



Max Weber and the Problem of a 'Successful Peace'

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Article abstract

"How can we think of peace? And when?", Max Weber asks in a letter to Ferdinand Tönnies, in 14 October 1914. This article focuses on the concept of "successful" peace, the decisive concept for Weber's ideas about the "way out of the war" that the author refined between 1914–1918 in his speeches, texts and letters. For Weber, a successful peace depended not only on the foreign policy dimension but even more on important inner reforms and a fundamental reorganisation of the German Reich. Analysing Weber's "ideas of 1918" – radically opposed to the well-known "ideas of 1914" – this paper focuses on three aspects: (1) nation and state citizens (2) Prussia, (3) German tradition, history and political culture, before outlining, at the end, Weber's ideas about the European post-war order.

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Abstract. *“How can we think of peace? And when?”*, Max Weber asks in a letter to Ferdinand Tönnies, in 14 October 1914. This article focuses on the concept of “successful” peace, the decisive concept for Weber’s ideas about the “way out of the war” that the author refined between 1914–1918 in his speeches, texts and letters. For Weber, a successful peace depended not only on the foreign policy dimension but even more on important inner reforms and a fundamental reorganisation of the German Reich. Analysing Weber’s “ideas of 1918” – radically opposed to the well-known “ideas of 1914” – this paper focuses on three aspects: (1) nation and state citizens (2) Prussia, (3) German tradition, history and political culture, before outlining, at the end, Weber’s ideas about the European post-war order.

Introduction

Compared with Émile Durkheim und Georg Simmel, the two renowned founding fathers of sociology also discussed in this volume, Max Weber’s position on the First World War and his ideas about the post-war order evidently differ in three respects.* Durkheim passed away one year before the end of the war on 15 November 1917. Simmel died less than a year later, on 28 September 1918, six weeks before the armistice. Weber, on the other hand, survived the end of the war by about a year-and-a-half; he submitted observations and commentaries as well as endeavoured to influence the “way out of the war”. The second difference concerns participation in the war. None of the three

* This article was translated by Suzanne Kirkbright. Published with support by the Centre de recherches historiques (EHESS/CNRS), Paris.

'sociologists' was a combatant at the front. However, unlike Simmel and Durkheim, Weber, who was an officer in the military reserve, had volunteered for service right at the start in August 1914. He was put in charge of organising the army hospital in Heidelberg and he wore a military uniform until autumn 1915. Following his resignation from this role, and even beforehand in 1915 and early 1916, he tried to arrange a position, albeit to no avail, in the military administration as an expert in economic and social affairs. Brussels, Berlin and Warsaw were under discussion. The third factual difference is connected with Weber's status in 1914/15 as a "military reserve officer of the field hospital commissioned in Heidelberg", as he referred to his official role in a letter¹ to Edgar Jaffé on 9 May 1915. Unlike Durkheim and Simmel, who at the start of the conflict immediately intervened in the public debate on the war, up to the end of 1915 not a single *public* opinion nor even any comment about the war has been passed down by Max Weber, except for his signature in July 1915 on a petition to the Reich Chancellor for a policy to bring about a negotiated peace settlement. Apart from this, during the initial 16 months of conflict, we are aware only of Weber's private comments about the war in correspondence with relatives, friends and colleagues as well as retrospectively from Marianne Weber's *Lebensbild* (*Max Weber: A Biography*), which was published in 1926.

Weber's first intervention as a commentator in the public debate in Germany was a wide-ranging article published on 25 December 1915 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* that seemed *prima facie* to be an essay on political theory entitled "Bismarck's Foreign Policy and the Present" (*Bismarcks Außenpolitik und die Gegenwart*) (MWG

¹ Max Weber's letters are edited in Section II of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (MWG). References here are by date and recipient. The relevant volumes are given in the bibliography.

