On May 8, 1945, World War II ended with Nationalist Socialist Germany’s unconditional surrender to the Allies. That has not, until recently, been an occasion for commemoration in West Germany. But each year, in the last days of April or in early May, at a special site, a group of men with a special bond have met to commemorate a day of special significance for them. From Poland, from France, from Italy, from East Germany, from Czechoslovakia, from all the countries occupied by Hitler’s armies, old men, in dwindling numbers, have come to Dachau, to the Appellplatz of the former concentration camp, to remember the day of liberation. Some of the men spent twelve years imprisoned in this camp or elsewhere in the system that spread out from Dachau. They, of course, and others arrested as the original opponents of the Nazis, did not come from Poland, or the Soviet Union, or from Austria: every person sent to a concentration camp before 1938 was a German citizen. Whether Communists (the largest group) or Social Democrats, they sustained themselves with the belief that the defeat of the Nazis would bring a new beginning in which the solidarity of the left would be the basis of a progressive democracy. The story I want to tell here concerns the hopes of these men on liberation day 1945 and what happened to them in the first year of the Allied victory over fascism.¹

Most of those who spoke of the Hitler dictatorship in terms of “fascism” were Communists. Their belief that they had recognized more clearly than anyone else what fascism was, and against whom it
was directed, was supported by the number of their comrades the regime had imprisoned. Anti-Nazis might oppose the dictatorship; “antifascists” were engaged in a more historic struggle. With the defeat of Hitler’s Reich the dark night of reaction was over; everywhere in Europe the men of the left who had played leading roles in the resistance to the Nazis stood at the head of the liberators. Everywhere Communists expected, and for a time made, political gains. The situation in Germany after the war was different, however. The Germans were not liberated, they were conquered. In the eastern part of their truncated country that would mean the establishment of a Communist regime in a new state under Soviet protection. In the western zones of occupation there was also to be a new state, founded on liberal and democratic (as well as anti-Soviet) principles, and under American protection. Dachau, being in the zone originally occupied and governed by the U.S. Army, was a microcosm of this evolution. There we can see the principles of the conquerors of Nazism being converted into the practices of the successor West German state. It was talking about what happened there with those disappointed men who still call themselves antifascists that led me to reflect more closely on a transition they have long perceived as critical.

It is not a transition to which historians have paid a great deal of attention: we will probably always be more fascinated by what took place when the Nazis came into power than by what happened when they lost it. The aftermath as been discussed mainly in terms of Allied policy and the division of Germany into two states when the Allies fell out. In both East and West Germany the emphasis is on the opening of a new chapter rather than the closing of an old one. Or else it is assumed that the old one simply did close with the defeat of Nazism in 1945—as in very important respects it did. However, just as it is more illuminating to look at the Nazi “seizure of power” over a period of months, and perhaps best in one place (as W. S. Allen does), it is instructive to follow the Nazi fall from power over several months, and again in one place. The place, Dachau, has become a symbol for what happened when the Nazis took over; that gives it a special interest after their fall, too. Just as we can see the seizure of power as “a coup d’état by installments” directed at eliminating the socialist threat from German life, it becomes evident that the liberation from Nazism entailed (at least in Dachau) a remarkably parallel elimination of the threat from the left, though this time by very different means.

The difference in means can hardly be overemphasised—democracy rather than violent dictatorship. But we should not lose sight of the ends. If the most important thing about National Socialism was its guarantee to remove the left threat to majority conceptions of social
and individual interest—and it undoubtedly was—it makes sense not to close the campaign with Hitler's bullet in the bunker but to pursue it at least into the denouement of 1945–46. That places the question of the historical failure or success of National Socialism in a rather different perspective. ³

No one in Germany was thinking of the historical success of National Socialism in April 1945. There had been more than five years of war, which ordinary people had continued only because they had no power to stop it and because they were constantly reminded of the terrible retribution advancing toward them from the East. The propaganda pictures of Soviet atrocities were stark. When so many men had died—fathers, husbands, brothers, sons—should it have been so that their families would end like this? There was no alternative but to continue, simply continue.

Rosel Kirchhoff had grown up in Dachau. In 1944 and 1945, as a student in Stuttgart, she helped serve meals to the survivors of the terrible Allied raids. She noticed that the people no longer cried as they took their food amid the rubble and watched the bodies of their sisters or their parents being dug out. They were no longer capable of responding with grief, and they did not care about defeat. When the Wehrmacht finally began to disintegrate at the end of April, Rosel hitched a ride home to Dachau. It looked, she remembers, just the same as it always did. Though Munich, only seventeen kilometers to the south, was almost as badly bombed as Stuttgart, in the old market town on the Amper river it could have been peace time. ⁴ The local newspaper no longer appeared but in the last issues life can be seen going on as usual, in the small print of personal notices under the large print rhetoric of the war:

*Business notices:* Johann Fischer and son, farm equipment. Closed from 27.12.44 to 2.1.45 for stocktaking.


*Exchange:* Pram, ivory, good condition, for accordion, 3 or 4 chord.⁵

On April 29 the end was obviously near. American guns could be heard not very far away. The Schutzstaffel (SS), so prominent in Dachau for twelve years, had fled, leaving behind huge storehouses of almost every conceivable commodity—spirits, cosmetics, cigarette papers, leather, fabric, canned foods—things ordinary people had not seen in years. Many were still out on the streets with armloads of Italian cloth
or oxcarts of French champagne when the first American soldiers appeared.

They came like cats, silently, on their rubber soles. Strange creatures in their greenish overalls and curious helmets, they fanned out among the houses and started to requisition billets. Their armored vehicles rumbled through the town, down the hill, and across the river, in the direction of the concentration camp. From inside the camp the prisoners heard shooting. Their wait was tense. Many had already gone, forced into a “death march” to the south, and it was known by those remaining that Hitler wanted no concentration camp prisoner to fall into Allied hands alive. When the helmet of the first American soldier appeared over the gate there was cheering and immense relief. Before long the flags of all the imprisoned nationalities were flying over the camp.

It is significant that the euphoria of liberation was celebrated not in the town itself but largely by foreigners in that other Dachau which the local community had always felt was fastened on to it as an alien growth. It was assumed in the town that these foreigners, the liberators and the liberated, would now have the say in what was to happen. Only a few people, in the first days, had the presence of mind to sense that key moves in determining the political future of Bavaria—and these people were still as much Bavarian as German—would be made early in the rule of the outsiders. Whether the hitherto dominant community values of the conservative majority were reasserted or whether radical departures were allowed to get under way would depend (or so it was then thought) on this first struggle for influence. In Dachau the contending forces were to be represented by the American commandant, Captain Malcolm Vendig, his chief German administrative official, Landrat Heinrich Kneuer, and the leader of the antifascist resistance, Georg Scherer.

Everyone in Dachau said I must try to talk to Georg Scherer, though some thought he would not talk very willingly: “He doesn’t have anything to do with politics these days.” To members of his generation on the left he was clearly something of a folk hero and even conservative townspeople spoke of him with affection and respect. People who could never get themselves to utter the word “antifascist,” and did not particularly admire him for spending six years in the concentration camp or for leading Dachau’s only armed resistance against the SS, recalled his decency, energy, and fairness in the difficult days after the war. Nobody had a bad word to say about “der Scherer Schorsch.” So when, on a weekday evening, I succeeded in seeing him—even in his seventies he was very busy running his clothing factory—he was very
much as I expected to find him: shortish, vigorous, straight to the point, more comfortable in shirt sleeves than in his business suit. He thought he would complete the interview more efficiently in his office than in his home, so he led me through the back garden to the rear entrance of the big building, whose front facing the Münchener Strasse bears the name "Bardtke und Scherer, Kleiderfabrik." Under the harsh factory office lights, surrounded by fabric samples and racks of winter coats, he told me in a few sentences about his arrest, his release, the rising at the end of the war. He did not expect to be asked about his earlier life: that was not part of the history of which he was the recognized custodian. He was uncomfortable, outside his field, because at that time in his life there was nothing remarkable in his experience. He had gone hungry, he had worked hard just like everybody else. A childhood in Dachau meant severe and crowded schooling, a kind of poverty that was normal and therefore not unhappy in retrospect. You remembered things like being sent to buy beer—by the jugful, not by the bottle. You had a ten-minute run up to the pub to get what was called "three-quarters"—just short of a litre. On the way home you always drank a bit off the top and then ran water into it so your father did not notice. His early life, he insisted, was typical for working-class people of his generation.

