II. The rise of the labour movement in the 1860s and 1870s

Industrialization did not really gather momentum in Germany until the 1850s, but in the decades that followed it proceeded at an ever increasing pace. This was a decisive factor in making the "social question" the dominating issue of the 1860s, alongside the problem of national unity, in the confrontations between the major ideological tendencies of the day – Christianity, liberalism and socialism – which were all to exert a lasting influence on the development of the trade union movement in Germany.

1. *The emergence of class society*

In the 1850s and 1860s it became perfectly clear that the future belonged to industry. Even in 1870 there were still more people employed in agriculture and handicraft than in industry, but their proportion of the working population was declining; mechanization was increasing its hold on small businesses and on small-scale manual production. Although Germany was still an agrarian country in 1870, it was by now firmly on course to become an industrial power. The nationalist fervour resulting from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the proclamation of the Reich in 1871 certainly gave general impetus to economic development; but the freedom of trade (Gewerbefreiheit) taken over from the North German Confederation and the standardization of the monetary, stock market and postal systems and the French reparations gave rise to a "foundation boom", which soon – in 1873–74 – turned into a protracted economic downturn.

With the advent of industrial capitalism the bourgeoisie became the dominant class in economic terms. Although the bureaucracy, diplomatic service and military professions were still dominated by the Prussian nobility from the provinces east of the Elbe, it was the rising industry, the large trading companies and the banks that formed the foundation of the grande bourgeoisie's economic influence. But as in the 1850s, the bourgeoisie largely acquiesced, as far as its political aspirations were concerned, in the authoritarian monarchy; full of admiration for the policy of a strong Germany incorporated by the Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, and swept away by visions of Germany's greatness and world stature,

large sections of the bourgeoisie adopted Prussian concepts of virtue and supremacy: discipline, diligence, subordination, inculcated at home, at school and in the armed forces, became the dominating values. The same values – translated into a sort of entrepreneurial head-of-the-household outlook ('Herr-im-Hause-Standpunkt') – also held sway in working life.

In the 1870s – probably owing to the recession – economic power became increasingly concentrated. Cartels and large concerns formed. Names such as Alfred Krupp and Carl Ferdinand Baron von Stumm-Halberg became symbols of entrepreneurial success and the patriarchal, authoritarian treatment of the workers. Patriarchal attitudes and company welfare policies developed over these decades, denying the workers any say in economic matters and immunizing them against the blandishments of radical political or trade union organizations. This viewpoint could not have been better put than in Krupp's "Message to my dependents" of February 1877: he said that everyone must "do his duty in peace and harmony and in accordance with our directions". And addressing "his workers", he urged: "Enjoy what is given to you. When work is done, remain amongst your nearest and dearest, your parents, your wife, your children, and consider household and education. Let this be your politics and you will enjoy many a happy hour. But do not allow yourselves to become excited by national politics. Matters of state require more spare time and knowledge of conditions than the worker has. You will be doing your duty if you elect those recommended to you by persons whom you trust. But you will do nothing but harm if you seek to intervene in the lawful order. Playing politics down at the pub is expensive, too – you can find better things to do at home."[1]

In the 1850s and 60s the directors of large companies were generally also their owners; the same person thus wore both the employer's hat and the proprietor's. From the 1870s onwards, with the development of the stock market, these two roles grew apart, gradually at first and then more rapidly. The consequences were the growing anonymity of capital and the rise of the manager, answerable to the proprietors. Further, the 1870s saw the rise of entrepreneurs' organizations, representing the economic, social and political interests of their members. This period jolted both sides of industry into organizing: a number of anti-strike societies were founded, the first factory-owners' associations appeared, and 1875 saw the formation of the Central Association of German Industrialists, dominated by heavy industry.

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1 Quot. Wilhelm Berdrow (ed.), Alfred Krupps Briefe 1826–1887 (Berlin, 1928), p. 342 ff.

Hand-in-hand with the advance of industrial capitalism, the above changes in the world of work and the workplace became more pronounced in the decades around the proclamation of the Reich, in particular the ruthless exploitation of the working class, continued urbanization with the attendant housing shortages, social uprooting and frequently appalling living conditions, exacerbated by low wages, undernourishment, unemployment and disease. Of course, it should be remembered that pay varied greatly according to industry, occupation, qualifications, age, sex and even region. In 1863 the weekly earnings of a worker in the Saxony textile industry around Crimmitschau were 1–1¼ Talers, of a Leipzig printer 6–7 Talers, and a Berlin mechanical engineer 12–13 Talers. These enormous wage differentials certainly hampered the development of a uniform worker consciousness, which was almost inevitable, given the experience of exploitation common to all workers and their marginalization and the discrimination against them in law and politics. This patronizing Big Brother attitude towards the working class was most obvious in the Prussian electoral system, which laid down three classes of voter, depending on income. In Berlin, for example, a voter belonging to the first class had 21 times as many votes as a third-class voter; in Wattenscheid, 1,100 times as many; and in Essen, Krupp was able to appoint one third of the town councillors with his vote alone.

