The paradox of the German Revolution of 1918-19 is that it promised so much but accomplished so little. Spontaneous popular demonstrations toppled national and local governments, creating revolutionary councils in nearly every city in Germany. Yet neither the provisional central government nor local councils produced meaningful changes in the economy or social structure. The Weimar Republic replaced the Wilhelmine Empire, but the imperial governmental structure—bureaucracy and military—remained largely intact. Furthermore, the process of the Revolution itself alienated many of its strongest supporters—the Independent Social Democratic party (USPD), the Communists, and a sizable portion of the working class—from the government created by their revolutionary actions. Thus the Republic began its history with significant enemies on the left.

This combination of revolution and alienation has led to considerable debate about the nature of the Revolution. Most historians explain these events by studying the executives of political parties and national governments; much of the research on the Revolution concentrates on Berlin and Munich. This chapter relies upon a series of local studies, which provide a fresh perspective on the Revolution—that of rank-and-file revolutionaries. By directing attention to revolutionary demands, the relations between revolutionaries and leaders, and the interaction of local councils with both the Wilhelmine bureaucracy and the new national government, an attempt will be made to provide new answers to questions about the nature of Germany’s Revolution: Did the working class genuinely seek revolutionary change? Why were revolutionaries unable to wrest power from the Wilhelmine governmental structure? How did the Revolution’s supporters turn into the Republic’s enemies?

Historians have long argued about whether the events of 1913-19
warrant the name "revolution." But the evidence from Germany's cities demonstrates that workers were indeed revolutionary. The Revolution was essentially a popular movement supporting extensive democratization of the government, limited socialization of industry, and the intervention of government in the society and economy on behalf of the working class. A striking similarity of workers' basic goals emerges from the diversity of the revolutionary process across Germany. Because socialist leaders, the provisional national and provincial governments, and local councils all faltered in implementing these goals, workers reaffirmed their demands loudly and clearly in the first four months of 1919.

Yet these goals were never achieved. Other historians have pointed to the failure of socialist leaders, in the SPD and USPD and at the national and local levels, to take advantage of their working-class support. But the actions of socialist leaders provide only a part of the explanation for the lack of fundamental change. From the local perspective, the ability of Wilhelmine bureaucracies to retain power and to obstruct the activities of revolutionary councils was even more important, and the intervention of the new national and provincial governments in this conflict proved crucial. The explanation for the failure to implement working-class demands can be found in the interactions among new and old governing bodies.

Workers protested in vain against the reassertion of bureaucratic power and the eclipse of revolutionary goals. Disappointment turned to distrust and alienation as the new government ignored their demands and actively repressed their protests. Thus, the process of the Revolution, whereby workers came to blame the government they had helped to create for the frustration of their ambitions, was itself responsible for turning many of the Revolution's supporters into the Republic's enemies. One of the long-term problems of the Weimar Republic was the fact that the revolutionary dynamic had alienated much of its potential working-class basis.

Evidence from cities all over Germany shows the revolutionary intentions of the men and women who toppled their government in November 1918. Revolutionary activity was not isolated to any particular geographic area. Workers and soldiers in nearly every city spontaneously created workers' and soldiers' councils, without the prompting or even the knowledge of socialist leaders. The pronouncements of these councils in early November provide a good indication of workers' goals and expectations; despite considerable variety in the political orientation of revolutionaries in different cities, councils consistently demanded a far-reaching democratization of German government and society. Furthermore, workers repeatedly
reaffirmed their support for these radical political goals in the following months.

By November 1918 the Wilhelmine Empire maintained control over its citizens through military might alone. Even where workers had demonstrated extreme dissatisfaction with the government during the war, such as in Braunschweig or Düsseldorf, they had been subdued without difficulty through military intervention. Workers feared the harsh punishments meted out by military tribunals and the drafting of "troublemakers" into the army. Thus the Revolution appeared first in the military forces. But once the mutiny of the armed forces had begun, it stimulated revolutionary actions among workers and soldiers alike. The initiative often came from outside, but in nearly every city, the spontaneous actions of workers and soldiers overthrew their local governments.

Darmstadt provides an example of a city in which the military revolted without aid from workers. The soldiers acted alone in electing a council on the night of November 3; at approximately 2 A.M., between five thousand and seven thousand soldiers marched to the palace with the intention of taking the Grand Duke prisoner. Even in small and conservative Jülich, soldiers stationed there rebelled on November 3 by electing a council. In towns where working-class discontent remained just below the surface during the war, workers acted as soon as they were satisfied that the military was incapacitated. In Hamburg news of the sailors' revolt in Kiel sparked an unauthorized strike in the shipyards and a meeting at which workers called for democratic reforms and the abdication of the Hohenzollerns. In Düsseldorf the arrival of sailors from Cologne on the evening of November 8 led to workers, soldiers, and sailors alike roaming the streets, disarming officers, and freeing prisoners.