Georg Scherer was eight when World War I broke out. It was the summer holidays and he had been sent to work for a farmer at Pippinsried, twenty-five kilometers away. On August 1, 1914, coming home from the fields at midday, the workers were met by people telling them to unhitch the horses and park their wagons across the road to hold up the French advance. The roadblock stayed there all through dinnertime, but at one o'clock the French still had not come so the horses were hitched up again and everyone went back to the fields. That was his last memory of summer. The four long years of war were years of grim struggle for most families. In his view, Dachauers who knew only World War II, when Germany could draw supplies from all of conquered Europe, had no idea of deprivation. Even the years of hardship afterward were luxury in comparison.

The euphoria of going off to fight for the Fatherland did not last long. When Georg's father went, immediately on the outbreak of the war, his mother was left alone with four small children. Georg was the eldest and became joint breadwinner with his mother. While she worked at the gunpowder factory down on the flat to the east of the town, Georg spent half of every day working for a farmer, half going to school. The farmer kept an ox in his barn where the family lived in Dachau, just off the Mittermayer Strasse, and had a field down on the Moos. Georg had to cart feed from the field to the ox every day and was paid with a loaf of
bread. On Wednesdays, because that was the day the peasants ate noodles, he would put on a knapsack and go from farmhouse to farmhouse, begging for bread. The pieces he brought home were cut up and dried out so that there would be something for soup in the winter. The other staple was potatoes found by picking over the fields after the crop had been harvested. Wheat fields also yielded a few gleanings, small ears of wheat that he would sometimes eat where he found them. In the evenings the children would climb over the walls of the convent to steal apples, which would also be stored for winter. Georg as a provider had to do what was necessary: “After all, I had four mouths to feed.” What his mother earned in the powder factory and what she received as a war pension did not go far. Each morning she sent him off to school with a single slice of bread, leaving the loaf marked with a notch. When he came home he carefully cut himself another slice and marked the loaf off again with a ruler. After he finished his day’s work for the farmer he cooked the evening meal—almost always bread, soup, and potatoes. There was never any question of meat: the family went right through the war without eating meat.

At the end of the war Georg had his first taste of the political violence that was to consume Germany in the aftermath and to fasten itself, as a very synonym, on Dachau. When the White Army arrived in 1919 to give the coup de grâce to the Bavarian Räterepublik (Soviet Republic), the twelve-year-old Georg was rather thoughtlessly wearing a red cockade. A White soldier hit him so hard in the face that he was knocked into the dirt. Georg’s father came back from the war and found a job emptying powder from surplus shells in the explosives factory. One day there was an accident and he was blown to bits. The workers’ factory committee decided the least they could do was to help the boy learn a trade so he too went into the factory—now called “Deutsche Werke”—apprenticed as a fitter and turner. When the Deutsche Werke closed down in 1923 (Himmler was to find another use for all those empty barracks ten years later) Scherer was forced to clear ditches, pick hops—anything to support the family through the inflation. Then in April 1925, when money was again worth something, he was taken on at the Bavarian Motor Works in Munich. He held his job, on good pay, through the depression. He bought a motorbike, got married, became a father. There was no need for him to rock the boat.

He was, however, a socialist. Even if his main interest was sport it was always, since 1922, workers’ sport. The affairs of the Dachau Workers’ Sports Association were his major interest: he was a committee man and in 1928 he attended the Workers’ Olympics in Frankfurt. In 1931, when the Socialist Workers’ party (SAP) was founded, to the left of the Social Democratic party (SPD), he was attracted by its call
for a united working-class front against the Nazi challenge. He was not the kind to give up either his sport or his politics just because the Nazis had taken over government, dissolved the unions, and closed down the Workers' Sports Association. Despite pressure at work he refused to join any party organization; in 1935 he even distributed some anti-Nazi pamphlets given to him by one of the foremen. He should, he said, have known better. He was taking some children for a gymnastics lesson, practicing for a Christmas show, when they came to arrest him.

He was interrogated, beaten, and finally thrown into the concentration camp—a world removed from the Dachau he had lived in up to now. For six years he knew only the society of imprisoned comrades and SS brutality. In 1940 he was appointed Lagerältester, responsible for all prisoners. In this time he not only learned what solidarity between comrades was; his name became virtually synonymous with it. Released in 1941 in order to be sent to the eastern front he found a job in a small munitions plant. He evaded an almost certain death by being able to stay in Dachau, but there was almost no one who would talk to him. He was now not a Dachauer, but a "KZler"—one of those from down there. By 1945, however, it was precisely this unique dual identity that was to give him his extraordinary role. Fearing that the SS might commit further atrocities before the Americans arrived, and determined also to show that not all Germans had to be liberated from fascism by foreign arms, he led an armed insurrection in Dachau on April 28. The rising, coordinated with resistance action in Munich, was at first successful—the Rathaus was taken, the Volkssturm sent home. It was then bloodily suppressed by the SS. Three Dachau workers and three concentration camp prisoners lost their lives. Their bodies were left lying in the town square as a warning.

Scherer and others fled to the woods in the west. He watched, appalled, as the Americans rounded up the few Germans who attempted to make a fight of it and shot them down against the wall of a church. The next day someone came to fetch him. He was called before the American commandant and appointed deputy Bürgermeister. "I didn't especially want to do it," he told me, "but there was no-one else."

There were huge practical tasks to be accomplished. There were 6,000 dead from the camp to be buried; 27,000 survivors to be fed. A typhoid outbreak had to be contained by strict quarantine. Transport and labor had to be organized, food requisitioned, prisoners awaiting repatriation accommodated. For all these tasks the Americans relied on local organization. In the camp there was the discipline of the prisoners' national and international committees. They knew that to survive the liberation continued solidarity and patience were necessary.
Outside the camp there was chaos, and something like a “great fear.” Forced laborers of many nationalities, but mainly Russians and Poles, were in the streets, along with concentration camp prisoners from outside work brigades. Not all the prisoners, as some people in Dachau still remind you rather too quickly, were political prisoners. There were common criminals. People in Dachau feared vengeance; in fact the worst crimes were thefts of radios and bicycles. The main hardship they suffered was the wholesale requisitioning of housing by the Americans.

Max Gorbach was one of the prisoners outside the camp. His experiences in the hotel trade in Switzerland and Canada had helped make him a Communist; he had smuggled anti-Nazi material across the border into Germany and he had fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War. After he was handed over by the Vichy French to the Gestapo in 1941, and sent to Dachau, he had been put to work in the Wülfert meat-canning factory in the town. Now, at the liberation, he immediately became one of the organizers of provisions and of labor.