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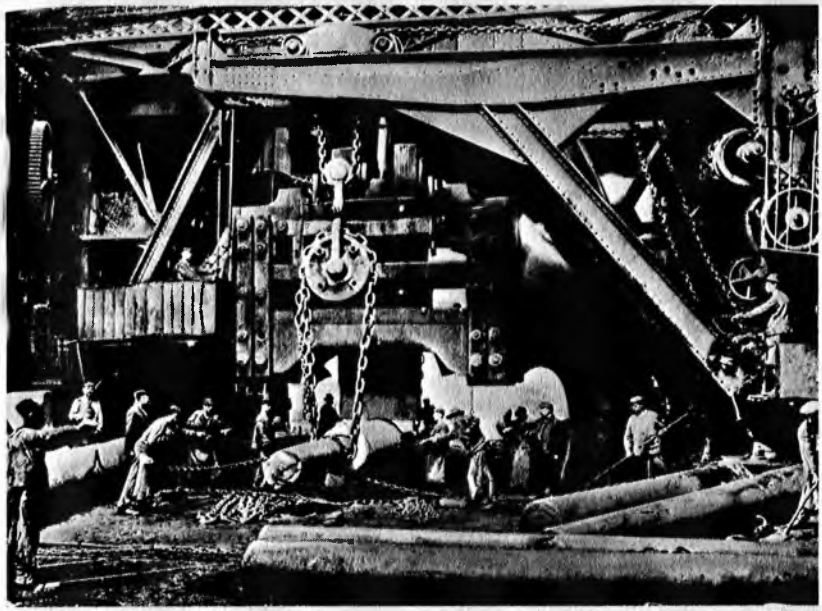
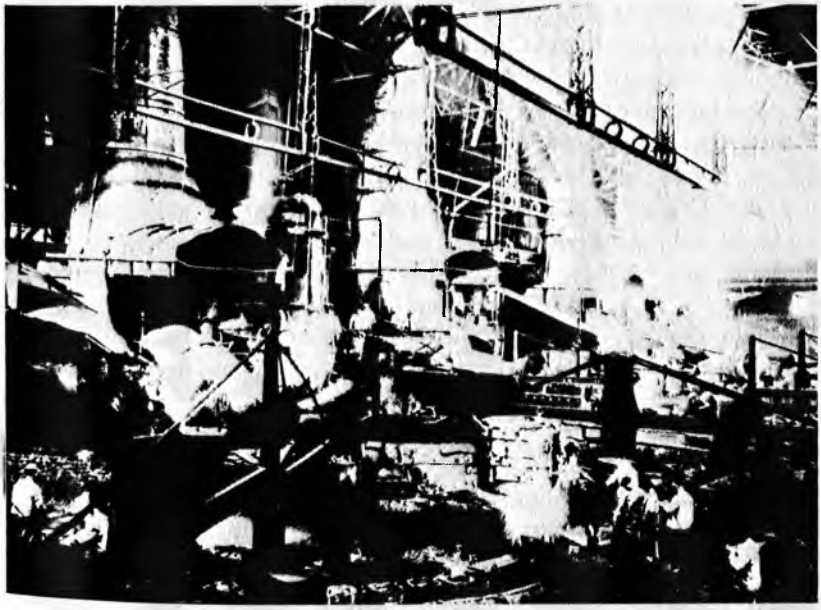
Yet despite the evident trend in the 1860s and 70s towards a class society, the picture was not all black: there were also progressive, democratic forces at work in politics and society. Successive waves of legal reform in the 1860s, originating in the states of southern Germany, created a new political climate. With the dawn of the "New Era", democratic and social reform bills were expected and for this reason the old laws were applied less rigorously – in anticipation, as it were. Crucial to the development of trade unionism was the lifting of the ban on associations – first in Saxony (1861) and Weimar (1863) and finally throughout the North German Confederation (1869). But this was still a far cry from a guaranteed *freedom of association,* as is evident from Article 152 of the trade regulations of 21 June 1869[2]: "All prohibitions and penal sanctions against tradesmen, trainees, journeymen and factory hands for concluding agreements or forming associations for the purpose of obtaining improved wages or working conditions, in particular through the withdrawal of labour or the

2 Bundesgesetzblatt des Norddeutschen Bundes No. 26, 1869, p. 281



The power hammer "Fritz", inaugurated on 16 September 1861, made the Krupp cast steel works one of the largest forges in the world.



Krupp's Bessemer steelworks about 1900

locking out of workers," were lifted. On the face of it this sounded quite good – but it put a ball and chain around the workers' feet. For firstly the "right of association' did not apply to agricultural labourers, seafarers and canal-workers, railwaymen or state officials; secondly, Article 152 recognized not only the strike but also the lockout, even granting employeers the right to terminate the contract of employment (that is, sanctioning dismissal). Thirdly, it was still possible to declare the trade unions political associations, thus providing grounds for the application of legal restrictions on the right of association (including an all-out ban). Finally, Article 153 expressly limited the unions' freedom of action: for instance, recruiting members, picketing and even shouting "blackleg" were considered punishable acts: "Anyone who by the use of physical force, threats, insults or slander compels or seeks to compel others to subscribe to such agreements (Article 152) or to comply with them, or by similar means prevents or seeks to prevent others from withdrawing from such agreements, shall be liable to three months' imprisonment, unless the general criminal law lays down a more severe penalty."

But as we have already pointed out, the working class was by no means faced with a "united front" of exploiters and political adversaries. Growing numbers of more perceptive people were devoting their attention not only to the question of nationhood but also to the "social question" and proposing various different solutions.