In all cases, soldiers' and workers' revolts soon combined. The day after mutinies in Göttingen and Nuremberg, workers and soldiers marched together through the cities. In Hanau workers provided the leadership, but soldiers also participated in a demonstration on November 7; representatives of the SPD and USPD formed the Workers' Council and negotiated directly with the Soldiers' Council to form a joint revolutionary organ. The workers in Jülich managed to create a Workers' Council one day after the military's actions, despite the fact that no working-class party had ever existed in the town.

Rank-and-file revolutionaries had acted on their own initiative; socialist leaders were almost universally surprised at the outbreak of the Revolution. Even those organized political groups that had urged revolution were not responsible for its outbreak. Spartacists in Stuttgart, who helped to engineer a city-wide strike and the creation of a Workers' Council on November 4, failed to control the movement in their city because
Towards the Holocaust

their actions anticipated the military revolt. Spartacist leaders were arrested in Stuttgart on November 6 and only released three days later, after a revolutionary government had been established without their participation or advice. In Düsseldorf the USPD leaders did not even know about negotiations between the police chief and an improvised Workers' and Soldiers' Council until they were nearly completed.

Although councils were formed as a result of demonstrations and demands by workers and soldiers, in most towns workers turned to their traditional Socialist leaders when they set up official revolutionary governments. In Düsseldorf, for example, the late-arriving independents were able to place themselves at the head of the Council. Nevertheless, rank-and-file workers and soldiers did hold council posts in most cities. Socialist leaders who joined the Revolution did not immediately impose their own goals upon the councils; especially in the early days of the Revolution, council leaders simply appropriated the demands of the workers and soldiers who had brought them to power. Thus the early statements issued by councils or made by council leaders reflect the desires of Germany's rank-and-file revolutionaries.

All councils did not agree on goals for the Revolution. The degree of radicalism among both workers and leaders varied greatly from city to city. Few councils went as far as those of Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz, which on November 3 jointly welcomed the collapse of capitalism and the seizure of power by the revolutionary proletariat. But even less radical councils expressed a commitment to significant change in the governing system. In Darmstadt, the SPD-controlled Workers' and Soldiers' Council demanded "the Republic, equal rights for troops and officers, participation of soldiers in the power of command and discipline." In the town of Diez, outside of Frankfurt, the Soldiers' and People's Council announced that it would work towards "complete democratization, abolition of militarism." The Council in Nuremberg announced that it would "do its utmost in order that the complete transformation of our governmental and political situation take place quickly and peacefully." In Dortmund, the program issued by the Council on November 10 proclaimed its long-term goals to be "political and social revolution (Umwälzung) in the sense of democracy and socialism." Dortmunders proposed a variety of revolutionary actions: a takeover of military power and creation of popular security forces, and control by the Council of all industrial firms, banks and transport institutions.

The minimal program common to nearly every council was "democratization" of the government, economy, society, and military. Soldiers seemed to have the clearest idea of what they meant by democratization; their demands typically included part or all of the "Hamburg points" adopted by the first Congress of Councils, which encompassed the election of officers
by soldiers, the exercise of command over garrisons by local 
workers' and soldiers' councils and the abolition of all insignia 
of rank. Workers' vision of democratization was less concrete, 
but seemed always to mean the establishment of popular, democratic 
control over the institutions of the government and the economy, 
in order to make them responsive to the interests of the working 
majority.

The head of the Council in Göttingen, Simon Städtler, provided a 
particularly clear statement of the basic goals of most of 
Germany's revolutionaries. Städtler had left the SPD for the 
USPD in November 1918; a china painter by trade, he was a 
soldier when the Revolution began. The first order of business, 
according to Städtler, was to end the war and put a stop to 
militarism. The representatives of the monarchic "authoritarian 
state," especially the Kaiser, had to step down to make way for 
a people's state. For the time being, revolutionaries must 
cooperate with the "representatives of the overthrown order," 
because their expertise and experience were required for military 
and economic demobilization. Later, the structures of the 
authoritarian "military and administrative state" had to be 
"fundamentally altered" and replaced with democratic structures. 
He also favored elections to a constitutional assembly that would 
determine the form of Germany's parliamentary democracy. 
Städtler had no specific idea of how to implement these goals; 
his certainly did not advocate the most radical path. But it is 
clear he meant his revolution to bring about fundamental change. 
Städtler wanted not only to end the war, but to end militarism. 
He wanted not only to set up a republic, but to change the 
structures of the military and the administration. He was 
willing to cooperate with the Wilhelmine bureaucrats, but only 
temporarily. Rank-and-file workers all over Germany shared 
Städtler's goals. Although some revolutionaries demanded more, 
this minimum program would have itself revolutionized Germany.