Several times in the account Gorbach gave me (he supplied rather more detail than Scherer) the same phrase crops up: “Es war notwendig Ordnung zu schaffen.” The first necessity was to create order. To stop plundering, restore essential services, create the basic conditions for the continuance of organized life. There is some irony in this: the Communists had often enough mocked the Majority Social Democratic party (MSPD) for keeping things going at the end of World War I. Ebert had said, “We were in the truest sense trustees in bankruptcy of the old regime.” Were not men like Gorbach, disciplined Communists, becoming trustees in bankruptcy for the society that had produced National Socialism? Certainly at the time it was not the most pressing consideration: these men felt they simply had no choice but to step into the breach. They had to act. First of all they had to act out of solidarity for their comrades. The supplies, transport, and housing they organized were in the first instance for their fellow prisoners in the camp. Second, in the special case of Scherer, he had to act out of solidarity with his own community. He was a Dachauer, and even if many people in Dachau had not wanted to know him after he was released from the camp, there was now a job to be done and he was the only one who could do it. Someone had to organize fuel for the bakeries and hospitals in the coming winter, to find workers and provisions for turf-cutting brigades. Someone had to organize labor and transport for the burial parties if disease was going to be contained.

This emergency organization, of course, was never nonpolitical. Quite the contrary. These men had not spent twelve years in unflinching ideological opposition to National Socialism for nothing. They saw themselves as Widerstandskämpfer, resistance fighters. In fact they
believed, not without some reason, that they were the only Germans who offered determined resistance to Hitler. Further, some among them were theoretically as well as experientially educated to understand the historical phenomenon of fascism and they had fairly clear-cut ideas about the political tactics to be adopted at the moment of fascism’s defeat. These tactics they now put into effect. They divided Dachau, then containing some 22,000 inhabitants, into seventeen districts. In open meetings on the streets they called on people to take part and everywhere committees of seven members were elected. This meant that all the things that had to be done could be organized on the broadest possible base. There was an attempt to establish the broadest political base as well. To coordinate the seventeen districts a committee of eight was chosen: two Communists, two Socialists, two from the former Bavarian Peoples’ party—the populist Catholic conservative party of the majority—and two without party affiliation. To this committee they gave the name Anti-Fascist Action Committee (AFA).

Such committees—generally known as “Antifa”—sprang up almost everywhere in Germany when the Third Reich collapsed. They were purely local and uncoordinated creations that, as a U. S. intelligence report put it, set out “to mobilize all the politically healthy forces in the population so as to create the conditions for a new, democratic Germany.” In the best early assessment of the antifascist initiatives, the report pointed out that under the circumstances it was naturally “the old working class, the group in German society most active in opposing the Nazis, which makes up the overwhelming majority and also most of the leaders.” Whether the leaders were from the German Communist party (KPD) or the SPD depended mainly on the qualifications of available personnel. “The Communists have nevertheless taken over the leadership in the majority of groups because on the one hand their commitment is especially strong and on the other hand the idea of the united front accords exactly with their current programme.” Many older Social Democratic leaders were suspicious of the Communists and more interested in their own party organization. They may also have doubted that antifascism could build on the social base the Communists thought had been created by the war, with sections of the middle class moving to the left. Whether the basically working-class antifascist organizations could win over the middle class remained to be seen. “At the moment,” commented the report, “the mass of the middle class regards these groups constituted mainly of workers with traditional mistrust.”

In Dachau, of course, there was an additional reason for suspicion. The concentration camp gave extra strength to the antifascists—they were able, for instance, to issue a duplicated broadsheet almost daily—
but with regard to the local population it was not an advantage to belong to such a notorious concentration of Communists, or to be associated with the threatening horde of foreigners. The broadsheet, called “The Anti-Fascist,” was subtitled “Voice of the Germans from Dachau,” partly to identify it among the publications of all the other nationalities. However, in Dachau town it was not enough to be German; even more than elsewhere people wanted reassurance that the voices listened to would be from their own community.

The AFA in Dachau was not a coterie of outsiders. The initiative and organizing energy came from men of the left, some of whom had been in the camp, and the presence of the camp undoubtedly strengthened their hand. The AFA itself was not made up of former prisoners; as in other towns it was set up as a citizens’ organization across party and to some extent across class lines. Because “antifascist” was a term used mainly by Communists it was difficult for middle-class people, whether compromised with Nazism or not, to take the word into their mouths. Some Catholics believed their anti-Nazi credentials were as good as any Communist’s; they believed cooperation was both necessary and politic. Such men as master glazier Syrius Eberle served both to reassure the conservative majority and to give them a voice.

The AFA was prominent and energetic. It could claim to be representative. However, it had no authority of its own. It started the post-Nazi reconstruction working, street-by-street, home-by-home: making lists of all Nazi party members, evicting them from houses, enrolling them for compulsory labor—“you put in the next three days with your oxcart shifting bodies; here’s a gas mask”—but the AFA could issue orders only so long as it was permitted to do so by the U. S. Army.

The American army had fought its way across Europe in a crusade against Hitlerite evil. It took over responsibility for governing the largest part of occupied Germany with a basic prejudice that all Germans had more or less supported Hitler and that they should therefore be treated as a conquered rather than as a liberated people. Apart from the consequent “nonfraternization” order—a directive crying out for subversion by battle-weary soldiers—policy was still in the process of being formulated when the military government detachments took over the towns and districts assigned to them. They had the Handbook of Military Government, whose status was rather uncertain, and two general aims: to remove Nazis and to “get things going.” These aims, as they hardened into the twin pillars of American occupation policy, did not necessarily contradict each other but they did involve deciding which Germans really were Nazis, which groups should have influence on local policy, and who should have executive authority in administra-
tion. The obvious groups to turn to, in the first instance, were the antifascist committees.

In the first days there was agreement on priorities and effective cooperation. With regard to the first American objective, "denazification," the antifascists had already led the way. Even before the occupation authorities issued their 132-question Fragebogen to all people over eighteen, the AFA in Dachau had started compiling lists and distributing handwritten questionnaires. Their concern—and in this almost all Germans, as distinct from almost all Americans, agreed—was that the real Nazis, those who had promoted and profited from the regime, be identified. Nominal membership in a Nazi organization they saw as unimportant. Their realism about this, and the neighborhood structure that let people decide who was a real Nazi and who was not, did not impress the Americans; they persisted in an inflexible policy of excluding all party members from even minor official positions. When denazification, again on American insistence, was given over mainly to ad hoc German courts, the Spruchkammern, in which those with the right connections could produce exonerating testimonials (Persilscheine) while "little Nazis" were fined or deprived of their livelihood, most antifascists quit in disgust. Because it affected so many people personally, denazification was to remain one of the most resented consequences of Germany's defeat and few people distinguished the commonsense practice of the local antifascists from the rigid directives of the occupying power. 12

Even as they attempted to purge every branch of administration of Nazis, the Americans knew they had no option but to rely on Germans as administrative personnel. Yet they never seriously considered basing the continuing operations of military government on the antifascist committees. Rather more curiously, in view of what had happened in the transition to the supposedly democratic and republican administration after 1918, the American practice of installing experienced civil servants was never seriously questioned by the antifascists. They seem to have recognized it (in perhaps a too-German way) as inevitable even though they knew that trained administrators were unlikely to be men of the left. The result, at least in Dachau, was an element of "dual power" that indeed had striking parallels with the situation in 1918–19. 13 There developed almost immediately a competition for influence between those who believed they were nurturing a new democracy in the cooperative effort of antifascism and those who regarded the experiment with deep suspicion.