Let us first turn to the Church, and the Catholic Church in particular. Although many advocates of social reform still had outdated ideas of a status-based social order, by championing and founding working men's associations on the one hand and by urging brotherly love and charity on their fellow-men on the other, they preached a balance between employers and workers. The mood of a new beginning in matters of social welfare not only took hold of individual areas, such as the Essen and Aachen districts, but also seized the biennial assemblies of Catholic churchmen. Before long, the Centre, the party of political Catholicism, was obliged to draw up a social policy programme and in 1877 a lathe-operator from Essen, Gerhard Stötzel, became the first worker to be admitted into its parliamentary group.

The leading figure of "social Catholicism" was, however, Bishop Ketteler, who advocated social reforms with a Christian flavour, a more energetic state social policy and organized self help for the working class. The fact that he turned to Ferdinand Lassalle, the founder of the Social Democratic General Association of German Working Men (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein – ADAV), for advice on some points of social reform shows how fluid the boundary between the camps was in the

1860s, even if any organized form of co-operation between the Church and Social Democracy or the trade unions was unthinkable. The description of social misery and exploitation and the criticism of labour's character as a commodity and of untrammelled economic liberalism contained in Ketteler's key work "The Worker Question and Christianity" (1864) come close to Lassalle's ideas. Like Lassalle he recommended as a solution the setting up of producer associations, though funded by voluntary contributions rather than the state, as proposed by Lassalle. In his speeches in 1869 at the Liebfrauenheide in Offenbach and at the Episcopal Conference in Fulda, Ketteler advocated wage rises, shorter working hours and a ban on child labour and factory work for mothers and girls. He gave his backing not only to the Catholic working men's associations but also to the interdenominational Christian-social associations, which in 1870 formed a federation in Elberfeld and at this time had some 200,000 members. The influx of new members enjoyed by the Catholic workers' and journeymen's associations and the Christian-social associations shows that religion still exercised an influence over large sections of the working class. Rapid industrialization and Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic Church helped to ensure that many workers, especially Catholic ones, retained their religious commitment and their ties with the Church.

There were also sections of the liberal bourgeoisie that showed some understanding of contemporary social problems – especially as they often saw the growing explosiveness of the issue as a threat to their own social position. Support for social reform – for example, in the shape of the Association for Social Policy (Verein für Socialpolitik) formed in 1872 by scientists, politicians, employers and clergymen – and the provision of educational associations and liberal trade unions were intended to check the build-up of radical protest movements. Under the motto "education and thrift" the idea was to enable the working class to move up in the world and become integrated into existing society. At the same time there were no doubt hopes that workers organized in liberally inclined associations would support the bourgeoisie in its confrontation with the nobility and the absolutist state, particularly in the constitutional clash with Bismarck, and come out in favour of national unity and the parliamentary system. In fact, this idea did catch on with some of the workers, who not only acquired specialist know-how through these educational associations but could also practise the principles of organization: the development and expression of informed opinion, and the representation of interests.

Finally, the 1860s saw the first stirrings of social democracy, which, though far from being a unified movement, at least derived most of its

support from the workers themselves. It was within the ambit of these organizations that in the 1860s, and above all in 1868–69, a number of trade unions emerged, favoured by the lifting of the ban on association and the upturn in the economy.

2. *The breakthrough*

Even in the reactionary 1850s the continuity of the labour movement was not entirely broken; the experience of political suppression and worsening capitalist exploitation may have helped to show up the clash of interests between employer and employee, which still seemed surmountable to the founding fathers of trade unionism in 1848–49, in a harsher light. Furthermore, the shortcomings of government social policy confirmed the assumption that the main way of curing social ills was self help. Backed by sections of the liberal bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church, this idea won increasing support from the workers themselves, who had begun to organize into political parties and trade unions in the 1860s. These parties and unions developed in tandem; and in any case the demarcation lines between progressive liberal organizations and social democratic ones were by no means clearly defined.

So the continuity of the trade unions was not completely destroyed by the bans of the 1850s. This is illustrated most clearly by the fact that it was again the printers and cigar workers that were among the first occupational groups to make use of the "new freedoms" of the 1860s and form new associations. Commencing with the Leipzig Printers' Assistants' Association, set up in 1861–62, the idea of trade unionism quickly spread to many other cities. The merger of local associations was undoubtedly encouraged, more than anything, by experience of conflict with the employers. That is demonstrated by the "Threepenny Strike" (Dreigroschenstreik) in Leipzig in the spring of 1865 over the introduction of better piece rates. Even though the strike as a whole was a defeat for the printers, resulting only in small wage rises, the solidarity movement, reaching far beyond Leipzig itself, was a step in the direction of a new, common worker consciousness, as the basis of a wider organization; not only the printers but also workers in other trades supported the Leipzig strikers by collecting money for them.

Two immediate results of the Threepenny Strike are of special importance. The Printers' Association left the liberal Assembly of German Working Men's Associations, demonstrating its desire to break with the political and philosophical ideas of the bourgeoisie. Secondly, in autum

1865 the Leipzig printers announced a congress of German printers, to be held in Leipzig at Whitsun 1866, to discuss the experiences of the strike. There, in May 1866, the German Printers' Union (Deutscher Buchdruckerverband) was founded. The main aim of the union – headed by Richard Härtel from 1867 on – was to achieve standard rates of pay for printers. It was above all experience of conflict and solidarity that had led to a clarification of the position: independence from political parties and supraregional combination – these were the lessons the printers learned from developments in the mid-1860s.