Once workers had established councils and made clear their 
expectations, most drastically curtailed their direct participation 
in revolutionary activities. In almost every city, leaders of 
the socialist parties took over the direction of the Workers' 
Councils; rank-and-file workers who remained active took 
subordinate positions. There is no evidence of dissatisfaction 
with this trend; it allowed workers to turn their attention to 
struggles in the workplace: increasing wages and decreasing 
hours. The months of November and December were characterized 
by strikes, demands and renewed demands for the eight-hour day, 
an increase in wages despite the decrease in hours, and better 
conditions on the shop floor. Trade union leaders in 
Düsseldorf found it difficult even to keep up with the varied 
and rapidly changing demands in individual factories. Workers 
in Dortmund also left trade unionists behind; with demands and 
work stoppages they forced concessions on wages and hours from 
their employers.
The transfer of activities from the political arena to the workplace did not mean that workers ceased to care about attempts to democratize the state apparatus. They were willing to show their support for revolutionary changes whenever their leaders asked for it or when workers decided themselves that the gains of early November were threatened. Usually such actions took the form of a demonstration in favor of the local Workers' and Soldiers' Council. Where councils came under attack from more conservative parties or citizens, workers sometimes played a crucial role in preserving the power of the councils by demonstrating their support. In Jüllich, many workers turned out for a public meeting called by the Center party, which was known to be highly critical of the Council. They interrupted the Social Democrat who defended the Council with frequent applause and hooted down the speaker who attacked the Council with riotous calls of "scoundrel!" and "counter-revolutionary!". 26 Although these expressions of class conflict in previously quiet Jüllich must have astonished the town fathers, it was this popular support that enabled the Council to continue its existence until the town was occupied by Belgian troops on December 2. In Blieskastel workers turned out for three important demonstrations; each defused serious opposition. Several thousand workers marched in support of the creation of the Council on November 10. Thousands responded to the Council's call to defend socialism and freedom against the counterrevolution on December 11. The local newspaper reported that many SPD members took part, despite the fact that the SPD had officially left the Council. On January 13, many workers put down their tools in order to participate in a series of mass meetings sponsored by the Council, which was now controlled by the Spartacists. 27 In Erfurt, where moderate independents worked comfortably together with the SPD in the Council, workers went beyond the requests of the Council in order to defend the Revolution. On January 14 workers learned of the planned departure of troops from Erfurt for Berlin. Fearing these troops would be used against revolutionaries by Ebert's government, they called a one-day general strike; twenty thousand marched in the streets and the Council agreed to prevent the departure of the troops. 28

The evidence from worker demands and council pronouncements shows the revolutionary nature of workers' goals. Revolutionaries all across Germany consciously and consistently defended their radical political demands, despite the fact that workers expended most of their energy in November and December on the improvement of their position in the workplace. But after the early days of the Revolution, they required either a specific request from their leaders or serious provocation before acting on political issues. Having made clear in the first days of the Revolution the framework in which they expected their leaders to operate, most workers trusted their political parties to formulate and resolve questions concerning the state. More importantly, both rank-and-file workers and their socialist leaders assumed that
the Revolution was over in early November and that the transition to a democratized state and society could proceed without further battle. This assumption promoted the turn away from politics to the workplace and explains why a working class that genuinely desired revolution left the transformation of the state in the hands of its leaders.

THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

The seizure of power had not actually been completed on November 9 or in the days following. The Wilhelmine governmental machinery was still intact, under the control of bureaucrats loyal to the old order. During the months of November and December, councils and local bureaucracies struggled over the extent to which working-class demands for democratization would be satisfied.

Councils had drastically different perceptions of their functions. Some, frequently those dominated by the SPD, perceived themselves as caretaker administrations, holding power only provisionally. Because the SPD's policy was to await national elections before undertaking democratization, its representatives in the councils tried to follow a caretaker approach, regardless of demands expressed by workers. Those councils that did not act as revolutionary agents concentrated instead on maintaining order and the well-being of the population. The Soldiers' Council in Jülich announced it was only empowered to maintain calm and security in the town, and the committees set up by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council there were directed exclusively towards the temporary concerns of the population: security, housing for returning troops, and distribution of food and clothing.29 In Cassel, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council sought to work with the existing City Council rather than to replace it. Two Council members became aldermen of the City Council and were responsible for military and civilian affairs.30 In Göttingen two Council members joined the town government, but only in an advisory capacity, despite the previous agreement that all decisions of the local government had to be countersigned by a Council member. The Council's actions all concerned temporary problems—control of the black market and closing down dance halls in order to conserve light and heat.31 The mixed Council in Erfurt, composed of both USPD and SPD members, concentrated on a formal control of the bureaucracy, securing of order, and providing food. It allowed the continued temporary employment of prisoners of war, and used its own security force to guard the city's banks.32 In Dortmund the Council acted only with the approval of the local government, completely disregarding its earlier radical resolutions.33