The competition was not, in the first instance, for the allegiance of the German people, but for the ear of the sole authority, the occupying power. Captain Malcolm Vendig, its representative in Dachau, was
described by one of the men who served under him, later a minister in the Bavarian government, as being “filled with what could only be called missionary zeal for the democratisation of Germany.” Working together with Georg Scherer and the Anti-Fascist Action Committee seems to have posed few problems for him in the beginning. But local administration was not to remain a matter for local decision. The military government, while not yet formally recognizing any Bavarian entity, decided to restore the pre-Nazi administrative system and on May 7, the day before Germany’s unconditional capitulation, Vendig was given (or himself selected—the exact process is obscure) a German chief executive who immediately managed to make that surrender seem more conditional than it appeared. This man was Heinrich Kneuer, described by everyone who knew him as “a professional administrator of the old school.” He had served in a lesser position in Dachau from 1921 to 1930; during the war he held an important post in the State Food Supply Office in Munich. As district administrator, or Landrat, he was now answerable for the entire Dachau district administration. His deputy, Josef Schwalber, the future minister, later called him “ein Mann des Rechtes”—a man of justice and right (not of “the right,” though he was that, too), a man “for whom the principles of the rule of law had become second nature—a quality which, in a time when no one knew what rights and laws were still valid, could not be valued too highly.”

The Landrat was directly responsible to the commandant and was required to report every day. A full transcript of these meetings is preserved in the state archives in Munich. It is a fascinating record not only for the information it contains about the turmoil of the immediate postwar situation but because it shows how in that situation two men with completely different ideas about politics and German history see themselves as deciding the direction of Germany’s political development. In theory and in practice they thrash out whose conception of democracy should prevail; in the end, of course, it is the practice and not the theory that counts.

From the outset Landrat Kneuer took it as his duty to educate the American as to German realities. So from the first day he complained about the antifascist committee, which he considered not only a challenge to orthodox administration but a threat to the social order—and the political order he believed necessary to maintain it.

On May 14 Kneuer claimed he could not get on with registering the foreigners—the main object of local anxiety—and the farmers out in the villages were forming vigilante groups for their own security.

LANDRAT: They have not been listed by their nationalities. Besides I am being held up too much by these antifascist people.
Antifascism and Democracy

COMMANDANT: In what way?
LANDRAT: They simply undermine all authority, decide against everything that they think might be bourgeois.

COMMANDANT: Who are they?
LANDRAT: They are Communists. They want a Communist Bürgermeister.

COMMANDANT: But who would they put forward?
LANDRAT: Scherer. I had a talk with Dr. Linneimier [the Bürgermeister] on Saturday and he told me he would make way for Scherer . . . I asked him not to rush matters, but to let me talk things over with you today, as I did not wish to be pushed into any decision. Since yesterday I have been informed that it is Scherer who is bringing confusion into the population, he being head of the antifascist movement, by making them work hard labor, worse than the Nazis ever did.

Kneuer is outraged because his own wife, his children, his servant, and his father (aged 70) have been asked to appear at 7:00 each morning to work as laborers. The commandant does not seem to think it would hurt them to put in some hours with a shovel but in the end he gives the Landrat authority over labor matters. “It is your affair to get the house in order—I want to see the results.”

Some days later Kneuer tried to have the antifascists dissolved, as in Munich, on the grounds that they were a political party.

COMMANDANT: I have not looked at this antifascist movement we have here as a political party . . . they may be helpful in ferreting out people, that’s why I have not taken action so far. I can’t see any definite political direction there.

LANDRAT: But the name!

All through June, Kneuer was relentless in his attempts to have the antifascists suppressed. Though he did not say so in so many words, he seems to have seen the AFA structure as something not far removed from soviets and he was determined to end the situation of dual power. By the end of the month he was largely victorious. Though the commandant refused to veto the publication of antifascist propaganda in the Amtsblatt, the weekly official bulletin, he called in Herr Eberle, chairman of the AFA, and told him that he wanted the Landrat to have authority in all matters.

Still the Landrat’s anxieties about political developments were not resolved. Some days later he managed to engage the commandant in discussion of fundamental political principles, on which he considered himself an authority. He perhaps got more of a debate than he expected.
LANDRAT: It won't do to listen too much to the people.
COMMANDANT: Well, we do in the United States.
LANDRAT: The voice of the street never determined any political convictions.
COMMANDANT: That is one of the reasons why Germany never had a good democracy. I maintain that the Nazi party came into power because the majority of the people wanted that government. It was a perfectly legal government.
LANDRAT: I believe that a certain class of intellectual men should run the government of the state.
COMMANDANT: Well, here you have it, you do not want democracy but what we would call autocracy.
LANDRAT: The mass is stupid and if it is permitted to run the government, nothing good would come from it. The government should educate the masses.
COMMANDANT: We don't look upon the people or the public as a mass, we look at him as an individual. We think that every individual has his rights and we think that the rights of the individual are as strong as the rights of the state.
LANDRAT: Oh no, this is not what I meant. I have written books on politics. I mean to indicate that there must be one body which represents the government.
COMMANDANT: That's Hegel's thesis on political philosophy. Hegel considers the supreme body the state, we don't. When did you ever have liberalism in Germany?
LANDRAT: In the Weimar Republic.
COMMANDANT: Look here: when does Germany's history start? Say from the year 500 to 1919. All right, you had a steady growth. That means 1,500 years against the 15 years of the Weimar Republic and most of that freedom was only on paper. I think that Dr. Kneuer is a perfect example for a German democracy. He has the theory, but in practice he does not even know what democracy really is. He wants democracy but as soon as people are to have something to say in politics he will maintain that they are incapable of governing themselves. We don't think that any group of people are that smart that they should tell other people what to do.
LANDRAT: My idea of democracy is different. I have studied democracy and I still believe that a certain class of clever men should run the government for the other masses. I am against all sorts of dictatorship.
COMMANDANT: Well, to me it seems your democracy will be a dictatorship of a certain group of persons. That's enough on democracy today.

The Landrat's most pressing concern was not with principles. His real worry was that under the cover of democratic principles the
Communists lurking within antifascism would take up positions from which it would be hard to shift them. A case in point was whether Communists would be eligible for appointment for the new gendarmerie.

**COMMANDANT:** If you keep Communists out of everything they are going to go against you. I think a man should not be barred from a position because he is a Communist. I do believe that we should not engage an undue proportion of Communists in the Gendarmerie, but they should not be excluded. The Communist party in the United States is perfectly legal, but they never can get too many votes.

**LANDRAT:** Communism in America or England is an altogether different thing than in Germany. Germany is a poor nation and open to Communism.

**COMMANDANT:** Well it wouldn't be so poor if it did not start a war every twenty years.

**LANDRAT:** Communism among the Gendarmerie won't do. We have had our reports coming in from the whole Landkreis. Now if we have men who are working against us [Communists] we can't rely on these reports.

**COMMANDANT:** I don't want communism to establish a dictatorship as you say in Germany. But understand me: if you put a cup of water on the stove and take away the lid it will never boil over. As soon as you put the lid on it will boil over. As far as appointing the new gendarmes goes, they should be picked as to whether they are good gendarmes and not as to whether they are Communists.

**LANDRAT:** Now we are clearing this country of National Socialism and bringing Communism in. Dictatorship again. National Socialism is no danger to us any more, it is dead. Communism is the future danger.

**COMMANDANT:** We won't have another dictatorship. Because you forget that we have a military government, you can afford these experiments in your government now, because you have the ultimate control of the military government.

**LANDRAT:** I am afraid that America will get tired of getting order into European affairs. They are liable to up and leave it to someone else who may be more interested.

**COMMANDANT:** Military government will stay here for a few more years to come. For a couple of years you do not have to worry.