As for the importance of experience of conflict and strikes for the emergence of a sense of working class solidarity, the development of the printers' association was fairly typical of the early stage of trade union history. This is underlined by the example of the miners. After thousands of miners had submitted a petition in 1867 to the ministry responsible, seeking an amelioration of their wretched plight, in 1872 they proceeded to stage the first "mass strike", their resentment fuelled by disappointment at the failure of their petition. This strike, too, ended in defeat, but the strike committee that had been set up became the embryo of a miners' trade union.

Experience of industrial conflict was of major importance in virtually all the unions that were founded in rapid succession in the late 1860s and early 70s, profiting from the strength of the economy. It would be no exaggeration to speak of a wave of strikes from 1865 to 1873 (Table 2a), in which the textile and garment workers, engineering workers, printers and, in particular, the miners were the leading participants. This wave of strikes was accompanied by a trade union "foundation boom". In 1868–69 alone the trade associations of the tailors, bakers, carpenters, shoemakers, building workers, woodworkers, engineering workers and textile and garment workers all came into being. As the occupations indicate, these associations were by no means centred on industrial wage labour. Though trade unions did emerge in that sector, too, with the associations of miners, iron and steel workers, engineering workers and manufacturing workers, it was the craft-based trade associations that initially dominated, such as those of the printers, joiners and shoemakers. So to begin with, the unions were not very well represented in the centres of heavy industry; rather, they arose in the commercial regions of central Germany, the Rhine–Ruhr area and, above all, the major cities – Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover, Leipzig, Munich and Nuremberg.

The setting-up of trade unions in the 1860s was by no means a uniform process: there were major differences according to occupation and industry and also on a regional basis. The unions soon sought other rec-

ruits, too, such as semi-skilled and unskilled workers and women. But this proved difficult. Often it meant the formation of separate associations, as in the cases of the Manufacturing, Factory and Manual Workers' Association and the Manual and Factory Workers' Association. This shows the difficulty of bringing together craftsmen and skilled workers with considerable professional pride and less qualified labourers in *trade associations*. Thus the founding years of the 1860s and 70s were also a period of seeking, in which organizations both local and supraregional, both segregated by occupation and gender and all-embracing, short-lived and more permanent, co-existed. While the dominant trend even in the 1870s may have been the formation of central trade associations, it was by no means the only path taken.

The first few years after the formation of a trade union were naturally a time of constant efforts to set up a permanent executive and administration and to ensure efficient press relations and recruitment; in addition, all the associations sought to establish a stable system of benefits, partly as the best argument when joining up new members. Finally, with the following wind of a flourishing economy, they all attempted to formulate their economic and social demands and to achieve them through numerous cases of industrial action. Higher wages and shorter working hours (down to ten hours a day) were certainly the most important "material" goals of the unionized workers. But equally important were probably their efforts to resist the "bosses"' attempts to debase them and deny them their rights; again and again, strikers would call for an end to the "gagging" regulations in force in the factories and demand humane treatment by superiors and the right freely to join a trade union.

Disregarding political parties, the labour movement took two forms in the 1860s: temporary strike coalitions, which were rallying movements for specific conflicts, and local, but more long-term trade union associations, based on the principle of representative democracy through the election of delegates. These two forms of organization were often born out of industrial disputes with the employers, although naturally once the dispute was over only the trade unions were able to monitor the employers' compliance with the agreements reached and, if necessary, take the required action, or threaten to do so, without losing valuable time. Unions enjoyed another great advantage over strike coalitions: they were able to provide funds for industrial disputes and their existence as permanent organizations enabled them to "learn" – "storing" information on the tactics to use when taking militant action, for instance. Moreover, it swiftly became clear that strikes could not be an end in themselves: the cost to the workers was simply too high. Furthermore, major industrial

disputes, especially defeats, repeatedly turned out to be the undoing of the organization involved. In fact, carefully devised objectives and methods soon became standard trade union policy. A resolution adopted by the Leipzig Social Democratic Workers' Association in May 1871 stated that a strike should only be called "if there is a compelling necessity and the necessary resources are available". The "establishment and maintenance of works cooperatives (Gewerksgenossenschaften)" was recommended as the "best way of acquiring money and organizations".[3] The unions were, then, a response to specific industrial disputes, which they turned into formal conflicts of interest. With the strike wave of 1865–73, industrial action superseded the traditional forms of protest such as complaints and petitions as the workers' means of defending their interests.

Simply in view of the risks which strikes entailed, the inclination of most union members to aim for regional and national forms of organization as quickly as possible is quite understandable. It was the best way to build up funds, to finance industrial action and to prevent strike breaking through the transfer of workers from areas not affected by a strike. Moreover, the benefits system was also a major argument for achieving the maximum level of organization.

While these were undoubtedly sensible reasons, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated, there is no overlooking the fact that unionization provided a way of keeping worker militancy and spontaneous protest under control and ultimately snuffing them out. Before long, absenteeism, go-slows and "wildcat" strikes were subject to disciplinary measures by the unions as well as the employers. The decision to centralize the unions marked the first step on a road that was ultimately to lead to administration, order and discipline becoming the essential characteristics of everyday trade unionism.