Those councils that adopted a caretaker approach failed to begin the task of democratization. But this did not mean that such councils were useless or helpless. Not only did they aid the bureaucracy in the process of demobilization, but they also demonstrated their ability to override the bureaucracy when
Towards the Holocaust

ey saw fit. Göttingen's Council authorized confiscation of food stuffs obtained illegally. Although Frankfurt's mixed Council was careful not to interfere with the internal administration of the city, it established committees that sought to control the operations of the police and the post office. Local officials were initially unable to dispute the Council's control of the regional railroad agency, while the Council worked towards the complete transfer of the state railway into the hands of the workers.

Activist councils considered themselves the rightful organs of governance and tried immediately to begin democratization at the local level. These councils were often strongly influenced by the USPD and were located in cities where a high concentration of armaments industries had restructured the local economy and attracted a large number of workers during the war. Activist councils pursued directly the goals expressed by workers in November. "Interference" (Eingriffe) in the government or the economy, as it came to be called by those who opposed it, was frequent and often successful in the early days of the Revolution. In the Thuringian towns of Gotha and Gera, the Workers' Councils dissolved the Wilhelmine City Councils. In Leipzig the Workers' Council disbanded the City Council and threatened the local bureaucracy with a takeover of the Reichsbank if it refused to pay Council salaries with public funds. The Council in Braunschweig officially ended the Duke's power by declaring the property and estates of the ducal family to be state property. Some councils sought direct democratization in the economic and military spheres. The Council in Hanau took over the management of a powder mill on November 9, at the same time hiring shoemakers and tailors to supply clothing to the population. On November 14 the Council forbade the firing of anyone in the city. In Düsseldorf, during the first few days of the Revolution, the Council deposed the police chief for his harsh behavior towards the Socialists during the war, announced its intention to establish its own system of justice, and dissolved the political section of the police force.

Even activist councils, however, reduced their direct action after the first days of victory. Few revolutionaries, leaders or rank-and-file, seemed to fear the ability or the will of the bureaucracy to thwart the Revolution, and nearly all council members shared the view of Städtler in Göttingen that local bureaucrats possessed expertise essential to the period of demobilization. The Düsseldorf Council, relying on its ability to control its former enemy, invited the police chief to resume his position the next day. In Nuremberg the Council made an agreement with the mayor that "municipal colleagues" would remain at their jobs "under the terms of the laws in force."

Councils in general contented themselves with supervising the city and county governmental apparatus. The typical pattern was for one or two revolutionaries to be placed in the office of
the mayor and county president and sometimes on the city council. Often council committees assigned to certain problems—such as housing or clothing—coordinated their activities with the Wilhelmine department also responsible for that area. In most towns, the councils or their delegates carried out the function of "overseer" in a remarkably casual fashion.

It is apparent that the failure of the councils to satisfy working-class demands was in part the fault of the councils themselves. Especially in the first days of the Revolution, councils could wrest power from local governments, although the political composition of a council frequently determined whether it sought such power. Activist councils that moved rapidly were able to establish considerable authority. Even councils that worked in cooperation with the local Wilhelmine government often succeeded in carving out their own sphere of control. Thus those council leaders who failed to take advantage of the revolutionary power given them by workers were to some extent responsible for the paucity of change. But this failure of leadership is not the whole story. Both caretaker and activist councils met significant resistance in their attempt to make changes. Local bureaucracies and the new national and provincial governments hindered the councils' ability to implement revolutionary demands.

In virtually no case did local civilian authorities resist the Revolution at its inception. Most mayors, city councils, and county presidents announced not only their willingness to cooperate with the revolutionaries, but also their acceptance of the councils as the highest local authority. They "stood on the ground of the Revolution," as the contemporary phrase had it. But this capitulation was a curious one. Many Wilhelmine officials couched their acceptance of the new order in language similar to that of District Commissioner (Landrat) Völkers from Jülich:

I explained to him /[he head of the Jülich Council/ that under the current conditions I would have to give way to coercion, and that I was ready to support the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, insofar as it concerned the maintenance of calm and order, and the securing of food for the people. But otherwise I would be true to my oath of office, sworn to my king, and would carry out my duties to the best of my knowledge and conscience. . . . 41

The district commissioner intended to limit his cooperation with the revolutionaries as much as possible; his support for the local Council, as he explicitly stated, had been obtained by force. For Völkers and the many bureaucrats who shared his attitudes capitulation was a tactical maneuver that allowed them to retain control of governmental machinery. They used the freedom of action afforded them by the councils' policy of
oversight to influence council policies in a moderate direction, to obstruct specific council plans, and to reassert their right to determine policy.