In fact, Kneuer did not have to wait two years to have his mind put at rest. His speculation about America was shrewd, yet he turned out to be wrong. He turned out to be wrong about democracy too. On July 21 the Commandant read him a list of names. They were to constitute a new town council, which according to Vendig would be the first town
council in postwar Bavaria. There were eight men of the right—mainly affiliated to the old Bavarian People’s party (BVP)—and eight men of the left, five Social Democrats and three Communists. 18

This signaled the end of the political moratorium the Americans had continued for twelve weeks after the collapse of twelve years of Nazi repression. The beginning of democratic politics, which Kneuer dreaded and Vendig was determined to establish, could not be far off. Already in July the Western powers had begun to authorize political parties—the German Communist party (KPD) was the first—and in September they began to organize in Dachau. In November the first party political statements—under the authority of the Landrat and the military government—appeared in the Amtsblatt. There were three equal columns: for the Social Democratic party, the Bavarian Volksbund or People’s League, soon to merge with the new Christian Social Union (CSU), and the KPD.

The statements, as is the way with political platforms, offer few surprises. The SPD appealed to history, its credentials as the longest-standing democratic party in Germany; the KPD soldiered on with its strategy: “the firm unity of all antifascist, democratic, and progressive popular forces.” Most interesting, though, is the pitch made by the Bavarian Volksbund:

1. The Bavarian Volksbund is the organization recognized by the Dachau military government which has made it its aim to embrace all those opponents of National Socialism who don’t subscribe to the Socialist-Communist common action program.

2. It is a solely local organization of the town and district for, on the one hand, making preparations for the coming Bavarian Landespartei [the party that would express the particularist interest and special character of Bavaria] which will fulfil the basic principles below; on the other hand for representing these principles in public life in the locality until such time as that party is founded.

3. The fundamental principles of the Bavarian Volksbund are:

(a) The building up of a state and social order out of the powers of Christianity which has been the foundation of Western civilization for two thousand years and which gave a large proportion of the active fighters against National Socialism the strength to reject its horrible and corrupting teachings and methods.

(b) Attainment of a true democracy by rejecting all militarist and dictatorial efforts no matter of what kind or color.

(c) Creation of a powerful Bavarian state as guarantor of the common good and cultural particularity of the Bavarian people.
(d) Setting up a social community life recognizing the worth of the human personality. The equal rights of all before the law, without difference as to status or property. Help for the economically weak.19

Everybody recognized the Bavarian Volksbund for what it was: the successor to the old Bavarian Volkspartei, which could not be directly refloated because in the end it, and its voters, had not resisted Nazism as firmly as its rhetoric implied. Catholicism was initially an effective inoculation. It wore off when economic interests were threatened and the very order of society appeared to be imperiled by the increase in Communist strength during the depression. Even though the Volksbund's political demands now included "cleansing Bavaria from National Socialism in every form," ordinary Nazi party members might be excused for thinking that "exclusion of all real National Socialists from political, economic and cultural life; punishment of the criminally guilty" did not apply to them. They might also have noted that though workers' interests as represented in unions would be recognized, the state would exercise economic leadership "according to the sole criterion of the Volksgemeinschaft"—a collectivity impossible to purge of its Nazi connotations. Not every former Nazi would vote for the party farthest to the right. Some turned to the SPD, a few even to the Communists, who consistently defended the "little Nazis" while demanding that the powerful and the profiteers be called to account. However, it could be expected that those whose strongest political instinct was for conservative stability would declare themselves as soon as they had the opportunity.

The American reports repeatedly referred to the apathy of the Germans, and without doubt many were now past caring what happened politically: their immediate preoccupations were food and shelter and the fate of missing husbands and sons. They were not, however, devoid of political opinions and when, at American insistence, they were asked to express them, they made completely clear where they stood. In the first turnout of the new democracy, a poll for an elected town council held on January 27, 1946, the people of Dachau voted 59 percent for the Bavarian Volksbund, the only party, as it proclaimed, for those who did not want to vote Socialist or Communist. The SPD got 29.4 percent, the KPD 11.6 percent. The Volksbund's vote was six percentage points higher than the combined BVP and National Socialist vote in March 1933 (29.2 and 24 percent respectively); the SPD's was almost exactly the same; the Communists' was down by a fifth from what they got under Hitler (14.7 percent).20

What had happened to antifascism? The short answer, one vigorously disputed by antifascists, is that it had been superseded by democracy. In a free expression of opinion the people had declared themselves
firmly against taking any risks. They preferred known party loyalties. Because this result could have been foreseen, the Communists in particular had appealed against holding early elections. They needed time to negotiate their common-front program with the other parties, and to convince the electorate that their policy of cooperation and nonrevolutionary democratic consensus was genuine. Goldhammer, secretary of the Bavarian Communist party, was energetic in his efforts to set up a bloc of democratic parties after the model of the Russian zone and indeed would have preferred to participate in a Bavarian government under CSU founder Josef Müller, rather than under the socialist Wilhelm Hoegner. The Communists, their ranks terribly thinned from the struggle with fascism, knew that their only chance of continuing political influence was inclusion in an alliance—a governing alliance—of all progressive parties. Elections were bound to drive the parties into contests that the Communists could not hope to win: they therefore had to be put off as long as possible. “Several of our people were ministers, and they made a good job of it, too,” Max Gorbach told me. “But the Americans did the same here as in Greece; they scheduled elections too early, before the process of democratization had taken hold.”

The military government definitely intended to thwart the left by insisting on early elections at a local level. From the beginning, as it reported in August 1945, it saw the antifascist committees as posing “something of a problem.” On the one hand there was “their evident desire to play a part in denazification activities and local community self-help”: they contained “democratic elements only too anxious to cooperate with MG” whose services in tracking down Nazis and getting things going locally were thoroughly useful. On the other hand the committees were “almost wholly of leftist orientation.” The responses of American authorities at the local level varied from the cooperative caution of Vendig in Dachau to the outright banning of the largest and most active committees on the grounds that they were contravening the prohibition on party political activity. Obviously, though, prohibition of party politics could only be an interim policy for the most ideologically democratic of the victors, especially when parties were permitted, under license, in the Soviet zone. Once parties were authorized (on a local level in August, on a statewide basis in November) it would be better to hold elections quickly before the left could organize the “alliance of progressive forces” that was the key to Communist hopes. Writing in 1950, at the height of the cold war, and with the West German government successfully established under Konrad Adenauer, General Lucius Clay was straightforward about why, as head of the American military government, he had pushed for early elections.
"The overthrow of the Nazi regime which had ruled Germany for twelve years left a political vacuum. This had to be filled promptly with democratic leadership while we were still there to prevent the growth of new totalitarian systems under different names. I was convinced that we could neither hesitate nor delay."23

Early elections, then, had a threefold purpose. First, they would encourage the silent majority, known to be conservative, to come out, as it were, after the debacle of conservatism Hitler had lured them into. Second, they would force the progressive parties to compete with each other before they had time to consolidate a bloc. Third, since such a grouping might give the Communists access to government office for an extended period it was important to isolate them from the outset.