If experience of industrial action is to be considered the most important precondition for establishing unions, there were considerable differences when it came to party political allegiance. Unlike the Printers' Union, the first national union, the General German Cigar Workers' Association, founded in 1865, was close to Lassalle's ADAV; by autumn 1867 it had roughly 6,500 members and by the summer of 1869, some 10,000. Its chairman, Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche, was a committed Lassallean. And the trade associations that emerged in the late 1860s and early 70s by no means attached as much importance to stressing their party political independence as did the printers. Although the early trade

3 Quot. Arno Klönne/Hartmut Reese. Die deutsche Gewerkschaftsbewegung. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (Hamburg, 1984), p. 40

union movement arose from the workers' desire to defend their social and economic interests against the employers without depending on anyone else, the unions were very much involved in the various political tendencies and parties to which they subscribed; these, however, sought to use the unions for their own ends. What did this party political spectrum look like?

3. *The trade unions and the struggle between the parties*

Let us first look at social democracy. Ferdinand Lassalle broke new ground with the formation of the General Association of German Working Men (ADAV) on 23 May 1863 in Leipzig. The ADAV manifesto, Lassalle's "Open Letter of Reply" to the central committee for the convocation of a general German workers' congress in Leipzig on 1 March 1863[4] not only painted a vivid picture of the wretched conditions of the day but also pointed the way ahead to a better future. The key words of this plan were equal suffrage and state-aided producer associations; the trade unions had no place in it. Union work was bound to appear pointless: in tackling the issue of consumer associations, Lassalle had expounded the "iron law of wages", whereby pay could not rise above subsistence level for any length of time, since higher wages would lead to an increase in the working population, whereupon the increased supply of labour would push wages down again. Lassalle did see that the organization of the working class was a precondition of obtaining political influence; but it was party political organization he had in mind – in the ADAV, the membership of which was growing but slowly, reaching 4,600 in the summer of 1864. Under pressure from reality (that is, the trade unions' success in attracting members), the ADAV, now headed by Johann Baptist von Schweitzer following Lassalle's death, finally brought itself to recognize this branch of the German labour movement. As mentioned above, an ADAV official, F.W. Fritzsche, even took over the leadership of a trade union, the Cigar Workers' Association. The possibility cannot be ruled out that von Schweitzer, who never made any secret of his reservations on the subject of unions, encouraged the setting up of unions partly because the supporters of the International Working Men's Association, founded in London in 1864, would shortly be forming their own associations.

4 Reprinted in Dowe and Klotzbach (eds.), Programmatische Dokumente der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, 2nd edition (Berlin and Bonn, 1984), pp. 112–44

Be that as it may, at the ADAV general assembly, which met in Hamburg from 22 to 26 August 1868, Schweitzer moved that a congress be convened to set up an umbrella organization for trade unions with Lassallean leanings. Although this proposal was rejected by the majority, who still retained the old hostility towards the unions, Schweitzer and Fritzsche were authorized to arrange a congress in Berlin in their capacity as members of the Reichstag. Accordingly, on 26 September – with Schweitzer in the chair – the General Federation of German Workers (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterschaftsverband) was founded; true to the centralist principles of the ADAV, it organized itself into trade sections – for coal and iron ore miners, engineering workers, dyers, shoemakers and so on. Nine of the twelve sections planned were set up immediately.

In its rules the General Federation of German Workers[5] stated that its aim was "the preservation and promotion of the honour and the material interests of the working class". In accordance with the ADAV's centralist ideas, Article 2a laid down that each section was to "give its president or some other individual the unconditional authority to take part in the negotiations and decisions of the Central Committee of the General Federation of German Workers on behalf of the section". This Central Committee, consisting of the presidents of the individual sections, was the body which decided whether or not to support a strike (Article 8f). If one looks at the strike movements of those years, this rule meant that the route from a local or company-wide protest to the support of the Central Committee was a very long one. Certainly, it was a contribution to planned, sensible union action and represented a way of organizing industrial disputes; but for the workers concerned it must have been hard to grasp at times that they had to shelve a strike for "overriding" reasons.

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The second largest tendency within social democracy, the "Eisenachers", led by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, accepted the idea of trade unions from the start. They were thus following the principles of the International Working Men's Association, which were influenced by Karl Marx. Marx's Inaugural Address at the IWMA's Geneva congress recog-

5 See Satzung für den (Schweitzerschen) Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterschaftsverband, beschlossen vom ersten Deutschen Arbeiterkongress 1868, in Hermann Müller: Die Organisationen der Lithographen, Steindrucker und verwandten Berufe, reprint of the first edition of 1917 (Bonn and Berlin, 1978), pp. 425–30

nized the necessity of the "economic emancipation of the working class"[6]. Marx therefore endeavoured to commit the unions to a revolutionary policy. In his view, which he put to the General Council of the International on 26 June 1865, the trade unions "completely miss their purpose as soon as they confine themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system".[7]

The effect of these ideas was indirect rather than direct and was seen above all when the Union of German Workers' Associations cut loose from its mentors in the liberal movement at its Nuremberg Congress of 7–9 August 1868. Several union leaders took part in this "General Congress of German Social Democratic Workers" out of opposition to Schweitzer's authoritarian style of leadership and the ADAV's centralist concept of trade unionism – chief among them being Fritzsche, the leader of the Cigar Workers' Union and Vice-President of the ADAV, Heinrich Schob of the Tailors' Union, Louis Schumann of the Shoemakers' Union and Theodor Yorck of the Joiners' Union. Led by August Bebel, the President of the Union of German Workers' Associations, the majority of the delegates passed a resolution stating that the emancipation of the working class had to be the work of that class itself; the Congress also resolved to join the IWMA and recommended the establishment of works co-operatives (Gewerksgenossenschaften), for which Bebel submitted "model rules" on 28 November 1868[8].

