

Neighbors and Enemies
The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin,
1929–1933

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List of Abbreviations

ADGB	Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
AEG	Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft
AIZ	<i>Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung</i>
Antifa	Antifaschistische Junge Garde (Young Antifascist Guard)
AVAVG	Gesetz über Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung
BA	Bundesarchiv
BA-SAPMO	Stiftung Archiv der Arbeiterparteien und Massenorganisationen within the Bundesarchiv Berlin
BDM	Bund deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls)
BL	Bezirksleitung (KPD District Leadership)
BLHA	Brandenburgische Landeshauptarchiv, Potsdam
BT	<i>Berliner Tageblatt</i>
BVG	Berliner Verkehrsgesellschaft (Berlin Transport Company)
DDP	Deutsche demokratische Partei (German Democratic Party)
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party)
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party)
EF	Eiserne Front (Iron Front)
EZA	Evangelisches Zentralarchiv Berlin
GStA	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz
HJ	Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth)
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte
Kbgbf	Kampfbund gegen den Faschismus (Fighting League against Fascism)
KJVD	Kommunistische Jugendverband Deutschlands (Communist Youth League)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
KPO	Kommunistische Partei – Opposition (Communist Party – Opposition)
LAB	Landesarchiv Berlin
NSBO	Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellen Organisation (National Socialist Factory Cell Organization)

NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist Party)
OSAF	Oberste SA-Führer/Oberste SA-Führung (SA leadership)
RB	Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold
<i>RF</i>	<i>Die Rote Fahne</i>
RFB	Roter Frontkämpferbund (Red Front-fighters' League)
RFMB	Roter Frauen- und Mädchenbund (Red League of Women and Girls)
RGO	Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts-Opposition (Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition)
RHD	Rote Hilfe Deutschland (Red Aid Germany)
RJ	Rote Jungfront (Red Youth Front)
RJWG	Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz (National Youth Welfare Law)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Stormtroops)
SAJ	Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend (Social Democratic Youth Organization)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party)
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Squads)
UB	Unterbezirk (KPD subdistrict)
UBL	Unterbezirksleitung (KPD local leadership)
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party)
<i>VB</i>	<i>Völkischer Beobachter</i>
<i>VZ</i>	<i>Vossische Zeitung</i>
ZK	Zentralkomitee (KPD Central Committee)

Introduction

Germany's first republic always stood on shaky ground. When Philip Scheidemann, head of the Social Democratic bloc in parliament, announced the dawn of a German republic from a Reichstag balcony on November 9, 1918, his declaration was not universally well received. On the same day, Karl Liebknecht, the leader of the radical Spartacist movement, announced the birth of a socialist republic, and the violence that followed verged on civil war. On August 11, 1919, a constitution was ratified in the city of Weimar, lending the new republic its name and drawing international attention to Germany as arguably the most liberal state in the world. Yet stability did not come to Germany in any sustainable form. The Weimar Republic lurched from crisis to crisis between 1919 and 1923, enduring street violence, a short-lived putsch, political assassinations, and hyperinflation. Even after 1924, questions about economic health, cultural experimentation, and the value of parliamentarism never fully receded from public debate. Nonetheless, no one expected the magnitude of the turmoil that followed. Beginning in earnest in 1929, unmatched levels of economic depression were accompanied by the end of parliamentary rule, violence, and the emergence of a National Socialist Germany by the end of January 1933.

In their attempts to describe the Weimar Republic, and its final years in particular, scholars have frequently turned to the language of natural disasters. “Flames,” “deluge,” “plague,” and “volcano” have all turned up in titles of Weimar studies, as a way to describe the power of the destructive force that swallowed all in its path, including the republican state.¹ Yet such an image of the republic and its collapse is misleading, not in terms of the strength attributed to Nazi evil, but in the sense of helplessness often felt by those who witness a natural disaster. The disintegration of the Weimar Republic did not happen overnight, nor did it happen beyond the reaches of

¹ I am referring to the following works: Anton Gill, *A Dance Between Flames: Berlin Between the Wars* (London: J. Murray, 1993); Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s* (second edition, New York: Harper, 1995); Daniel Guérin, *The Brown Plague: Travels in Late Weimar and Early Nazi Germany*, Robert Schwarzwald, trans. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994, from the original 1933 Paris edition, *La peste brune a passé par là . . .*); and Thomas Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann, eds., *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994).

human intervention. Other scholars have stressed the republic's structural weaknesses, or the detrimental actions of a handful of political and industrial policy makers, but these approaches also downplay citizen involvement in the crisis. This study attempts to fill this void by examining how residents of the capital, especially those living in workers' districts, experienced and participated in the dissolution of the republic. In so doing, I will stress the engagement rather than desperation of radicalized Berliners, who were active in confronting the upheaval of the Weimar period and in the end contributed often in unforeseen ways to the speedy demise of democracy and the legitimization of the Nazi regime.