The results of local council elections in Dachau showed that this never-quite-explicit purpose of the poll was a complete success. The Communists had worked successfully with Social Democrats and even conservative Catholics in the Anti-Fascist Action Committee. They were included in the Bavarian government headed by the Socialist Hoegner, and even though they knew of Schumacher's determination to keep the SPD in the western zones out of a merger with the KPD they had hopes for a united front at least in Bavaria. Now the parties had gone into the election not only separately but as rivals and the consequences of this were drawn dramatically at the first meeting of the newly elected town council. The Bavarian Volksbund had won twelve seats, the SPD five, and the Communists two. The new burgermeister was of course from the majority—Josef Schwalber, about to make his career in the CSU. Scherer, when he had been the center of antifascist inspiration and organization as deputy burgermeister, had not been thought of as a party man. For the election, though, he had to choose whether he would stand as a Socialist or a Communist. It was not a choice: he would stick with his comrades from the concentration camp resistance. The Communists tried to capitalize on his popularity—and no doubt to an extent succeeded—by running the slogan "Wählt die Liste Scherer": vote for the list headed by Scherer. Now, when his position of deputy burgermeister again had to be filled, the SPD decided not to support Scherer. They put up their own man and secured the numbers to have him elected. Subsequently they explained it was the democratic thing to do. If the people had wanted a Communist as deputy burgermeister they could have voted for his party in the first place.24

Failure to win the Socialists to an electoral alliance was the death blow to antifascism. In explaining why they did not vote for Comrade Scherer, the SPD made much of the fact that the parties were still separate at the national level; they could not move ahead of the national
leadership. For another two months it was still possible to hope that the considerable rank-and-file sentiment in favor of closer cooperation between the working-class parties would have concrete results. In April 1946, a merger was achieved in the Soviet zone. The SPD in the West, however, chose as its leader Kurt Schumacher, a most vehement opponent of amalgamation. In the Soviet zone the Communists never contested an election on their own; at local and state elections held later in the year it was the new Socialist Unity party (SED) that represented the combined left. The KPD, like the SPD, henceforth existed only in the western zones. It was not allowed by the occupation powers to use the name Socialist Unity party because, as the SPD pointed out, in the west the parties were not unified. An application by the Communists to change their name to “Sozialistische Volkspartei Deutschlands” was also disallowed. They had to face the electorate isolated as the same old KPD.

This outcome was everything the Communists had sought to avoid. The hope of both local antifascists and the party leadership had been that common programs and in effect consensus politics would secure them much more broadly based support. The line Walter Ulbricht brought back from Moscow in 1945 appealed for nothing more radical than “the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution which was begun in 1848.” Part of the aim was to give the working-class parties time to recover and organize in a more united way; there was also a genuine belief that “people from all sections of the population who jointly suffered in the prisons and concentration camps have become friends and will now, too, continue to stick together and work together.” Ulbricht believed the Communists could form a progressive alliance even with people from the middle classes because “profound social changes have taken place as a result of Hitler’s war. Men and women from bourgeois circles have been thrown out of their customary ways of life.”

This view—until elections reminded people that their customary ways of life went together with customary political allegiances—seemed to have some foundation in Dachau. Though basically a working-class initiative and the key organization of the radical left, the Anti-Fascist Action Committee clearly had strong middle-class representation at its meetings and as the Communists reminded voters at the time of the 1946 elections, they themselves had taken the lead in bringing in people like Eberle, in order to secure the cooperation of “positive antifascist elements” from among the middle classes. “Georg Scherer didn’t ask, ‘Are you a Communist, a Social Democrat, or from the Volkspartei?’ He asked, ‘Are you an antifascist and willing to help clear up the Scherbenhaufen (heap of rubble) that the Nazis have left us?’”
That the middle classes—overwhelmingly Catholic, commercial, and conservative—might gain more from the cleanup and the return to normality than the left seems not to have been considered. As Scherer told the very first meeting of the AFA on May 8, 1945, what he proposed was simply a necessity: the bringing together of all positive antifascist forces in Dachau as the indispensable basis for forming policies that were both healthy and possible for Dachau; rooting out the remnants of fascism; and reestablishing a normal civilian life—“ein normales bürgerliches Leben.”

_Bürgerlich_ does not only mean “civilian”: in fact, only in the extraordinary circumstances of 1945 could it have that meaning. “Bourgeois,” “civic,” and “respectable” are all more important connotations of _bürgerlich_, though no one word translates this key term of German politics adequately. It denotes, in ways Scherer certainly did not have in mind, that large class sector of German society whose economic and social standing can be more or less affluent and status conscious, whose attitudes can vary between righteous philistinism and relatively relaxed liberalism, but whose politics have the reliable common ground of being conservative in an antisocialist sense. In Dachau, where even under the monarchy there had only been a couple of aristocrats, and where the ideology of the center and the right was cemented into Catholicism, _bürgerlich_ denoted a political culture that embraced not only the genuine _Bürger_, the old-established craft and trading families clustered round the church, the Rathaus, and the marketplace on the top of the hill; it also linked naturally with the rural conservatism of the surrounding farmers. Since the beginning of the century this majority had been in passionate ideological combat with the incursions of socialism, spreading out from Munich through the unionized workers living down on the flat, and the insistent campaigning of the Social Democratic party.

Socialist electoral strength increased steadily in Dachau (though never in the outlying villages) and for a time after World War I the Socialists had a majority on the town council. They may have thought that this phase—their leader, Burgermeister Böck, could claim to come from one of the oldest settled Dachau families—integrated them into the dominant political culture. To an extent it did, but such a historic shift toward democratic norms could not be consolidated under the unfavorable conditions of the Weimar Republic. When the crisis came, the local Socialist majorities—whether in whole states such as Prussia or small towns such as Dachau—were overwhelmed by a radical reaction that exploited the values, norms, and rules of the old political culture to give Germany a revolution in political institutions. The old
political system (in both monarchical and republican variants) had not been without its successes in representing social interests ideologically and in reconciling them pragmatically. Under the impact of successive disasters even its forms could not survive the long ideologized but now desperately polarized consciousness of interests.

With the ruinous inflation a fresh memory, and as the lines of unemployed and gains in Communist strength threatened further social upheaval in the depression, the political culture of conservativism found a place for Nazi radicalism. More and more of those who saw themselves, and the society in which they wanted to continue living, as bürgerlich saw their political choice as being ever more starkly between socialism—not necessarily any longer Social Democracy—and National Socialism. Hitler persuaded an increasing number of Germans, many more than voted for his party, that the Communist threat demanded the most resolute action. "Fourteen years of Marxism have undermined Germany. One year of Bolshevism would destroy Germany." For Germany to experience political and economic revival, "a decisive act is required: we must overcome Germany's demoralization by the Communists." What Hitler's decisive action meant became clear after the Reichstag fire and his subsequent election victory. On March 20, 1933, Himmler announced the setting up of the first concentration camp, outside Dachau.

The anti-Communist majority in Dachau, and in similar towns throughout Germany, still felt beleaguered in 1945. The war was over, Hitler's twelve-year rule was ended, but they had not been delivered from their enemies. They were occupied by foreigners they had not been trained to regard as liberators: those who did regard the Americans as liberators were a highly suspect and threatening assortment. Some of them—Poles, Russians, and other "displaced persons" (DPs)—were an immediate danger. Others, notably the antifascists who had emerged from the camps together with the Poles and Russians, were bent on reordering their world in ways ordinary peaceable people had gone to extraordinary lengths to resist. For anti-Communists, as well as antifascists, should the awful sacrifices of the Hitler years have been in vain? Most people remembered vividly what had happened after the last war: the revolution born out of defeat seemed to be the start of all their troubles. Then too there had been workers' committees and eventually—if briefly—a "Council Republic" (Räterepublik) antithetical to their conceptions of social and political order. They had had to mobilize then, with much less equivocation than in 1933—the Nazis after all had not been the most savory allies—and now that the Nazis were out of the way they had no doubts at all about the kind of society they wanted to protect and the political
institutions appropriate to it. They did not want antifascist committees; they wanted regular town councils. They wanted parties with which they could clearly identify their interests, not "alliances of all democratic and progressive forces" that would most likely be against their interests. They wanted things very much as they had been.

