquel's election was deeply political.

Sonnemann recognized clearly that in order to prevent the re-election of Mumm with his immaculate standing in the city's high society, only a figure of Miquel's standing would do.[128] Moreover, Miquel was not just a famous National Liberal; he was also his party's most influential advocate of local self-government.[129] As far as Sonnemann was concerned, Miquel had achieved a degree of self-government for the province of Hanover after its annexation in 1866 that Frankfurt could only dream of.[130] For Frankfurt Democrats, there could be no higher recommendation. Miquel was also known to be a proponent of the separation of church and state with regard to education. Moreover, he was insistent on the importance of the local supervision of schools with minimal state interference.[131] These demands were all central to the Frankfurt Democrat agenda. Miquel had also been extremely successful as mayor of Osnabrück.

[124] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 19 Jan. 1868 (1. Blatt).
[125] The Progressives were much more reticent about municipal expenditure on public buildings and the city's infrastructure. In the 1890s, the National Liberals accepted the support from the *Mittelstand* groups, one of whose main goals was the introduction of voluntary guilds. Still, in practice, the National Liberals did little to comply with this demand.
[126] Sheehan, 'Liberalism and the city', p. 126; Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1849–1914*, p. 535.
[127] W. Hofmann, *Zwischen Rathaus und Reichskanzlei: die Oberbürgermeister in der Kommunal- und Staatspolitik des Deutschen Reiches von 1890–1933* (Berlin, Stuttgart, Köln, and Mainz, 1974), pp. 38 ff.
[128] *Frankfurter Beobachter*, 19 Nov. 1879.
[129] See, for example, J. Miquel, 'Verfassung und Verwaltung der Provinzen und Gemeinden des Königreichs der Niederlande', *Preußische Jahrbücher*, 24 (1869), pp. 312–40, esp. pp. 339–40. See also his speech on 18 Mar. 1876 on the proposed city ordinance, in *Johannes von Miquel's Reden*, ed. W. Schultze and F. Thimme (Halle, 1911), II, pp. 302–17.
[130] HStAW 407 n. 138¹ fos. 114–15: Democratic Association meeting, 17 Nov. 1879.
[131] *Johannes von Miquel's Reden*, ed. Schultze and Thimme, II, pp. 61ff. (speech on Church and Education of 3 Feb. 1871), and ibid., pp. 244–6 (speech of 11 Mar. 1875 on 'the State and Local Secondary Schools').

There, he had created voluntary guilds to alleviate the artisan's distress due to the introduction of freedom of trade. In fact, this was the only aspect about Miquel's policies that was unacceptable to the Democrats. As a result, in his informal negotiations with Sonnemann before his election, Miquel was left in no doubt that such policies were unwelcome in Frankfurt.

Miquel's election proved a political masterstroke. For it allowed the Democrats to have their cake and eat it. With the *Magistrat*, Miquel was happy to comply with the Democrats' main local political demands, save the municipalization of services and the extension of the local franchise. (During Miquel's period of office, this latter demand was never prominently on the political agenda.) At the same time, to a Prussian government permanently suspicious of a city council with notorious Democrat leanings, a mayor of Miquel's reputation, backed by a National Liberal *Magistrat*, served as a conservative shield against the Democrats. As long as Miquel was in charge, the state was unusually lenient in allowing even the more daring Democrat schemes to go ahead. At Miquel's insistence in the strongest possible terms, the state allowed the promotion of a non-denominational system of education well after the end of the *Kulturkampf*.[132] Also, in the mid-1880s the state allowed Miquel to negotiate with SPD leaders, who due to the anti-Socialist laws would otherwise have been expelled, to ensure the successful foundation of industrial tribunals.[133] These schemes were fiercely promoted by the Democrats, and tolerated by the National Liberals. They would have been unachievable without the engagement and personal standing of the First Mayor.

The case of Frankfurt demonstrates that by 1880, party politics had come to dominate local government in every respect. This does not mean that social status was no longer important. To the contrary, politics allowed social elites to formalize and extend their power.[134] Political leadership after 1866 was assumed by a new elite of newspaper editors, but apart from that the free professions and merchants continued to be over-represented in local government. Of the twenty-eight councillors who held the prestigious offices of council president, secretary, and their respective deputies (1866–1900), sixteen were lawyers, and five were owners or chairmen of large businesses. Only two were smaller craftsmen, and they held the relatively minor office of deputy secretary for a total of three years. Moreover, even if Sonnemann advanced himself by advocating a more 'open', and popular, style of politics, all three liberal parties

[132] A. Anderhub, *Verwaltung im Regierungsbezirk Wiesbaden 1866–1885* (Wiesbaden, 1977), pp. 238–42. Miquel's report of 31 May 1880 to the Wiesbaden education authorities in which he summarized – deferentially, but firmly – the position of Frankfurt liberalism on denominational schooling and which subsequently became one of the cornerstones of the Frankfurt liberals' defence of their position, is reprinted in E. J. Müller, *Aufklärungen über den Schulkampf im Jahre 1904 and 1905 in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt, 1905), pp. 82–5.

[133] H. K. Weitensteiner, 'Karl Flesch – Kommunale Sozialpolitik in Frankfurt am Main' (D.Phil. thesis, Frankfurt, 1976), here p. 116.