I/15)². The first sentence sounded entirely neutral: “From an external viewpoint Bismarck’s foreign policy was: Triple Alliance.” However, the reader had no need to wait long to discern the gist of Weber’s argument. The characteristic of the Triple Alliance, according to Weber, “followed on from the general idiosyncrasies in every sense of Bismarck’s ‘conservative’ policy. It was by no means a policy of a ‘Greater Germany’.” (MWG I/15: 71-72). This sentence alone contains one of Weber’s main considerations regarding the “way out of the war”, namely: dispensing with annexations. In his newspaper article, in more neutral language and with a nod to the censors, Weber alluded to ideas that – we are familiar with these due to their posthumous publication – he had recently outlined in a memorandum “On the Matter of the Peace Treaty” (*Zur Frage des Friedensschließen*). (MWG I/15). Therefore, Weber’s first intervention in the public debate was dedicated to the issue of how the war could have been avoided or limited (a reference to Bismarck’s foreign policy), and secondly, he considered the “way out of the war”.

To associate Weber’s attitude towards the war in August 1914 with Dirk Kaesler’s suggested motto – “the old lion licks blood” (Kaesler, 2014: 737) – is to mislead the reader on two counts. Firstly, such a perception results from an overestimation of Weber’s proclamations in private correspondence such as, “This war is great and wonderful”³, and of boastful talking in letters that of his mother’s sons he had “the strongest *inborn* bellicose instincts”, and he hated “this war that should have arrived 20 years earlier and found me on horseback” as a captain who “would have

² Max Weber’s writings and speeches are edited in Section I of the *MWG*. References here are by date and recipient. The relevant volumes are given in the bibliography.

³ For instance, among others in a letter to Karl Oldenberg on 28 August 1914. Cf. Bruhns, 2017: 145.

led the company to the enemy”.⁴ After the declaration that “this war is great and wonderful”, the concluding part of the sentence is usually overlooked: “no matter what the outcome”. Weber’s initial enthusiasm about the war is quite different to many contemporaries who wanted to seize world domination. Secondly, however, a reading like Kaesler’s distorts the view of Weber’s central concern that was already expressed in his letter of 14 October 1914 to Ferdinand Tönnies:

How can we think of peace? And when? Hundreds of thousands are bleeding because of the embarrassing incapacity of our diplomacy. We cannot deny it. Therefore, I do not expect a lasting and fruitful peace for us even in the event of a favourable outcome.⁵

Not a successful war, but a “successful” peace⁶ – this is the decisive concept for Weber’s ideas about the “way out of the war”. We should also remember that for him peace-time success was not dependent or only conditionally dependent on a successful war.

During the war years, Weber refined his ideas about a “fruitful peace” regarding the political and military development in his speeches, texts and letters, yet without reverting even once further to that notion, at least not in the texts and documents, which have been handed down to us. He endeavoured, too, actively to influence the government’s policy about the conduct of war and public opinion by compiling memoranda for the government, in his speeches and particularly newspaper articles to improve the foreign and domestic policy conditions for a successful peace.

⁴ Letters to Frieda Gross, 14 March and 16 November 1915; to Helene Weber on 24 April 1916.

⁵ *Wolfgang Mommsen, Max Weber and German Politics, 1890–1920, trans. Michael S. Steinberg, Chicago London, University of Chicago Press 1984, p. 190.*

⁶ The term “Friedenserfolg” (successful peace / success of peace) was a neologism coined by Weber in opposition to the currently used term “Kriegserfolg” (successful war / success of war).

We focus first on the foreign policy aspect and turn secondly to domestic policy. Finally, we outline Weber's ideas about the European post-war order.

On the foreign policy dimension

At about the same time in October 1914 that Weber wrote to Tönnies that he was sceptical about the outcome of the war, Kurt Riezler, press officer in the Foreign Office and a trusted friend of Reich Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg from the Great Headquarters (*Großes Hauptquartier*, during the time in France in Charleville-Mézières) wrote in a letter (10 October 1914) to Käthe Liebermann, his fiancée:

In fact, I believe that if we are victorious that is the beginning of the end for Germany's domestic existence. Her best is entirely unpolitical. The country does not tolerate world domination. The foundation of the Reich was, as Nietzsche said, already a simultaneous decline (Roth / Röhl, 2016: 178).

There seems to be considerable parallelism with Weber's sceptical view, and yet this is deceptive. Weber's attitude towards the foreign policy dimension can be characterised in a sentence from his newspaper article of 25 December 1915:

If anything distinguished the objective goals of Bismarckian policy, then it was the sound judgement for what was feasible and politically desirable in the longer term, particularly at the greatest heights of heady military successes. [...] It also conflicts today with German interests to force a peace whose main result would be: *that Germany's boots in Europe would stand on everybody's toes* (MWG I/15: 90).