With this draft constitution, the "Eisenachers", as they were called from 1869 on, after the town where the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) was founded, came out in favour of democratically structured trade associations. The main power of decision-making – for example, on whether or not to give backing to an industrial dispute – was to be given to the union executive (Article 38) and not, as advocated by the Lassalleans under Schweitzer's leadership, to the "umbrella organization". The aim of the trade unions was to "preserve and promote the dignity and the material interests of its members' (Article 1). To this end, they were to introduce

6 Karl Marx, Inauguraladresse der Internationalen Arbeiterassoziation, gegründet am 28 September 1864, in Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels: Werke (MEW), vol. 16, (Berlin 1962), p. 5 ff.

7 Karl Marx, Lohn, Preis und Profit (1865) in MEW, vol. 16, p. 152; originally written in English and reprinted in Marx/ Engels, Collected Works Vol. 20 (London, 1985) p. 149

8 See (Bebels) Musterstatuten für Deutsche Gewerksgenossenschaften, in Müller, pp. 441–450

assistance in the event of a strike or disciplinary action and a comprehensive system of welfare benefits, carry out statistical surveys and start their own newspaper (Article 2). Express provision was made for female membership (Article 3). In early 1869, a number of unions were founded in conformity with Bebel's recommendations, including the International Bookbinders' Association, the Coal and Iron Ore Miners' Union and the International Manufacturing, Factory and Manual Workers' Union headed by Julius Motteler.

While the Eisenachers were thus far more sympathetic towards trade unions than the Lassalleans, both assigned the unions a subordinate part in the emancipation of the working class. The unions were supposed to school the proletariat for the decisive political struggle, which was to be waged by the party. Thus both trends inside social democracy tried to gain the support of the trade unions in the 1860s. From the very outset they turned the unions into battlefields for competing party political interests, which undoubtedly weakened them. This probably applied most of all to Schweitzer; after all, he made sure that the Federation of German Workers barred its members from joining the "Eisenacher" SDAP. This made it obvious that the Federation was the ADAV umbrella organization. In view of later developments, there is no denying that the trade unions' clear links with the Social Democratic movement provided a welcome pretext for setting up the liberal Hirsch-Duncker trade associations (Gewerkvereine) and, at a later stage, the Christian trade unions.

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Even the inaugural congress of Schweitzer's Federation of German Workers in Berlin saw a break with the liberal trade unions, represented by a delegation of mechanical engineers from Berlin led by Max Hirsch. Hirsch had just toured England and in his "Social Letters" in the "Berliner Volkszeitung", a newspaper published by Franz Duncker, a deputy of the liberal German Party of Progress, he tried to enlist support for trade unions on the English model. Furthermore, he had opposed the appeal by the General Congress of Workers because it mentioned striking. One may assume that the idea of hitching the planned Federation to the ADAV also disturbed him. Hirsch's conception of trade unions was dominated by ideas about the amicable settlement of disputes and independence from political parties, which in fact meant giving implicit support to the liberal Progress Party (*Fortschrittspartei*), of which he was a member.

When the mechanical engineers from Berlin led by Hirsch put forward these ideas at the congress, they were expelled from the hall for seeking –

as a resolution put it[9] – "to cause disquiet and disturbance among the workers in the interest of the capitalists". In response Hirsch called for the establishment of trade associations (Gewerkvereine) 'on the English model'. In November 1868 the Trade Association of the Mechanical Engineers of Berlin was set up, becoming in December the Trade Association of German Mechanical Engineers and Engineering Workers (H-D), the first national, liberal trade union organization. In May 1869 the Federation of German Trade Associations (H-D) was formed as an umbrella organization of eight trade associations whose memberships were growing rapidly. By the end of 1869 some 30,000 members were organized in 250 local associations along the lines of the model rules drawn up by Hirsch and Duncker[10]. These laid down that a trade association was intended to "protect and promote the rights and interests of its members in a lawful fashion", in particular by setting up a comprehensive system of benefits (Article 2) and the improvement of working conditions (Article 3) – from wage levels and working hours to the establishment of courts of arbitration. Rooted in the tradition of liberal thought, the H-D trade associations rated the principle of self help more highly than state aid. They envisaged their organization as a negotiating counterweight to the employers, from whom they did not consider themselves divorced by any unsurmountable clash of interests. Equal rights for workers, the amicable settling of differences through negotiation, social reforms on the basis of existing conditions and their own benefits system – these were, in their opinion, the way to solve the "social question", which they approached with purely moderate demands.

However attractive the idea of trade associations was initially, resistance to equal rights for workers and a thorough-going policy of social reform on the part of the government and the liberal bourgeoisie soon dashed their hopes for the peaceful settlement of differences. Disillusionment was probably hastened, too, by the defeats suffered by the associations in two strikes in 1869–70 – in the Waldenburg coal district (Lower Silesia) and the Niederlausitz textile industry around Forst. They confirmed the view born of experience that the unions had nothing to gain by adopting a conciliatory policy in the face of the employers' intransigence. The failures of union policy and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 combined to inflict severe membership losses on the H-D associations, whose numbers declined to less than 20,000.