Bureaucrats were often successful in persuading revolutionaries to follow certain policies, as in Jülich where the Council members had few plans of their own. In Wiesbaden the mayor convinced the Council to let him proof the list of potential members of the new security force in order to screen out a large number of Leftists. Even in more radical cities, councils were subject to persuasion. The Hamburg Council chose to re-establish the city legislature after representatives of banks and commercial firms convinced the Council head that the action was necessary to facilitate credit for the city. Where persuasion failed, local authorities sometimes tried to use their continued control over the governmental machinery to prevent council activities. In Erfurt and Leipzig, the city governments tried to prevent specific Council activities by withholding funds. Willers in Jülich simply refused to sign regulations placed before him by Council members. The most common means of obstruction, however, was to argue with the council over each new policy decision, questioning whether the policy was correct and whether the council had the authority to implement the policy. The Wilhelmine departments in charge of Düsseldorf's clothing and food distribution disputed at every step the Council's right to make decisions in these areas, and this considerably slowed the Council's actions. In Nuremberg a member of the Council described the problem: "If the Workers' Council wanted to do something, the officials always restrained it."

This gradual revival of the particular powers of the bureaucracy led to a reassertion of its primacy in the governing sphere. In Hanau the Council appointed one of its members, Dr. Wagner, as provisional district commissioner. Wagner constantly conflicted with the local county commissioner, Schmid, about the proper division of duties. When the Council asked Schmid to resign, he refused, and at the end of December, he moved his office to Frankfurt in order to be able to carry out his duties without Wagner's or the Council's interference. Schmid ceased altogether to acknowledge the authority of the Council.

Councils reacted to the bureaucracy's reassertion of power in different ways. The Council in Jülich did not try to force the recalcitrant district commissioner to cooperate. But other councils fought back. Although responding to repeated attempts at obstruction took up an increasing amount of energy, councils were sometimes successful. The Düsseldorfer took over the city's clothing and food supplies despite bureaucratic objections; the Council confiscated and redistributed black-market goods found in house-to-house searches and at factories, in the face of bureaucratic insistence that such actions should be reserved for the "legitimate" authorities.
Schlüchtern, and Biebrich-Wiesbaden in Hesse-Nassau, district commissioners lost their jobs due to council actions.\textsuperscript{52} In Nuremberg, the mayor agreed to the early retirement of a police official who had made himself particularly unpopular with the working population.\textsuperscript{53}

Councils also sought to prevail over their local adversaries by appealing to the new national government in Berlin. The Council in Erfurt complained to the Council of People's Commissars on December 30 that the local government refused to pay the sum previously agreed upon for the creation of the Volkswehr.\textsuperscript{54} The national government was particularly appropriate as an arbiter between councils and the Wilhelmine bureaucracies, because both parties recognized it as the highest national authority. Unfortunately for activist local councils, however, the new government, even when headed by a coalition of USPD and SPD members, was disinclined to countenance "interference" by councils in the affairs of local bureaucracies. When in December a Bürgerrat was founded in Elberfeld in explicit competition with the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, the latter forbade all activities of the former. Members of the Bürgerrat complained to the Central Council in Berlin, which supported the Bürgerrat on all points.\textsuperscript{55} The Düsseldorfers' attempt to create a special court was forbidden by the Council of People's Commissars.\textsuperscript{56}