Though this study is not about the fictional representation of the republic's collapse in Berlin, a few examples from the literary world prove useful as a way to introduce the themes of this book.² As if they knew democracy would not be seen again in Germany for some time, novelists and other chroniclers of life in Germany rushed out to capture the moment. Their motivations in writing and their assessments of the situation are as varied as their characters, but two factors remain constant across the late Weimar literary spectrum. First, by looking at novels we are reminded that men and women were coping with the situation in a variety of ways, both acting and reacting to the upheaval. Second, the centrality of Berlin and the transiency of life there, during this period of transition from republic to dictatorship, are notable. Male and female protagonists appearing in German fiction of the late 1920s and early 1930s are constantly running to or escaping from Berlin. They are either drawn to the city, attracted by the hope of economic opportunity or freedom from provincial tradition, or determined to flee it for the emotional safety of life in a provincial town. Even though the capital suffered terribly under the strains of depression, many held out hope that Berlin would offer a solution to crisis. In *Little Man, What Now?*, Fallada's Pinneberg seeks work

² Among many novels from this period concerned with life in Germany's capital, I mention the following: Rudolf Braune, *Die Geschichte einer Woche* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1978; original edition, 1930) and *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat* (Frankfurt a. M.: Societäts-Verlag, 1930; Munich: Damnitz, 1975); Günther Birkenfeld, *Dritter Hof Links* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1929); Hans Fallada, *Kleiner Mann – Was Nun?* (Rheinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992; original edition 1932), also *Little Man, What Now?*, Eric Sutton, trans. (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1992); Georg Fink, *Mich Hungert!* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1930); Erich Kästner, *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (Zurich: Atrium, 1931), also *Fabian: The Story of a Moralist*, Cyrus Brooks, trans. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993); Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (Munich: dtv, 1989; original edition, 1932) and *Gilgi – eine von uns* (1979; original edition, 1931); and Walter Schönstedt, *Kämpfende Jugend* (Berlin: Oberbaum Verlag, 1972; original edition, Berlin: Internationalen-Arbeiter Verlag, 1932). For further analysis of Berlin's role in the literature of the period, see Derek Glass et al., eds., *Berlin: Literary Images of a City* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1989); Hermann Kähler, *Berlin – Asphalt und Licht* (W. Berlin: das europäische Buch, 1986); Erhard Schütz, *Romane der Weimarer Republik* (Munich: W. Fink, 1986); and Peter Wruck, ed., *Literarisches Leben in Berlin 1871–1933* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987).

there to support his family, never giving up hope or the dressing table that symbolizes respectability, as he descends the social ladder rung by rung. In *Die Geschichte einer Woche*, Rudolf Braune's Werner arrives in the capital wishing to plant the seeds of revolution by starting a Communist factory cell in the chemical industry. In Braune's *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat*, Erna leaves her ten siblings behind in the country in search of independence and a typist's wage in Berlin. Also seeking an escape in Berlin is Erich Kästner's title character Fabian. After the disillusioning experience of World War I, Jakob Fabian attempts to make a life for himself in Berlin, hiding behind all the pleasures the modern metropolis offered. After a decade of living as a bachelor ad designer, he loses both his job and his first love. Fabian rejects the capital for the security of his parents' companionship and home. In some ways the city is redeemed, however, because the provincial town brings no solace to Fabian who is confronted with the same nationalist chauvinism he had rejected earlier.

As in *Fabian*, physical mobility and social marginalization caused by the Depression are hallmarks of the era and its fiction. Unemployment is a constant strain on characters throughout all the stories. In the workers' novels, this precariousness was a fact of life, unaltered by the fall of the monarchy in 1918. In fact, working-class life is portrayed as even less stable after the war's end. In Günther Birkenfeld's *Dritter Hof Links*, the young Paul's story ends as it began. He is unemployed and living in Berlin with his widowed mother – only now he is accompanied by his unemployed girlfriend. In the intervening pages, he has bounced from job to job, and lover to lover. His sisters have left the apartment. One was married briefly but is now on her own; the other has become a prostitute. Paul's father had been a skilled mason, but in the postwar period he drank himself to death, unable to deal with his memories of combat.

For the white-collar workers, or *Angestellten*, unemployment brings loss of social status as well as financial crisis. At the conclusion of Fallada's classic *Zeitroman*, middle-class Pinneberg finds himself penniless and living with his wife and child in a garden cabin on the outskirts of the city. At the beginning of Kästner's tale, Fabian's life as a carefree ad executive ends as the novel begins. Soon this PhD-holding young man finds himself opening car doors in front of a department store for spare change. In Irmgard Keun's, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, the female protagonist, Doris, gives up her job as a stenotypist in the hopes of becoming a somebody in Berlin by finding a rich male patron to support her expensive tastes. Failing in this goal, Doris lives on the verge of destitution throughout the book. In the last scene she stands prosaically in a Berlin train station contemplating her next move.