The Americans did not want things as they had been. They set out to effect a revolution in German history. Malcolm Vendig in Dachau was a very articulate spokesman of their cause. It may be true, as an American historian (Gimbel) who studied the experiment in another place (Marburg) has remarked, that they "proceeded without a conscious theory of artificial revolution: they did not know how to turn a fascist society into a democratic one. But then nobody else did, either. The two obvious policies were to remove fascists and to bring in democracy. Unfortunately, the first of these policies, denazification, was not altogether a satisfactory basis for the second. Niethammer has called denazification "the American surrogate for anti-fascist reform," and he shows why this purging of people rather than institutions was only a partial and contradictory success. It was radical enough to take the wind out of the sails of genuine antifascists; it was not radical enough to prevent the return of rehabilitated Nazis or those who had gone along with the Nazis (Mitläufer) into positions of authority in structures that continued to function as before. Its main effect was probably, as Niethammer says, to provide many West Germans with the idea that any possible responsibility they might have had for fascism and its consequences was more than compensated for—and disposed of—by what they were subjected to in the discriminatory and corrupt procedures of denazification.

In the first years of the occupation many more people were concerned with clearing themselves through these proceedings than with political reconstruction. When those most actively interested in political reconstruction—the antifascists—were squeezed out, their disillusionment, as Gimbel says, "permitted the assumption of leadership, at the local level, by others whose political, social and economic views bear a striking similarity to those of the leaders of the same community who proved so ineffective in the face of the Nazi challenge."

That is carefully worded—and dead right. It reminds us again that it was the occupying power alone that had authority in the situation and must therefore bear a large part of the responsibility for encouraging or thwarting political tendencies. It also reminds us that the tendencies themselves were not made in America; they were home grown, the product of communities with much more political experience than has generally been recognized. Though we can blame the Americans for cutting short the experiment in antifascist democracy, for reverting too
speedily to the institutional forms of the established political culture—
town councils locally, aligned with political parties nationally—it is
difficult to imagine that any genuinely democratic reconstruction of
post-Nazi Germany could have had a different result. Political cultures,
especially those with a highly ideologized history in which the connec-
tion between social interests, societal conceptions, and political alle-
giance has been tested and reconfirmed, are not so easily dislodged.
The terrible trials of violent political conflict and total war are as likely
to strengthen them as subvert them. For most people the disaster of
National Socialism would have become total only if it had ended in the
Communist takeover that they had put their faith in Hitler to save
them from in the first place.

The antifascists, who had experienced the worst that desperate ma-
ajorities can do, never fully understood this. Toward the end of Septem-
ber 1945, when Communists and Socialists had been working for
almost five months in close cooperation with their more conservative
fellow townspeople both on the AFA and the appointed town council,
they held their first political meeting. In the Schlosssaal, Dachau’s
largest and most prestigious location, 700 people applauded the speak-
ers from both parties who spoke of the sacrifices their members had
made in the fight against fascism, and the need for all to cooperate in
removing the remnants of Nazism and in political renewal. Even those
who shared responsibility for what had happened could atone by
joining in the work of democratic reconstruction. The report in the
Amtsblatt ended with an appeal: “Looking beyond the differences of
opinion of differing world views we offer you our hand, for the building
up of a new, antifascist, truly democratic Germany.”

For the antifascists, that was the only possible appeal; for those to
whom it was addressed it said everything wrong. No one in the con-
servative majority believed that either Social Democrats or Commu-
nists had changed their own world views; even among Social
Democrats there was suspicion of what, in a Communist world view,
the “building up of a new, antifascist, truly democratic Germany”
might mean. Cooperation in practical matters, in what antifascists
hoped was a radical political departure, had been possible precisely
because politics had been suppressed. Once democracy allowed the
expression of different world views, the world view of the majority, for
whom all the connotations of antifascism would only invoke mistrust,
would be bound to prevail. What the idealism, energy, and fairness of
men like Gorbach and Scherer had achieved was the reconstitution of
that political world that would unequivocally reject them.

It has often been said that Marxists have little conception of culture,
that their phrases about consciousness and “false” consciousness
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obscure for them the real ways social values and individual expectancies form each other. I think however, that ordinary Communists in West Germany had and still have a strong sense, from their experience rather than from their theory, of how powerful a political culture can be. A majority is a majority because its values, expectations, conceptions of legitimate political order, are publically recognizable and privately shared. The antifascists, by the more heroic, historic qualities of their biographies, had demonstrated their distance from the majority; what makes them so impressive also made them politically ineffective. If the majority won again, and not more heroically than in 1933, it was because of a socially and culturally grounded political solidarity that antifascists had every reason to regard as formidable.

It was this previously mobilized, historically tested solidarity and not just ideology that Kneuer represented at every opportunity to Vendig. Vendig, with not much more enthusiasm than Scherer, had to recognize its power within the first few weeks. Scherer, representing an alternative solidarity, would also have to be the representative of its defeat. The victory of the Landrat in his dealings with the commandant, of the Bavarian Volksbund and then the CSU in one election after another, were all democratic victories. Those who had suffered and struggled for twelve years to bring democracy to Germany had to accept what they had won.

In 1949, with the Federal Republic established, the cold war mounting to its pitch, a few weeks before the explosion of the Soviet atomic bomb, the first elections for the new Bundestag were held in West Germany. In Dachau the Communist party, perhaps wanting to recall the hopeful days of 1945, again hired the *Schlosssaal* for an election meeting, but just before the meeting began a "troop" of 150 DPs, mostly from Hungary, arrived in a body. As soon as the chairman rose to speak he was shouted down, the stage was stormed, and the candidate, Egon Hermann, fled to the Rathaus, from where he was rescued only by the intervention of local police, state police, and American military police. Hermann declared that he would not speak in Dachau again and "freely," as the report says, accepted the offer to place himself in "protective custody"—"sich in Schutzhaft zu begeben." The word must have had resonance for Hermann and others in Dachau: "Schutzhaft" was what the Gestapo placed you under when, without going through the courts, you were to be put away in a concentration camp. There were of course to be no more concentration camps; that solution had been tried. Hermann was simply escorted into Munich, and in the election the KPD received only 5.7 percent of the vote anyway. Just to be sure, on November 22, 1951, the democratic gov-
ernment of West Germany began proceedings to have the Communist party banned.36

Former Landrat Kneuer, I do not doubt, was pleased. (His tenure of office had been cut short by the discovery that he had given misleading answers in his denazification questionnaire.) What Malcolm Vendig might have thought I can only guess. It has not been possible to trace him through the U. S. Army. Max Gorbach would have been angry but philosophical. At the end of 1945 he married the woman who had been his fiancée twenty years before. Burgermeister Scherer officiated. Scherer was also a realist. When he could not persuade the town of Dachau to use the sewing machines from the SS tailoring shop to start a municipal undertaking, he took them over himself. Down on the flat, beside the road to Munich, exactly, as he told me, where the last 1919 revolutionaries were shot down by the Whites, he built a factory. There, late at night, surrounded by the bolts of material and racks of winter coats, he recalled how long ago, on the eve of his departure, the American Commandant had said: “I’ve only known one genuine democrat in Dachau, Herr Scherer. And that is you.”

If “Dachau” means anything in terms of Germany’s political development it means the failure of the left to secure democracy between 1918 and 1930 and the determination of the right to have done with challenges to entrenched interests once and for all. Hitler pledged to be the destroyer of Marxism and Dachau was set up to put this final solution, not the more famous one, into effect. It was assumed in 1945 that he had failed. Later, people could point to the German Democratic Republic and say: so much for destroying Marxism. From where Georg Scherer looked back, half a lifetime after Hitler’s defeat—well, he must have wondered.

Notes

A German version of this essay appeared in Dachauer Hefte 1. Jahrgang, Heft 1, Die Befreiung (Dachau: Verlag Dachauer Hefte, 1985).