The attitudes of the new provincial governments, usually although not always dominated by the SPD, served as well to stiffen the resistance of local bureaucracies. When District Commissioner Schmid from Hanau complained to Berlin in December about Council encroachments on his duties, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior responded that the Council was to "enable the District Commissioner Schmid to resume his duties again in their entirety." The needs of demobilization and food distribution required that the administration in Hanau remain in "trained hands."\textsuperscript{57} Wilhelmine school authorities in Düsseldorf fought the Council's attempt to end religious instruction; the Prussian Ministry of Education decided the Council was "not empowered to interfere in the educational system."\textsuperscript{58} The provisional governments of Saxony and Baden promulgated regulations on November 16 and 18, respectively, restricting the functions of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils to those of control and advice.\textsuperscript{59} The new Prussian government issued a series of rules in November that officially protected local Wilhelmine governments from changes initiated by councils.\textsuperscript{60} These regulations were welcomed by city governments, who wasted no time in bringing the weight of the provincial and national governments to bear in their struggle with local councils. On January 21, 1919, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Hannover, firmly controlled by the SPD, summed up the situation by complaining "that recent decrees of the Reich and Prussian governments in effect curtailed the activities of the councils and prevented their representatives from doing useful work."\textsuperscript{61}
Under cover of their capitulation to the revolutionaries, city governments were extremely effective in retaining power and limiting council activities. The determination and strength local bureaucracies demonstrated in November and December explains to a large extent the inability of councils to begin democratization. In the long run, USPD-dominated councils, which actively sought to restructure the local governments, were hardly more successful than the SPD-controlled councils. Instead of making good on activist statements and plans articulated in early November, councils found it necessary to expend their energies on battles with the bureaucrats. In these battles, however, the bureaucrats had powerful allies. The national and provincial governments used their influence repeatedly to defend the position of the local Wilhelmine governments. By January 1919 the outcome of this struggle for power was apparent: The goals of democratization and limited socialization remained unfulfilled.

ALIENATION

In the winter and spring of 1919, increasing numbers of workers began to recognize that neither local councils nor the national government were implementing the goals expressed so strongly at the beginning of the Revolution. Workers began to return to the political arena to protest the lack of progress and to reassert their demands. Ultimately, the fact that their leaders, particularly the SPD, ignored or repressed these renewed demands for democratization led to working-class alienation from those leaders and from the Republic that they had established. But this process was a gradual one.

Most workers apparently still had faith in their traditional party on January 19, 1919, when they elected representatives to the Constitutional Assembly. Nationally, the SPD far outdistanced the USPD, although the latter party had been far more vocal and active in its support of democratization. As can be seen in Table 9.1, this was evident even in Hamburg, where the local chapter of the SPD had openly opposed direct democratization.
In the radical cities of Erfurt and Düsseldorf, the SPD's showing was more respectable than might have been expected. Despite widespread worker support for democratization and for the councils, most workers had voted in traditional patterns. Since workers had never abandoned their original goals, it seems likely that they expected their prewar leaders to recognize and implement their demands. Yet even as the SPD was celebrating its election victories, workers began to express their disappointment with the slow pace of change. Workers made their views known with widely varying methods: complaints, demonstrations, strikes, and putsches. In most cases, the goals behind these diverse actions were similar to those expressed in November. The more radical methods employed in the spring of 1919 were a response to the earlier failure of the Revolution to satisfy its supporters.

In many towns, disappointment with the lack of democratization of the state and military were mildly expressed. In Göttingen, workers demonstrated on March 5 about the inequitable distribution of food; at the same time they demanded that "the officials should declare themselves for democracy, or resign; social reforms should not only be promised, but also realized." In February, the Nuremberg Soldiers' Council used the occasion of Kurt Eisner's assassination to issue a ten-point program which would "finally" secure the Revolution; the program included demands for the creation of socialist ministries, thorough scrutiny of officials, abolition of the privileges of the aristocracy and the wealthy, and immediate socialization of the

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Table 9.1
Percentage of Vote Given to Socialist Parties, January 19, 1919
(Selected Cities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>SPD</th>
<th>USPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Göttingen</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanau</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erfurt</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Düsseldorf</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Germany</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Popplow, 234; Comfort, 55; Struck, 414; Gutsche, 195; Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung. January 21, 1919; Morgan, 448.
largest factories. In Baden a state conference of councils held in January announced that the councils would continue to exist until the success of the Revolution was guaranteed by the National Assembly; that is, until local elections could take place, the democratic republic and the eight-hour day were securely established, the people's army created on a democratic basis, and the process of socialization begun in appropriate industries. These demands fairly sum up what Germany's working-class revolutionaries had expected all along.

Elsewhere workers' dissatisfaction with the results of the Revolution erupted in unorganized demonstrations and riots. In Hanau serious disturbances followed a meeting on February 17 in which the new national government was criticized. The next day the county court and police jail were stormed; ration cards were taken from the town hall, thrown in the street, and burned; food was stolen from the storage center. The following day the château belonging to the Landraf, the district President, was plundered. In Hamburg unrest broke out on several occasions. Workers demonstrated against the occupation of Bremen by Gustav Noske's troops in February; in April a demonstration of the unemployed turned into a two-day riot; and in June workers rioted over the quality of food produced by local manufacturers. When the first detachments of Noske's troops arrived in June, they were disarmed by the workers. Although these spontaneous actions by enraged workers did not always have direct political aims, even demonstrations about food were directed against the moderate policies of the new government and against the unwillingness of the bureaucracies to respond to the needs of the workers.