On the same day, 25 December 1915, Weber writes to Heinrich Simon, head of the editorial board of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: "I am certainly *against* every annexation of foreign territory in the East. [...] Above all, it is important to lower the 'expectations' and 'appetite' at home. Peace is not allowed to lag

behind the excited expectations – at least, not too strongly.” At that time, the media were heavily dominated by advocates of grand war aims. Typical of these was the so-called Seeberg Address (or, “The Manifesto of the Intellectuals”) of 20 June 1915 which, under the pretext that the enemies had planned the destruction of the German Reich, called to have done with the French threat once for all: “For the sake of our own existence we must ruthlessly weaken her politically and economically [...]” It was essential to hold onto Belgium “in the acquisition of which so much of the best German blood has been shed”. Russia, alongside the Baltic countries, must also cede land to Germany to increase its population. The English naval tyranny must be destroyed by establishing German maritime positions along the Channel, in the colonies and in Egypt: England should be dealt a vital blow at the Suez Canal, her “vital nerve” and so on.⁷

It is important to be aware of this base propaganda in the German media and in the public eye in order accurately to evaluate Weber’s position as he stated it in July 1915. Together with 90 university professors and renowned personalities, he signed the Delbrück-Dernburg Petition addressed to the Reich Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg:

Germany did not enter the war with the intention of conquest, but rather to maintain its existence, threatened by the enemy alliance, its national unity and its continuing development. Thus, Germany may only pursue in a peace agreement what serves these goals.

All war goals beyond this represented a “serious political error” and the consequence would be “not a strengthening but a disastrous weakening of the German Reich”. (MWG I/15: 762-63).

⁷ Böhme, 1975: 125-127. English translation in: “The Petition of the Six Associations and the Manifesto of the Intellectuals”, released 04 July 2014, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/46192/46192-h/46192-h.html>.

Not only the ideas about the war goals held by the *Alldeutscher Verband* and their associates contradicted the “way out of the war” but also the plans of the military and the politicians. They wanted a quick end to the war by forcing England to surrender through intensified submarine warfare or even its unrestricted conduct. For Weber, it was crystal clear that this conduct of the war would not only fail in relation to England but moreover would also provoke the intervention of the United States in the war. Weber’s committed opposition to this, initially in a memorandum to the government in March 1916 and subsequently in several speeches that same year, has been compared by Raymond Aron to the role of the Athenian general Nikias in the Peloponnesian war and his futile warning to his fellow citizens against the Sicilian expedition that was then to lead to the downfall of the Athenian empire (Aron, 1965: 181).

Another aspect of Weber’s foreign policy deliberation on the question of how and with what outcome the war could be ended is associated with the so-called fear of encirclement or the widespread idea during the pre-war years that people in Germany lived in a kind of fortress, which was besieged on all sides.⁸ Many witnesses could be quoted, yet two examples may suffice. On 15 January 1912, the classical philologist Hermann Diehls wrote to his Belgian colleague Franz Cumont: “Now in this country no one is in any doubt about the Entente’s game of collusion to strangle us at the right moment on land and sea.” (Bonnet, 2005: 110 f). Like Diehls, and many others, Thomas Mann also described himself as surrounded. In November 1914, he concluded his “Thoughts in Wartime” (*Gedanken im Kriege*) with the sentence:

You want to encircle us, strangulate, blot us out, but Germany, as you already see, will defend her deep, hated ego like a lion, and the result of your attack will be your amazement to find yourselves compelled to study us (Mann, [1914] 1970: 23).

⁸ See particularly Krumeich, 1989; Daniel, 2005.