Berlin's rail stations play a large role in all of these novels. Symbolic of more than the transiency of life in the German capital, the rail stations also illustrate the modernity of the metropolis. The double-edged nature of urban modernity is of course what draws these fictional characters to the city and

what makes survival such a test. Rail allowed for mobility, not just to and from the city, but also throughout the sprawling capital – connecting the once insular communities that made up greater Berlin in the 1920s. Modern forms of communication and commerce had given the city its cosmopolitan feel, making it a cultural and economic center in the 1920s as well as the seat of the national government. The fictional characters of the Berlin novels discuss the vibrancy and permissiveness of the city's nightlife, read stories about socialites, and note the popularity of the movie houses. But not everything was new. Just as the hope for prosperity clashed with the reality of economic instability, the city's growing cosmopolitanism clashed with the remnants of the German monarchy. The rail terminal itself is a prime example of this dichotomy. Its high-tech machinery, crowds, and noise denoted the excitement and anonymity of the modern city, while the pomposity of the nineteenth-century station façade confirmed that Berlin had a conservative, military, and royal past.

Contemporary chroniclers of daily life in the republic certainly emphasized the new café culture, the pace of automobile traffic and subways, and the rationalized workspace. They did not forget, however, the legacy of prewar and wartime Berlin. Like the façades of the train stations, the layout of the city and its landmarks were left over from an earlier era. Wealth was still found in the West and a lack of resources still characterized the East. The republic's parliament met in a building designed for a monarch's parliament, greatly restricted in its powers. Though we think of 1920s Berlin as having a consumer-driven culture – the home of AEG household appliances and Wertheim department stores – much of Berlin's population was still living in the crowded tenements erected quickly and with little expenditure toward the end of the nineteenth century to house the growing numbers of factory workers entering the industrializing city.

Though the physical remnants of pre-1918 Berlin still shaped life in the city in the 1920s, so did what was missing. The loss of virtually an entire generation to the war affected society and politics in ways too numerous to discuss in this introduction. The novels that appeared at the end of the 1920s, however, do not shy away from confronting the personal and political devastation wrought by the war. Kästner's protagonist reviles his elders, who convinced him and his school classmates to enlist and left him with a weak heart and a debilitating sense of betrayal. In the aptly titled *Mich Hungert!* (I'm hungry!), the main character Teddy finds himself in a predicament similar to that of young Paul in *Dritter Hof Links*: Teddy's father died in battle, leaving him to support his siblings and care for a single mother exhausted by overwork and poverty.

With all of this upheaval and tension between war and peace, prosperity and despair, monarchy and republic, urban modernity and provincial tradition, it is perhaps surprising that the republic lasted as long as it did. Without the benefit of knowing the tragic conclusion to Weimar's story,

the era's novelists describe an atmosphere of impending political crisis. In Schönstedt's *Kämpfende Jugend*, the violence between local gangs of Communists and Nazis is growing, and lessons are being learned that the author hopes will serve the young Communists well in the expected showdown between left and right. Likewise, Werner has built his factory cell, which he assumes will grow until the revolution brings the opportunity for the workers to take full control of their company's operations. Keun's "rayon girl," Doris, admits a lack of understanding of the political crises of the day, but she enjoys hearing people debate the issues and even finds herself caught up in one of the ubiquitous demonstrations in Berlin after 1929. Kästner's two protagonists hire a taxi so they can transport two Communist and Nazi paramilitaries who have shot each other to a hospital – even though they find the combatants' political ideologies distasteful. Ironically, the wounded survive but the two liberal Samaritans are unable to find their way in Berlin and die by the end of the book.

It is this process in which political and economic instability culminated in the death of the republic that has interested historians of the era most. Increasing popular support for the far left (communism) and far right (national socialism), coupled with the authoritarian tendencies of officials at the top levels of the republican government, led quite quickly under the pressure of the Depression to the undermining of parliamentary decision making. Simultaneously, in certain parts of the country where far left and far right paramilitaries had grown in number, various forms of street violence became common, challenging the government to take ever more extreme steps to restore civil order. Once the Nazi Party became the largest bloc in the Reichstag, the republic's president, World War I Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, and his advisers began seriously to consider involving the young party's leader, Adolf Hitler, in a new cabinet. Hitler turned down what he determined to be compromising posts until he was offered the brass ring, the chancellorship, on January 30, 1933.