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9 Quot. Müller, p. 157

10 See Musterstatuten der Deutschen Gewerkvereine (Hirsch-Duncker) in Müller, pp. 431–41

What was the situation at the end of the 1860s? There were the Arbeiterschaften allied to Schweitzer's ADAV; there were the International Gewerksgenossenschaften, which looked to the "Eisenacher" SDAP headed by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht; and finally there were the liberal Hirsch-Duncker Gewerkvereine. This political spread reflected social as well as political differences. Those sections of the working class that enjoyed higher status, such as the glove-makers, gold and silversmiths and mechanical engineers, were obviously drawn to a liberal democratic or social liberal vision of society, at least in the early stages of trade unionism in the 1860s and 70s. Those who had formerly practised a trade under the old guild system and since come down in the world – such as shoemakers, tailors, weavers, spinners and joiners – seem to have been more receptive to social democratic ideas.

The roughly equal attraction of liberal and social democratic ideas is reflected in their membership statistics. When the founding phase of the unions was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the Hirsch-Duncker associations had about 35,000 members, the Arbeiterschaften about 18,500 and the International Gewerksgenossenschaften about 18,000; on top of this there were the 6,600 members of the Printers' Association, which did not take a definite political line. The strength of the H-D associations and the Social Democratic unions' occupational orientation reinforce the impression that trade unionism was initially more popular with the more skilled workers, artisans and craftsmen.

4. *Crisis in the trade unions and the beginnings of centralization*

The Franco-Prussian War signified a major setback for the young trade union movement. The Federation of German Workers lost the majority of its members in 1870–71, a trend that was strengthened by Schweitzer's plan to turn the Federation into a cross-occupational organization called the "General German Federation for the Support of Working Men" (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterunterstützungsverband). The purpose of this new federation was laid down in Article 2 of the rules adopted by the general assembly on 12–15 June 1870: "To preserve and promote the honour and the material interests of its members by adopting a firm and united stance, particularly – if necessary – by the organized withdrawal of labour."[1] This national union, headed by a three-man Bureau and a cen-

[1] Satzung des Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterunterstützungsverbandes, beschlossen von der Verbandsgeneralversammlung vom 12. bis 15. Juni 1870, reprinted in Müller, pp.450–56

tral committee of twelve, brought together workers and artisans, both male and female, organized not by trade or industry but by district. This decision met with so much internal resistance that it was relaxed in 1871. None the less, several occupational unions, including the carpenters and joiners, left the Federation, whose membership had fallen from a pre-war figure of more than 18,000 to 4,200 in May 1871. The "Eisenacher" International unions also suffered heavy losses: four of the ten occupational unions folded in 1870, and the remaining ones had been weakened so badly that they were unable to convene a general assembly.

The economic boom of 1871–73 did enable the unions to recover to a certain extent. They achieved greater stability, and during the outbreak of strikes in this period they began to secure for the first time a small share in the benefits of growth for their members. A few examples will suffice.In 1871 the Berlin bricklayers achieved the ten-hour day after several strikes; in Chemnitz 6,500 engineering workers came out on strike in the autumn of 1871; and lastly there was the strike of 21,000 miners in the Essen district mentioned above.

But the crisis in the union movement triggered off by the war soon deepened with the onset of the depression of 1873. The poor economic situation sapped union power and lessened their chances of success. In almost every industry workers were forced to accept wage cuts. It was not only in heavy industry that the employers' crisis plan was in evidence. To bring down costs working hours were increased and wages cut; at the same time, the formation of cartels and entrepreneurs' associations was stepped up. The employers' position, which was evident enough from numerous cases of industrial action, became much more rigid. The "factory bosses" devised their own response to the rash of strikes and the spread of the trade union movement in general. With a call for state assistance against the "subversive movement" and through their own organizational efforts they sought to maintain their supremacy.

Moreover, most employers refused to negotiate with union representatives at all. The employers were determined to cling on to personal contracts, in accordance with the dictum "divide and rule". In spite of this, the first collective agreement was reached in 1873, the General German Printers' Agreement. Remaining in force for three years, it made the ten-hour day compulsory, regulated permitted overtime and stipulated the setting up of arbitration services. But it was to be a while yet before the idea of collective agreements gained general acceptance within the trade union movement, let alone with the employers.

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In this situation, the determination of trade unionists to meet the crisis with unity grew. Some years earlier, in 1870, Theodor Yorck, the chairman of the Woodworkers' Union, had come up with a plan to bring the unions together. At the Erfurt Trade Union Congress from 15 to 17 June 1872 this idea was unanimously approved: "Considering that the power of capital oppresses and exploits all workers equally, regardless of whether they are conservative, progressive-liberal or social democratic, Congress declares it the workers' sacred duty to set aside all party discord and, on the neutral ground of a united union organization, create the right conditions for powerful and successful resistance, safeguard livelihoods under threat and secure an improvement in their class position."[12] But the attempt to set up a "union of trade unions' planned for Whitsun 1874 at the trade union congress in Magdeburg, as an umbrella organization of "German trade co-operatives, trade and craft associations, which are concerned to achieve the material betterment and spiritual edification of the working class"[13], ultimately foundered on the reservations of the local organizations, which rejected any centralization of decision-making as undemocratic undermining of their own position. The strength of these local associations is shown by the size of their membership: of the 11,300 trade unionists represented in Erfurt by 50 delegates, approximately 6,100 belonged to national trade unions, 3,700 to local associations and 1,500 to free or "mixed" trade unions.