The essay owes much to many people. I am particularly grateful to those who contributed generously in interviews and to friends who suggested improvements in the writing. My greatest debt is to my mother, Hedy Barta, for her many hours of work in turning often indistinct recordings into readily consultable transcripts.

1. According to Bruno Bettelheim’s review of the various estimates, at least 11 million people and possibly twice that number died in the concentration camps; at best 530,000 survived at the time of Allied liberation. If, at the beginning of 1938, there were fewer than 30,000 prisoners, mainly in Dachau (6,000) and Sachsenhausen (8,000), the old political prisoners must have been a small proportion of the survivors. However their solidarity and the positions they established in the camp administrations enabled them to increase not only their own survival chances but
those of members of the resistance sent to the camps at later dates, often at the completion of jail sentences. See Bruno Bettelheim, "The German Concentration Camps," in *Surviving and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1980), pp. 46–67. Bettelheim's views of how people survived in the camps should be treated with great caution.


4. Interview with Rosel Kirchoff, Dachau, 1974. Stuttgart was about 55 percent destroyed, Munich about 45 percent (Hans Dollinger, *Deutschland unter den Besatzungsmächten 1945–1949* [Munich: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1967], p. 28). Between 5 and 6 million Germans were killed in World War II. Of the more than 40 million of all nationalities who died, 20 million were Soviet citizens, as compared with 356,000 British and 260,000 Americans. Cf. tables and notes in Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Das Ende des Reiches und die Neubildung deutscher Staaten* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), p. 364.


6. The image is Rosel Kirchoff's.


8. Interview with Max Gorbach, Munich, 1974.

9. Written by emigre intellectuals sympathetic to the antifascist initiatives, this overview report of June 1945 appears to have had little influence on the American authorities, who by the middle of May had already banned most of the larger Antifas, including the one in Munich (*Arbeiterinitiative*, pp. 14, 636–38. and for a general assessment, 699–717). A German translation of the report is in *Zwischen Befreiung und Besatzung*, pp. 107–16.

11. Cf. John Gimbel, A German Community under American Occupation: Marburg, 1945–52 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 32. The instances recounted by Gimbel of anti-Nazi Germans being roughly treated by Americans were, it seems, typical. In Dachau Max Gorbach was twice threatened by American soldiers for trying to check the taking over of houses by Poles and other displaced nationals: “You goddam German son of a bitch, these people have lost everything because of you. You’re lucky I don’t shoot you.”

12. On the evolution and application of denazification policy see Niethammer, Entnazifizierung. One of the reasons Communists were outraged by the crudity of U. S. procedures was that their own members who had joined Nazi organizations as a cover for resistance work were now purged along with genuine Nazis (ibid., p. 207).


16. Staatsarchiv, Munich, LRA 128075. The original transcript is in English.

17. Not all the foreigners were from the concentration camp. At the end of 1944 there were altogether almost 9 million forced laborers in Germany, approximately a quarter of the workforce. “Wastage” was very high; to achieve 2 million Russians actually working in Germany in 1944 perhaps 5 million were deported to the Reich (Arbeiterinitiative, pp. 145–50). There were several forced labor camps, for women as well as men, in the vicinity of Dachau.

18. Amtsblatt für die Stadt und den Landkreis Dachau, August 4, 1945. In terms of official status Vendig may have been right, though Neithammer suggests there were already similar bodies in the larger West German towns (Arbeiterinitiative, p. 659; Entnazifizierung, pp. 136–37, 203). Since party affiliations were not given they are not clear in every case.


23. Lucius D. Clay, Decision in Germany (London: Heinemann, 1950), pp. 87–88. There was strong resistance to Clay’s drive for party politics and early elections from his advisers in the military government; Clay liked to tease them that a military man had to persuade the liberal professors to restore to the German people their right to vote. Cf. Niethammer, Entnazifizierung, pp. 201–02.

24. Amtsblatt, February 13, 1946. The Communists did not reply directly but noted that in Hamburg the SPD had voted 270–24 for closer cooperation between the left parties. However such expressions of solidarity did not mean the SPD rank and file were in favor of amalgamation with the Communists. A military government survey at this time showed that one out of three SPD supporters in the U. S. zone was prepared to support a unity party along the lines of the SED (OMGUS Opinion
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26. Walter Ulbricht, “The Program of the Anti-Fascist Democratic Order,” his speech to the first conference of officials of the KPD of Greater Berlin on June 25, 1945; and *On Questions of Socialist Construction in the GDR* (Dresden: Zeit im Bild Publishing House, 1968), p. 17. The Communist strategy of class cooperation within a progressive alliance did not mean that the antifascist committees fared any better in the East than they did in the West. If anything, they were even more cruelly disappointed. The Communist leadership wanted no potential rival to official authority and insisted that the Antifas be immediately disbanded. Ulbricht’s own ruthless and apparently contemptuous attitude is described by Leonhard, pp. 318–26: ‘In this way ever initiative from below was nipped in the bud between the beginning of May and the middle of June’ (see also *Arbeiterinitiative*, pp. 635–43).


28. I use the term “political culture” here in the sense outlined by Almond and Verba for purposes of comparative analysis: “When we speak of the political culture of a society we refer to the political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings and evaluations of its population. People are inducted into it just as they are socialized into nonpolitical roles and social systems. Conflicts of political cultures have much in common with other culture conflicts and political acculturative processes are more understandable if we view them in terms of the resistances and the fusional and incorporative tendencies of cultural change in general” (Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba, *The Civic Culture* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963], p. 14).


29. Hitler’s “Appeal to the German People” on becoming chancellor, January 31, 1933. This is the single italicized line in the statement (Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Documents on Nazism* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1974], pp. 162–65). There is a yet more emphatic statement—to industrialists on February 20—on p. 168. For the relatively small electoral gains made by the Communists, as compared
with the huge increase in the Nazi vote during the depression (the Communist peak of almost 6 million votes, 16.9 percent of the electorate, in November 1932, can itself be seen as a response to the Nazis’ winning 13.7 million votes, 37.4 percent, in the July election), see the table in Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 603–04.

On the Nazi effort to suppress the working class as a political force, see Tim Mason, "National Socialism and the Working Class, 1925–May 1933," *New German Critique* 11 (Spring 1977): 49–93; and "The Workers’ Opposition in Nazi Germany," *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (Spring 1981): 120–37. Reinhard Kühnl, *Der Deutsche Faschismus in Quellen and Dokumenten* (Cologne: Pahl Rugenstein, 1977), chap. 6, p. 419, gives figure indicating the continued repression of working-class resistance even in the most settled years of the regime. In 1936, for instance, 11,687 Communists and 1,374 Social Democrats were arrested; in 1937 the numbers were 8,068 and 733. Antifascist declarations of the working-class party leadership in exile can also be found in this section (see esp. documents 276, 280, and 289).

30. Gimbel, *German Community*, p. 201; cf. the criticism of Hajo Droll, dissenting from his co-authors, that the antifascists also lacked a theory of revolutionary democracy and for that reason succumbed to conventional conceptions antithetical to their class interests (*Arbeiterinitiative*, pp. 628–31).


34. The same report commented that some people “so smart that they think they can hear grass growing” claimed to have heard a dissonance between the Social Democratic and Communist speakers. They were reminded of the assurances given by both speakers that their parties had learned from the mistakes of 1918–33 and of the continuing common action (Aktionsgemeinschaft) that proved it. In fact, this first joint meeting under the antifascist banner was also the last.


36. The Constitutional Court decided on August 17, 1956, that the principles of the KPD were incompatible with the “free and democratic basic order” (Alfred Grosser, *Germany in Our Time* [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974], p. 215).