The period from 1929, the benchmark for the start of the Depression, to what used to be referred to as the Nazi "seizure" of power is the timeframe for this study. These four years are sometimes labeled the Crisis Period, but Weimar's crises were certainly not limited to this final phase of the republic. As demonstrated here by this brief summary of some of the popular literature of the day, the Weimar Republic was riddled with crises throughout its life. The political turmoil, which captivates us for what it promises to teach about the attractions of fascism and the atmosphere under which Nazism could be successful, must be seen in the context of the legacy of defeat, the costs of losing a generation to war, the challenges of industrial society, and changing gender norms. We must look at individuals and institutions, representation and experience, mentalities and structures.

This is a tall order, and I do not pretend to cast my net nearly so wide. However, this book does offer one perspective that has been missing – a

local study that weaves together the multiple levels of the political process, from generational conflict and patriarchal assumption of power in the family, to neighborhood relationships, party camaraderie, and displays of state authority. Surely Berlin is in many ways a unique case.³ It was the capital city, and the specific ways the crisis unfolded within city limits drew special attention throughout Germany and around the world. One need only read an issue of the *New York Times* from the early 1930s to see that developments within Berlin were followed beyond Germany's borders. Importantly, it was not only the decisions of the Reichstag or the presidential decrees and appointments of chancellors that were deemed newsworthy. The grassroots political crisis and the deepening economic collapse in Berlin were also making headlines.⁴

Yet there are two reasons why the Weimar Republic's demise can be better understood by a focus on the capital. First, though the intensity of unrest among Berlin's workers was perhaps unsurpassed by that of any other city or region, there is no reason to expect that it was qualitatively different elsewhere. Unemployment was a national phenomenon, as were the rise of radical parties and the decline of the political center. Berlin may have had an especially volatile combination of a powerful Communist Party branch and an increasingly well-developed Nazi constituency, but the importance of gender and generational conflict in attracting support for the radical parties seems undisputed by recent studies of other localities.⁵

Second, as a direct result of the special attention focused on Berlin's political climate, the city acted as a barometer for the stability of the whole republic. Therefore, in the quest to understand how the government rationalized the end of parliamentary rule, or to explain why large segments of the population sought radical alternatives to the political crisis, events in Berlin

³ Hamburg and its environs have also served as a case study for a number of important works on the 1920s. For those that correspond most closely to this one, see Eva Büttner, *Hamburg in der staats- und Wirtschaftskrise, 1928–1931* (Hamburg: Christians, 1982); Hermann Hipp, ed., *Wohnstadt Hamburg. Mietshäuser der zwanziger Jahre zwischen Inflation und Weltwirtschaftskrise* (Hamburg: Christians, 1982); Maike Bruhns, Claudia Preuschoft, and Werner Skrentny, eds., “*Hier war doch alles nicht so schlimm*” (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1984); Angelika Voß, Ursula Büttner, and Hermann Weber, *Vom Hamburger Aufstand zur politischen Isolierung. Kommunistischen Politik 1923–33 in Hamburg und im Deutschen Reich* (Hamburg: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1983); and most recently Anthony McElligott, *Contested City: Municipal Politics and the Rise of Nazism in Altona* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

⁴ See for example, the *New York Times*, August 12, 1932, “Republic is ignored on Reich Fete Day.”

⁵ Cf. Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik: Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlicher Buchgesellschaft, 1996); Anthony McElligott, *Contested City: Municipal Politics and the Rise of Nazism in Altona* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); and Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

provided answers to contemporaries of the period and should continue to do so today. It is not surprising that Germans or the international community looked to Berlin to judge the extent of the crisis in the early 1930s. If a democratic government could not maintain its credibility among residents of the capital, which benefited from a local prorepublican administration and the visual grandeur available to all capital cities, then what chance did other towns and regions have? As other historians have shown, in various parts of Germany rural particularism, Catholic independence, and distrust of the national government only compounded the problems that were already overwhelming Berlin by the end of the 1920s.⁶

My focus is on the political crisis in the capital, but my analysis is not one that emanates from the corridors of political power, be those governmental bureaus or parties' headquarters. I begin and remain on the streets of Berlin. I seek to understand how citizens, in particular those who lived in the low-rent city center, participated in the collapse of the republic, not in the way they cast their ballots, but in the ways they related to their city, their local leaders, and most importantly each other. At the most basic level, I argue that a deep sense of uncertainty pervaded the city throughout the 1920s. This unease, exacerbated by the social and economic dislocation of a modern society thrust into severe depression, led to a transformation of social and political relationships in the capital. These developments underline the fact that the collapse was not effected solely in a top-down manner, either through governmental directive or party command. Rather with the weakening of the institutions of state and political parties, men and women found authority in themselves and neighborhood activism and ethics. In doing so, some resorted to violence, challenging the state to take increasingly authoritarian steps to rein in radicalism, which ultimately eroded any chance for republicanism and paved the way for a "peaceful" transition to the Third Reich.