[134] The argument that popular political organization can cement the power of existing elites is not new, but has been made in Ostrogorski, *Democracy*, I, pp. 329–70, 580 ff.

in Frankfurt were tightly led, and only rarely did the rank-and-file protest against nominations or decisions proposed by the leadership. The case of Frankfurt illustrates the general point that, far from threatening the position of notables in the town council, politics and political organizations buttressed their power. Moreover, the example of Frankfurt contradicts the general assumption that, just because of their similar social backgrounds, notables in local government can somehow be treated as a single, homogeneous entity. This may be so for a study of urban society, but it seems completely misguided in an inquiry into urban politics. Even if local elites went to the same social clubs, they could still be at political loggerheads with each other.[135]

In Frankfurt, politics became an important factor in local affairs in the second half of the 1850s. By the early 1860s, therefore, the achievements and the sophistication of the local liberal movements in Frankfurt appear to be quite similar to those in other towns, from Münster in the north, to Augsburg in the south, to Breslau in the east. Yet it was only after 1866 that a consistent and popular party political structure was developed. A political movement with ill-defined goals and ad hoc activities was transformed into separate permanent, popular political parties.[136] These were firmly in place by 1874, and formed the basis of local government in Frankfurt throughout the Empire. The example of Frankfurt illustrates the ways in which party politics could form the basis of all aspects of local government three decades before the advent of the SPD in local government, traditionally assumed to be the trigger of politicization.

III

There are ways, of course, in which Frankfurt was exceptional, not least as a centre of the newspaper press. Yet what is most striking is that in Frankfurt, those elements which have been traditionally regarded as catalysts for politicization were notably absent. Frankfurt did not have a particular democrat or liberal tradition: this was an invention mainly of the Democrats after 1866. There was no confessional conflict. And Frankfurt can certainly not be regarded as an early or important centre of class conflict. In other words, the example of Frankfurt proves that the politicization of local government did not need a challenge to liberal notable politics by the SPD. Nor did it require the challenge of the Centre party. The competition between the bourgeois liberals

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[135] The city's most exclusive association, the 'Casinogesellschaft', split in 1869. The old 'Casinogesellschaft' was led by the National Liberal leader, Georg Varrentrapp, while the members of the new 'Casinogesellschaft' followed Leopold Sonnemann. In 1876, both associations reunited. This has been taken as evidence that associational life continued to provide an overarching 'unpolitical' context for a united 'liberal milieu', despite the existence of three liberal parties. Roth, *Stadt und Bürgertum*, pp. 510–12. Considering the insults traded particularly between Sonnemann's and Varrentrapp's supporters during local, state, and national elections, this is highly unlikely. The underlying unity of the bourgeoisie is belied by the necessity of the association's split in the first place. Rather, the reunion in 1876 is evidence that the association no longer served any political function.

[136] For the general context, see Hein, 'Partei und Bewegung', pp. 73–83.

themselves was quite sufficient to provoke the politicization of local government of a scope and sophistication that was truly remarkable.[137]

The case of Frankfurt confirms the importance of the decade of German unification on German politics. The drawn-out process of unification from 1866 to 1871 and its aftermath clearly changed the context and the way in which politics were conducted, and it equally changed the way in which politics were conceived by the voting population at large. Yet this investigation also raises serious doubts about notions of a milieu which are so central to many works of electoral history. In particular, the idea of a single bourgeois 'Lager' (bloc) which contained a distinctive political culture common to the Protestant bourgeoisie fails to account for the way in which Frankfurt was politicized by political rivalries within the bourgeoisie, long before the SPD and the Centre party appeared on the scene.[138]

Finally, this study has demonstrated the artificiality of the barriers that have been assumed for the politicization of public affairs at the state and national levels on the one hand, and the local level on the other. This presents a challenge not only to perceived notions of the politicization of local government from around 1900. Most significantly, it casts a serious doubt on notions that by the mid-1870s liberalism was already a spent force, that it had lost its pervasive magnetism and its ideological flexibility with the failure of the 1848 Revolution.[139] Instead, it encourages a re-evaluation of the late 1860s and early 1870s for the importance of liberalism in Germany. Liberals did not just 'happen' to be in charge of local government. This study has shown that it is important to ask how they got there in the first place. The liberals' ability to articulate local government concerns across Germany in their diversity and individuality suggests an impressive vitality of German liberalism in general. For in urban government, liberals maintained their power throughout the Empire, despite the increasing porousness of a highly restrictive franchise, and despite the social and economic pressures that were particularly pressing at the local level.

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[137] Given that Frankfurt has been held up as a model for the unity of liberalism at the local level in Germany, the evidence presented in this article might suggest conversely that Frankfurt could be regarded as a model for the competition that did, in fact, exist between various liberal movements at the local level. Pohl, 'Überlegungen', pp. 71, 74.

[138] For a detailed treatment of the 'milieu', see Rohe, ed., *Elections, parties and political traditions*, pp. 1–25; K. Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen* (Frankfurt, 1992), pp. 57–121. For a recent assertion of the validity of the concept of the 'milieu', see K. Rohe, 'Politische Kultur – politische Milieus: Zur Anwendung neuerer theoretischer Konzepte in einer modernen Landesgeschichte', in Lässig and Pohl, eds., *Sachsen im Kaiserreich*, pp. 177–90.

[139] The classic articles in this debate are L. Gall, 'Liberalismus und ''Bürgerliche Gesellschaft''. Zu Charakter und Entwicklung der Liberalen Bewegung in Deutschland', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 220 (1975), pp. 324–56; W. J. Mommsen, 'Der deutsche Liberalismus zwischen ''Klassenloser Bürgergesellschaft'' und ''Organisiertem Kapitalismus''. Zu einer neuen Liberalismusinterpretation', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 4 (1978), pp. 77–90; L. Gall, '''Ich wünschte ein Bürger zu sein''. Zum Selbstverständnis des Deutschen Bürgertums im 19. Jahrhundert', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 245 (1987), pp. 601–23.