In a large number of cities, workers were alienated enough to progress to concerted action in the form of putsches and strikes. In Düsseldorf, the fifteen-hundred man security force incited the radicals in the Council, both Spartacist and independents, to reverse the slow decline of the Revolution by taking over the Council and the city government on January 7. Leaders of the putsch accused members of the bureaucracy of counterrevolutionary actions and the old Council of indecisiveness. "In order to secure the Revolution," the reconstituted Council took direct action: Hostages from the bourgeoisie were seized, the police disarmed, banks and the telegraph office occupied, and the police chief, mayor, and county president replaced by appointees of the Council. The new Council also took a more activist stance towards Düsseldorf's material problems, overruling the bureaucrats on issues of food distribution, relief work, and housing construction. Although the leaders of the putsch used more radical and violent methods than the revolutionaries in November, their goals were not substantially different: democratization of the government and subsequent intervention in the economy in the interests of the working class.
These strikes and putsches, the better-known revolts in Berlin and Munich, plus the declarations of soldiers in Nuremberg and workers in Göttingen, show that rank-and-file revolutionary activity was not confined to November. Attempts to impose revolutionary changes extended into the spring of 1919, when workers reiterated their former demands with more forceful methods. The inability of socialist leaders of all parties to secure those initial goals caused these actions against the new government.

The SPD-dominated national government responded to these renewed demands for democratization and socialization by ignoring or repressing them. Neither the provisional government in Berlin nor the elected government in Weimar ever implemented the Congress of Councils' vote favoring democratization of the military; democratization of the bureaucracy never got off the ground. The recommendations of the Commission of Nine about socialization of coal mines in the Ruhr were ignored; in Halle concessions concerning factory councils made to coal miners in February 1919 were rescinded in May. The sweep of Noske's troops from Bremen through the Ruhr and into central Germany and Munich left rage and resentment against the government in its wake. Government troops occupied Gotha on February 13 because of the strength of the radical workers' movement there; workers responded with a general strike that lasted until March 8. In other places, such as the Ruhr and Munich, armed workers resisted the advance of government troops. The new national government directed soldiers to end strikes and to fire on stubborn workers if necessary. These actions proved conclusively to many workers that the SPD government did not represent their interests. The use of troops against workers was the last of many steps on the path from revolution to alienation.

Many workers demonstrated their changed attitudes at the next national election in June 1920. The SPD's share of the vote in Hamburg dropped to 38 percent, while the USPD's rose to 15 percent. In Düsseldorf the SPD's votes declined to 7 percent, and the USPD's increased to 36 percent. All across the nation, the increase in the independents' share of votes (from 7.6 to 18.8 percent) and membership (from approximately 100,000 in 1913 to 900,000 in September 1920) reflected working-class disillusion with the SPD's stewardship of the Revolution. Indeed, it could be argued that the use of troops against the very supporters of the Revolution had the effect of repressing radicalism only in the short run. Many of the occupied cities later became centers of strong communist influence. Hanau, for example, became a "primary strong-point of the communist movement for a wide area in southwest Germany." The extent of workers' bitterness also became apparent in the aftermath of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920; workers in the Ruhr struck to save the Republic from the right-wing coup, but then used the
occasion to reestablish workers' councils and to reiterate demands for socialization and democratization, especially of the army. A portion of the Red Army formed to fight counter-revolution turned against government troops. The Weimar government continued the provisional government's policy of repressing revolutionary protests; as a result, it had to bear the hostility of a significant part of the working class.

The fact that many members of the working class failed to value the Weimar Republic as crucial to the defense of their interests surely contributed to its instability. This alienation had its institutional reflection in the fact that approximately half of the members of the USPD, the party most supportive of the Revolution, joined the KPD, a party committed to the overthrow of the Republic. Weak working-class support may well have been part of Weimar's inability to resist Nazism. As the strength of its right-wing enemies grew, the Republic could ill afford the alienation of November's revolutionaries.
The debate has centered primarily around two issues: whether there existed significant rank-and-file revolutionary sentiment and whether the SPD could have led the Revolution in a different direction. K. D. Erdmann, "Die Geschichte der Weimarer Republik als Problem der Wissenschaft," Vierteljahresheft für Zeitgeschichte, 3 (1955) provides an example of those who believe that the only choice for the SPD was a bolshevist dictatorship or a parliamentary republic in alliance with the old officer corps. Eberhard Kolb, Die Arbeiter-htmlte in den deutschen Innenpolitik 1913-19 (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1962); and Reinhard Rüpp, Probleme der Revolution in Deutschland 1913/19 (Weisbaden: F. Steiner, 1960) are two of the most prominent of those historians who argue that there was a "third way" for the SPD, a parliamentary democracy based upon genuine social reforms. Recent scholarship has criticized the theory of the "third way." In 1975 Wolfgang Mommsen suggested that the revolutionary councils were "little inclined to push the Revolution much further, and consequently the arguments of Rüpp and others are partially based on myth rather than reality," in his comment on Gerald Feldman, "Economic and Social Problems of German Demobilization, 1913-19," Journal of Modern History, 14 (1975), 30. See also Heinrich August Winkler, Die Sozialdemokratie und die Revolution von 1913/19: Ein Rückblick nach sechzig Jahren (Berlin/Bonn: Dietz, 1979).