The primary goal of the book, then, is to offer an interpretation of the collapse of the republic that emanates from Berlin's neighborhood-based radical culture – a radicalism defined not by membership in or commitment to any political party but by the desire to address actively the problems of daily life. The pervasiveness of radicalism in the capital was not simply a manifestation of economic desperation or a result of conflicting ideologies. Rather the full meaning behind street battles, daily protest, uniforms, and the politicization of once politically neutral spaces should be sought also in the day-to-day relationships between members of these communities and the methods they employed for preserving some degree of familial

⁶ See Detlef Lehnert and Klaus Megerle, "Problems of Identity and Consensus in a Fragmented Society: The Weimar Republic" in Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Ralf Rytlewski, eds., *Political Culture in Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) and Oded Heilbrunner, *Catholicism, Political Culture, and the Countryside: A Social History of the Nazi Party in Southern Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

and neighborhood autonomy in the face of catastrophe. This book will also contribute to our understanding of heightened generational and gender tensions in these years, and the connections between these developments and the growth of radicalism. The debates about female sexuality, consumption, and the “New Woman” and the rhetoric surrounding masculine rebirth, political activism, and the “Lost Generation” signaled the turbulence that surrounded gender relations and existed between the generations. I examine how these issues shaped the opportunities and limitations of male and female workers’ political engagement in their neighborhoods and beyond. By analyzing a culture of radicalism, which had less to do with party politics than with individual and community needs, and its impact on the republic’s fate more broadly, I endeavor to paint a more complete picture of Berlin during the Depression – one in which men and women were active in the transition from republicanism to dictatorship.

The study of Weimar Germany’s collapse is no new undertaking. Clearly the republic’s demise at the foot of Nazism leaves us with many questions as to how a modern society could embrace such a party and its brutality, particularly when only fourteen years earlier it had ratified one of the world’s most liberal and democratic constitutions.⁷ Though most historians would agree that a combination of both long-term and immediate pressures felled the republic, analyses of the political crisis can be separated into three categories. First, there are those who argue that the republic was destroyed by a handful of men at the pinnacles of political and industrial power. Other historians focus on the parties, maintaining that those which supported the republic were challenged and eventually overcome by the radical ideologies and violence of those on the extreme right and left. Finally, there are those who maintain that the middle classes never fully accepted their liberal birthright and were convinced of the republic’s shortcomings during the inflation crisis of 1923, which left them without their savings and with little chance for regaining their status in a terminally weak economy. Disenchanted, these citizens failed to support the republic as the decade progressed, jumping ship in ever-greater numbers to the special interest and nationalist parties before the emergence of the NSDAP. This study offers counterpoints to these three approaches. Where others have focused on central power, I have chosen to examine local power, suggesting in fact that the collapse occurred from below. Instead of concentrating on the ways institutions influenced developments in this period, this book emphasizes the challenges posed by politicized men and women to the authority of political parties and state institutions. Finally, I question those analyses that present workers’ culture as isolated within the

⁷ For analysis of the 1919 Constitution and the theorists behind the document, see Peter Caldwell, *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: The Theory and Practice of Weimar Constitutionalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

republic and middle-class culture as the chief determining factor for political developments in the Weimar era.

To begin with a classic text on the collapse of the republic, Karl-Dietrich Bracher's *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* notes the importance of the economic crisis in pushing the middle classes to the right and many workers to the radical left. However, in this and other texts, Bracher directs most of his attention to the actions taken at the highest levels of government after 1929.⁸ It was here that "the combination of political inexperience, lack of familiarity with the workings of parliamentary democracy, and powerful residues of authoritarianism proved fatal."⁹ The introduction of rule by emergency decree beginning in 1930 destroyed any chance for a democratic solution, argues Bracher, leaving a political vacuum to be filled by Nazism.

Though the Depression accelerated the downfall of the republic in Bracher's interpretation, what ultimately made the situation after 1929 different from the earlier political and economic crisis faced by the state in 1923 is that those in charge were not willing to find a non-Nazi alternative. Hagen Schulze and Henry Turner have turned even more singularly to the "personal relationships, characteristics, decisions and deficiencies" that intervened in the first weeks of 1933 and led ultimately to the placement of power in Hitler's hands.¹⁰ Though uncovering the significance of personal factors in this process is a thought-provoking exercise, it obscures the broader context in which Hitler could be accepted as chancellor by the majority of the German population. Though the NSDAP failed to gain an electoral majority in 1933, the bulk of the German population willingly accepted the new regime. President von Hindenburg, cabinet members, and party leaders were not only acting according to interpersonal conflicts and personal quests for power but also reacting to specific grassroots political developments and mass discontent.