The crisis in the young trade union movement favoured such attempts at unification – albeit only in the case of unions with a social democratic tendency. However, it was only when the political parties achieved unity that the way was clear for a merger between the trade unions. With the founding of the empire in 1871 one of the bones of contention between the Lassalleans and the Eisenachers had lost its relevance: the question of whether German unity should be achieved under Prussian domination, as advocated by the Lassalleans, or whether a "greater-German" solution – including Austria – was preferable had been decided in favour of the former. The two parties were agreed on basic principles – radical reform but not revolution – and had, after all, received 6.8 per cent of the vote in the general election of 10 January 1874. And as stated above, it also seemed advisable to unite Social Democratic factions in view of the weakness of

12 Quot. Müller, p. 301

13 Satzungen der „Gewerkschafts-Union", nach den Beschlüssen des Gewerkschafts-Kongresses vom 15. bis 17. Juni 1872 in Erfurt, in Müller, pp. 456–62; revised version, based on the decisions taken at the congress in Magdeburg, 23–25 May 1874, ibid. pp. 463–65

the trade unions, and therefore the decision was taken at the Gotha party conference from 22 to 27 May 1875 to found the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany. One encouraging result of the party merger was an increase in the socialist vote to 9.1 per cent at the general election of 10 January 1877; another was the unification of the Social Democratic union movement, a decision taken on 28–29 May 1875, also in Gotha, at a trade union conference immediately after the party conference.

The merger arose from a resolution by Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche, making it the duty of all trade unionists "to keep politics out of the trade union organizations". The resolution called on the trade unionists in the newly created Socialist Workers' Party to join, "as they are the only ones fully able to make the political and economic position of the workers fit for human beings". This formulation was undoubtedly intended to get round the law on association with regard to "political associations". At the same time, however, it expressed the idea of a division of labour between union and party, with the latter having precedence over the former. After all, the conference resolution stated most modestly: "Although the workers' trade union organizations cannot improve the workers' situation radically and permanently, they are nevertheless capable of raising their living standards periodically, promoting education and making them conscious of their class position."[14]

The low level of self-assurance among trade unionists was without a doubt due to the recent economic crisis, with all its adverse effects on organization and setbacks in industrial disputes. The willing recognition of the party's leading role was, however, also a symptom of the political situation, for the unions' position in law and equality for the working class as a whole still had to be fought for and won.

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Putting the decision to unite into practice turned out to be rather a slow process, as many of the occupational trade unions were very reluctant to carry out the merger. Overall union membership was slow to recover from the setbacks of wartime and crisis. The trade union movement grew steadily but was far from being a mass movement: by the end of 1877 the Social Democratic unions had a total of some 50,000 members. Thirteen unions had over a thousand members: the bookbinders, printers, factory workers, kid glove makers, joiners, hatters, bricklayers, engineering work-

14 Beschlüsse der Gewerkschaftskonferenz zu Gotha am 28/29 Mai 1875, in Müller, p. 380 ff.

ers, ships' carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, tobacco workers and textile workers. The strongest unions were the tobacco workers with 8,100 members, the printers with 5,500, the joiners with 5,100, the engineering workers with 4,000, the shoemakers with 3,600 and the carpenters with 3,300[15]. These membership figures show that even in the Social Democratic union movement the unions of artisans dominated the picture.

But the unification of the trade union movement slowly went ahead. In February 1878 the trade union conference in Gotha agreed on the need for greater concentration of the trade union newspapers and more co-operation between them. Membership dues were to be standardized (and raised). Lastly, the issue of greater mutual support in union administration and agitation was debated[16]. But a joint conference of trade unions on these plans due to take place in Magdeburg at Whitsun 1878 could no longer be held, with the imminent enactment of the Socialist Law and the prohibitions contained therein. The spread of the union movement and the Social Democratic Party, the reconciliation between Lassalleans and Eisenachers in Gotha, and the strikes and elections won by the movement as a whole strengthened the cohesion of their adversaries' defensive front, comprising both employers and state. As political pressure on the unions grew, so too did the political divergence in the trade union movement between Social Democrats and Liberals. At their Leipzig congress of 1876, the Hirsch-Duncker trade associations decided to introduce a signed declaration, whereby every member stated that he opposed Social Democracy. This was, however, not merely a response to the advances and radical policies of the Social Democrats; it was also, and principally, an attempt to evade the increasingly severe legal restrictions being placed on the labour movement.

The first attempts "to stem the Social Democratic tide" occurred in the mid and late 1870s, and certainly by the outbreak of the economic crisis. The breach of contract bill which Bismarck laid before Parliament in late 1873, making it a punishable offence to go on strike, was voted down in 1874 thanks to the National Liberals. But the same year a decree by the Prussian Ministry of the Interior made "pernicious agitation and incitement directed against the employers or against the owning classes" in the press or at a public meeting an offence. 1874 also saw the start of the "Tessendorf Era", so called after a Berlin public prosecutor, when every legal

15 Statistics from Willy Albrecht, Fachverein – Berufsgewerkschaft – Zentralverband. Organisationsprobleme der deutschen Gewerkschaften 1870–1890 (Bonn, 1982), p. 534 f.

16 Beschlüsse der Gewerkschaftskonferens zu Gotha vom 24. und 25. Februar 1878, in Müller, p. 466–68

possibility of harrassing the labour movement was employed. On 19 October 1878, the "law against the efforts of Social Democracy to endanger society" was passed by the Reichstag, hitting both party work and the trade unions very hard. With this step, Bismarck's Reich helped provide tangible proof that the picture of a class state painted by the Social Democratic labour movement was correct.