For example, Susanne Müller, Die Bürde der Macht: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie 1913-20 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1978); and Hartfrid Krause, USPD: Zur Geschichte der Unabhängigen Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1975). Although F. L. Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, 1913-19 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972) is one of
the few sources in English that includes data from a variety of German cities, his concentration is still on Berlin and Munich.


Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung, November 9, 1918; Dr. Paul Wentzhe, "Persönliche Erinnerungen," Stadtaad Düsseldorf XXIII, 40; Report by Strafanstalt-Inspektor Engelhardt to Düsseldorf's mayor, January 31, 1919, Stadtaad Düsseldorf XXI, 333.


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13 Eberhard Kolb and Klaus Schünhoven, Regionale und Lokale Räteorganisationen in Württemberg, 1913/19 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1976), chapter 3.
15 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 394.
21 Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, pp. 72-73.
22 Popplow, "Göttingen," p. 213.
23 Feldman, Kolb, and Rürup, in "Die Massenbewegungen," p. 91, have emphasized the extent to which workers turned to economic demands.
24 The Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung cites numerous instances of worker demands and strikes in November and December 1918, as well as the Free Unions' attempt both to moderate and support those demands.
27 Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung, November 10-12, 1918; Freie Presse, December 12, 1918; Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, 15974, p. 69.
30 Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, p. 152.
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35 Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, pp. 160-61.
36 Ibid., pp. 149, 163-64.
38 Lehr, "Betr. Bildung eines Arbeiter- und Soldatenrates," Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf XXI, 336; Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung, November 11, 1918; Lehr to county president, March 6, 1919, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf, Nachlaß Lehr 57, p. 36.
42 Ibid., p. 3.
44 Comfort, Revolutionary Hamburg, pp. 35-47.
45 Gutsche, Die revolutionäre pp. 143-44; Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, p. 163.
47 For example, see the police chief's attempt to impose rules on the Council about confiscations and the report of the director of the city's clothing department, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf, XXI, 332.
51 Police chief to Council November 14, 1918; correspondence between the Hauptversorgungsamt and Council, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf, XXI, 332.
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54 Gutsche, Die revolutionäre, p. 162.
56 Düsseldorfer Volkszeitung, November 26, 1918; Rat der Volksbeauftragten an sämtliche Bundesregierungen, December 5, 1918, Hauptstaatsarchiv 15974, p. 46.
58 Correspondence between Prussian Ministry of Education and Düsseldorf's Geheimer Studienrat, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf III, 1711, pp. 7, 18.
59 Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, pp. 156, 162.
60 Kolb, Die Arbeiterkriege, pp. 262-64.
61 Cited and paraphrased by Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, p. 151.
62 Other historians have argued that the election results prove most workers were satisfied with the course of the Revolution. See, for example, Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, p. 326.
64 Schwarz, "Weltkrieg und Revolution," p. 308.
65 Despite lack of progress on these issues, a conference of councils in Baden in August 1919 voted that all councils be dissolved. Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, pp. 157-58.
67 Comfort, Revolution in Central Europe, pp. 72-74.
68 Letter to Workers' Council from Executive Committee, Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf 15974, pp. 61-62; Adalbert Oehler, Meine Beziehungen zur Revolution in Düsseldorf, February 1919, p. 16; Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf, 15974, p. 69.
69 Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, pp. 163, 165.
Carsten, Revolution in Central Europe, p. 165.


Comfort, Revolutionary Hamburg, p. 180. Even if, as Comfort argues, many of the independents' supporters came from new voters and the SPD's losses are partly attributable to nonparticipation of their previous supporters (pp. 161-62), there is no doubt that the SPD's identification with the military occupation of Hamburg was a major cause of its decline in popularity.

Verwaltungsbericht der Stadt Düsseldorf, 1919-21, p. 5.


Struck, "Die Revolution," p. 417. KPD membership and voting strength during the entire period of the Weimar Republic clearly had other and more complex causes than resentment of the occupations of 1919. But the alienation from the new national government that the troop actions caused surely aided the Communists.


Morgan, The Socialist Left, p. 334.