In contrast to this emphasis on the governmental elite, a second stream of analysis has focused on the actions of the various political parties. As the largest party with the desire to maintain a republican government, the

⁸ Karl-Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* (Villingen: Ring Verlag, 1955). Cf. Ian Kershaw, ed., *Weimar: Why Did German Democracy Fail?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). This collection of essays is particularly helpful for breaking down the so-called Borchardt debate concerning the role of structural economic weaknesses within the republic and Chancellor Brüning's deflationary policies during the Depression in the republic's collapse. For more on these debates, see Knut Borchardt, *Wachstum, Krisen, Handlungsspielräume der Wirtschaftspolitik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982); the special issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (Vol. 11, 1985) dedicated to the debate; and the short text by Jürgen von Krudener, *Economic Crisis and the Political Collapse: The Weimar Republic, 1924–1933* (New York: Berg, 1990).

⁹ Karl-Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 169.

¹⁰ Hagen Schulze, "Explaining the Failure of the Weimar Republic," (unpublished manuscript, 1998), p. 3. The focus on the interpersonal relationships of the decision makers surrounding President von Hindenburg is developed most fully in Henry A. Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1996).

inability of the Social Democratic Party to halt the growth of antirepublican forces has received great attention.¹¹ The SPD's participation in the signing of the hated Versailles treaty, its role as architect of the republic, and the failings of the republic's early SPD-led governments tainted the party as being responsible for every woe faced by the young state. Public opinion further deteriorated once the SPD-sculpted welfare state began to be dismantled by the austerity measures of non-social democrats in the early 1930s. In the 1990s this interpretation was updated, broadening our understanding of the paralysis felt within the party as the evolving social structure and new political strategies of the more radical parties led to internal party discord.¹²

The role of the KPD in the collapse of the republic has also been reevaluated in the last twenty years. Instead of purely institutional histories of the party, which stressed an earlier Stalinization model, Eve Rosenhaft's *Beating the Fascists?* broke new ground in its exploration of political culture.¹³ Though she discusses KPD policy quite extensively, Rosenhaft's book also examines the social and cultural roots of radicalism among Berlin's workers and dissects the local violence directed against the growing fascist threat.¹⁴ This important book clearly informs my study in many ways. But

¹¹ For further elucidation of this general position, see the three-volume series on the republic by Heinrich August Winkler, especially volume III, *Der Weg in die Katastrophe. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1930 bis 1933* (Berlin: Dietz, 1987) and also Heinrich August Winkler, ed., *Die Deutsche Staatskrise 1930–1933* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992a) and Eberhard Kolb, *Umbrüche deutscher Geschichte*, Dieter Langewiesche and Klaus Schönhoven, eds. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993).

¹² See Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

¹³ Christian Striefler's *Kampf um die Macht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Propyläen, 1993) revives the claim that the KPD was an insurrectionary party and the main culprit in the downfall of the republic. Local Communist Party documents even in strongholds like Berlin, however, provide no significant evidence that its members held enthusiasm for calls to mass strike – not to mention revolution. His section on anti-Semitism within the KPD is a prime example of how the demonization of the KPD is employed to lessen the guilt of the NSDAP.

¹⁴ Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence 1929–1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Rosenhaft and Fischer are somewhat unique in their focus on the KPD. As noted later in this introduction, most research on Weimar violence has targeted developments within the NSDAP. The literature on the SA in particular is quite extensive. Some of the most useful studies remain Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism. The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925–1934* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–1935* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983); Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party. A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919–1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Peter Longerich, *Die braune Bataillone: Geschichte der SA* (Munich: Beck, 1989); Peter Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Eric Reiche, *The Development of the SA in Nürnberg 1922–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Peter Stachura, *Nazi Youth in the Weimar Republic* (Santa Barbara, CA: Clio, 1975). Bruce Campbell's

where she looked at the KPD in isolation, this study situates radical Berlin in the broader context of daily life in the city center. As such for discussion of party policy and for data concerning the social and economic background of Communist street fighters, I refer the reader to Rosenhaft's text.

In an essay that followed the book, Rosenhaft stresses the acceptance of violence in Weimar society and its attraction as a means of self-representation for the individual and for working males as a group. Rosenhaft argues that uniforms, public demonstrations, and acts of "bravery" symbolically reconstituted the male body, which had been weakened by the World War I and the economic crisis. However, the competing visions of the male worker presented by the SA and Communist paramilitaries offered two choices to the working class as a whole. The left-wing paramilitaries saw themselves as representatives of all workers and sought to gain more adherents through their loosely organized marches, which welcomed new converts. The SA offered a different image of the strong worker, symbolized by tightly controlled marching squadrons exhibiting bourgeois self-discipline. The Communists hoped to attract more participants through their public protests, while the SA desired only an audience for its spectacle.¹⁵ Both sets of troops sought to demonstrate their bravery to one another and to their communities. My intention is to show the larger implications their actions had for their neighborhoods, the capital, and even the country.

Following his own work on the SA, in *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism*, Conan Fischer compares the radical right and left, uncovering similarities in message and strategy among the Nazis and Communists.¹⁶ Some critics, however, have been unwilling to accept Fischer's view that the KPD and NSDAP fought for support within the same social circles and that the parties aroused similar motivations in their members. Detractors claim

contribution to this literature aims at understanding the social profile of the SA's leaders: *The SA Generals and the Rise of Nazism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998). For studies that explain the social make-up and organizational structure of those assigned to control this violence, see the classic work by Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Peter Leßmann, *Die Preussische Schutzpolizei in der Weimarer Republik; Streifen dienst und Straßenkampf* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1989); or Alf Lüdtke, ed., *Sicherheit und Wohlfahrt. Polizei, Gesellschaft und Herrschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), especially the volume's essay by Richard Bessel, "Militarisierung und Modernisierung: Polizeiliches Handeln in der Weimarer Republik." For an overview of modern developments in European policing, see George L. Mosse, ed., *Police Forces in History* (London: Sage, 1975) and Clive Elmsley and Barbara Weinberger, eds., *Policing Western Europe. Politics, Professionalism and Public Order, 1850-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Eve Rosenhaft, "Links gleich rechts? Militante Straßengewalt um 1930" in Thomas Lindenberger and Alf Lüdtke, eds., *Physische Gewalt* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 260.

¹⁶ See Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers. A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis 1929-1935* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983) and *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

that Fischer paints a picture of apolitical thugs on both ends of the political spectrum, thereby downplaying the particular threat posed by Nazism.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Fischer's study is valuable because it explains how the KPD responded to the support shown by workers to the NSDAP and addresses the connection between the cross-party attractions of radicalism and the social and economic crises.

Fischer also challenges those scholars who depict Communist combatants in a purely defensive position.¹⁸ In *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990*, Eric Weitz agrees that steadily increasing right-wing violence throughout the 1920s does not preclude the possibility of left-wing aggression.¹⁹ Weitz argues that the KPD leadership sought to control violence and use it as part of official party strategy. Though policy changed over time, as did the context for demonstrations, Weitz stresses the continuum of a developing acceptance of violent politics on the far left. This assertion is an important one, and its broader implications are shown in this study as it relates to the relatively smooth transition from republic to Third Reich.

¹⁷ See Fischer's controversial article "Class Enemies or Class Brothers? Communist-Nazi Relations in Germany, 1929–1933" in *European History Quarterly* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 1985), pp. 259–79. A great deal of research has been done on the ways in which the Nazi Party appealed to workers. Though criticized for his broad definition of the working class, see Max Kele's chronological analysis of changes in upper-level NSDAP policy and propaganda toward workers in *Nazis and Workers. National Socialist Appeals to German Labor, 1919–33* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972). The first chapter of Francis L. Carsten's *The German Workers and the Nazis* (London: Scholar Press, 1995) gives a short synopsis of the pre-1933 period. Conan Fischer's edited collection, *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996) is also very helpful in this regard. In particular, see the essay by Günther Mai on the NSBO and Helen Boak's piece on the attractions of Nazism to working-class women. On the subject of Nazi attempts to organize workers on the factory floor, see also Volker Kratzenberg, *Arbeiter auf dem Weg zu Hitler? Die Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellen-Organisation. Ihre Entstehung, ihre Programmatik, ihr Scheitern, 1927–1934* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1989).

¹⁸ Among others, see Bernd Weisbrod, "Gewalt in der Politik. Zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen" in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (Vol. 43, No. 7, 1992), p. 394. Weisbrod's arguments about the effects of political violence on German society are well developed. However, that such violence would have no effect on German workers, except in terms of a defensive reaction, seems to overlook the evidence of local aggression among KPD supporters – aggression that was a problem for KPD leaders, who demanded "revolutionary discipline."

¹⁹ Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Within this long-ranging study, the chapters on street politics and gender are two of the strongest. See also Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik: Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996). Though he does not devote much space in the book to the issue of violence, Mallmann stresses the independence of local Communists and their ability to sustain a labor milieu with local Social Democrats despite threats from the NSDAP and the public discord between leaders of the SPD and KPD.

Finally, some recent analyses stress the fragmentation of German society as an explanation for what they see as the failure of democracy to take hold among the middle classes in the 1920s. They argue that the bourgeois parties that supported the republic were never able to forge a sense of national unity. Preexisting regional and religious differences, as well as the isolationist traditions of working-class politics, only deepened as time went on and economic difficulties worsened. This climate of separate “milieus” made the republic vulnerable to the NSDAP, which promised the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a way to unite the nation. Those cultural milieus that remained fairly impenetrable to Nazi propaganda, including Jews and other minority groups and the political left, could then be easily persecuted as enemies to the *Volksgemeinschaft* after 1933. For Karl Rohe and others who look at social integration, the blame for Weimar’s collapse rests not with the SPD’s paralysis or even with the radical competition. Rather, these historians implicate the middle classes and claim that the roots of instability can be found well before the late 1920s.²⁰ Recently Peter Fritzsche too has stressed the importance of the inclusive nature of the Nazis’ *Volksgemeinschaft* rhetoric in attracting Germans before 1933. By pointing to a series of dramatic events beginning with July 1914 that mobilized large sections of the population, Fritzsche illustrates the force of a nationalist cause.²¹

In order to evaluate whether the republic’s collapse was indeed precipitated by conflict between various milieus, however, more case studies from around Germany will need to be conducted.²² We may find that further regional studies actually demonstrate that the provinces and their milieus were not as dissimilar as once thought. Oded Heilbronner’s *Catholicism, Political Culture, and the Countryside*, has begun this trend by demonstrating that Catholics in the South were not as immune to national socialism as previously believed.²³ Even if we continue to believe that particularism remained

²⁰ Cf. Lehnert and Megerle, “Problems of Identity and Consensus in a Fragmented Society” (1993). Although his research interests lie primarily in post-1945 German political culture, Karl Rohe has recently moved away from the concept of “Milieu” to the somewhat more fluid concept of “Lager” (camps) in order to stress “that culture rather than social structure shapes political preferences, i.e. historical experiences and processes which link political ideas and orientations to social structure.” Karl Rohe, “Party Cultures and Regional Traditions: The SPD in the Ruhr” in Eva Kolinsky, ed., *The Federal Republic of Germany. The End of an Era* (New York: Berg, 1991), p. 126.

²¹ Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²² Historians approaching the success of Italian fascism have greatly benefited from a number of local studies that have illustrated the variety of attractions to fascism. They also show the importance of local priorities, which sometimes led to unexpected political alliances. See Paul Corner, *Fascism in Ferrara, 1915–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power. Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2nd ed., 1987); and Frank M. Snowden, *The Fascist Revolution in Tuscany, 1919–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²³ Heilbronner, *Catholicism* (1998).

strong in parts of Germany, by 1930 the country's urban centers were characterized by their social and cultural diversity. Tensions still existed between social groups, but the burgeoning service economy and expansion of popular culture had done much to force contact between the classes. If one accepts a lack of social integration, it is still necessary to account for the timing of the republic's demise in the early 1930s.²⁴

One weakness of those analyses that depend solely on long-term developments is that they presume a 1930 social structure that was little changed from that of pre-1914 Germany. The evidence offered in this study, however, stresses the uniqueness of the Weimar era and the Depression years in particular. Large numbers of female-led households, industrial rationalization, and a decade of republican government are just a few reasons why Germany's political culture and social fabric in 1929 was very different from that of the prewar era.²⁵ The Weimar Republic was hobbled by its birth defects throughout its life, but the context in which these problems were debated or given priority had changed dramatically by the end of the 1920s. This assertion in no way questions the existence of an identity crisis among the middle classes or the importance of regional particularism. Rather, it emphasizes the need to address more fully the conditions of the Depression era itself and the new political climate that accompanied it.

The willingness to engage the Weimar Republic on its own terms is one of the greatest strengths of Detlev Peukert's work on the era. Peukert claims that

²⁴ Bernd Weisbrod also points to the slow growth of discontent among the bourgeoisie. However, for Weisbrod it was not the inability of the middle classes to rally support for the republic that led to its collapse. Instead, traumatic events such as World War I and the inflationary period of the early 1920s undermined any chance for republican allegiance to develop among the middle classes. See Bernd Weisbrod, "Die Krise der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und die Machtergreifung von 1933" in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Scheidewege der deutschen Geschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1995). An English translation, "The Crisis of Bourgeois Society in Interwar Germany," is found in Richard Bessel, ed., *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Dirk Schumann's book on political violence in the republic comes to a similar conclusion. He argues that the pervasiveness of right-wing paramilitarism and deep-seated anticommunism in the republic is proof that the vast portion of the bourgeoisie never abandoned its desire to reestablish a more authoritarian political and social structure modeled on the *Kaiserreich*. See Dirk Schumann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933: Kampf um die Strasse und Furcht vor dem Bürgerkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2001), pp. 367–8.

²⁵ Cf. Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Hartmut Kaelble, "Soziale Mobilität in Deutschland, 1900–1960" in Kaelble, ed., *Probleme der Modernisierung* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978); and Ute Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft: Beruf, Familie und Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1989). Daniel's text has been translated by Margaret Ries as *The War from Within: German Working-Class Women in the First World War* (New York: Berg, 1997). See also Elisabeth Domansky's chapter "Militarization and Reproduction in WWI Germany" in Geoff Eley, ed., *Society, Culture and the State in Germany 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).