Weber had already written in his 1906 essay on “Russia’s Transition to Sham Constitutionalism” (*Rußlands Übergang zum Scheinkonstitutionalismus*) that Germany was living “embedded in a world of enemies” (MWG I/10: 679). The idea of having long been encircled by enemies corresponded on the part of the adversaries in the war with the conviction that the German Reich was an unnatural construction. This idea was shared by politicians as well as academics. For example, in September 1914 Emile Durkheim wrote to the philosopher Xavier Léon:

Les royaumes de Prusse et d’Autriche sont des agrégats contre nature faits et maintenus par la force et ils n’ont pas su remplacer peu à peu la force et la dépendance contrainte par l’attachement consenti. Un empire ainsi façonné ne peut durer. La géographie de l’Europe va être refaite sur des bases rationnelles et morales (Durkheim, 1975: 470 f; cf. Fournier, 2007: 845).

The consequence of the encirclement syndrome, as Weber perceived it, was that he wanted to see the way out of the war paved with foreign- and military policy assurances and guarantees. Basically, there were two key demands: in future, Belgian neutrality had to be genuine neutrality towards both sides; furthermore, there was a need for guarantees that would have meant restricting Belgian sovereignty. The situation was similar in the East: although Poland was to become an independent state, Germany needed to access across her territory a line of fortifications against the Russian threat. It was a defensive mentality to have German-controlled fortresses in Poland and Belgium. Weber had in mind the European post-war order of states whose geopolitical centre was a German ‘power state’ (*Machtstaat*) with foreign policy guarantees through the recognition of its right to exist, through an alliance system and advanced line of defence – although without annexations. This was traditional thinking that radically differed from the philosophy of the political strategists in the Great Headquarters (and elsewhere) for whom the question of the “way

out of the war” in autumn 1914 was addressed under the viewpoint of how Belgium could be made into a tributary state, or indeed how it was to be divided up between Germany and a defeated France to establish a united front against England. To quote Kurt Riezler (19 October 1914) again, the idea was that “ultimately, the next century depends on the ingenuity of this conception of a new Europe” (Roth & Röhl, 2016: 188).

On the domestic policy dimension

The initial enthusiasm about the war among broad swathes of the German population was also associated with the conviction that it would fundamentally change German society for the better. Some observers promised themselves from the war – following Bismarck’s impetus for external nationhood – a boost for domestic nation building. Others clung for some time to the illusion of the ‘truce of the political parties’ (*Burgfrieden*), and countless intellectuals proclaimed the ‘German ideas of 1914’ that marked out Germany’s independent path to modernity, which was far removed from the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Bourgeois intellectuals and Social Democratic authors came together to discuss the future position of the workers in the new Germany, in post-war Germany.⁹ The Germans were perceived as being on the “way to a united and free nation”, according to the historian Hermann Oncken: “The experience of this war completes German fortunes externally and internally. That is its deepest meaning when one ranks this event in the wider historical context.” (Oncken, 1915, 1). Social scientists like Emil Lederer believed that they could discern a transformation of society to a community, and not merely in Germany. In the famous “Intermediate Reflection” Weber, too, pinpointed this new dimension of a feeling of community more realistically not in society at large but among the soldiers at the front:

⁹ See various contributions in Thimme & Legien, 1915.

In modern political societies *war* as the realised threat of violence creates a pathos and a feeling of community, and so releases a commitment and unlimited social sacrifice of the combatants. Moreover, it triggers as a mass phenomenon a work of compassion and outpouring of love for the vulnerable that overflows all normal boundaries of the group. In this, in the field of religion, it is comparable only to the heroic communities of brotherly love.¹⁰

His enthusiasm about the war in August and September 1914 was much more a reaction to the attitude and spirit of the soldiers than an expression of hope that the war as such would create a new and better Germany. Weber could not be taken in by such illusions – his political thinking was too realistic for this. Changes could only be carried out in conflict and through a power struggle with the “interested parties”, one of his favourite terms. The “successful peace” was based on the precondition of two central political reforms: firstly, the introduction of parliamentary government to the political system with the aim of putting politics in the hands of accountable politicians and forcing the administration to submit to the control of parliament. Secondly, the democratisation of society on the one hand through a reform of the electoral franchise in Prussia, and on the other hand through greater social justice. On both counts, in his work as a political commentator Weber shone a light on the situation of the returning soldiers.

If, for Weber, the war accomplished from a macrosociological perspective basically only the triumph of the rational, labour-

¹⁰ Translated by Sam Whimster. „Der *Krieg* als die realisierte Gewaltandrohung schafft, gerade in den modernen politischen Gemeinschaften, ein Pathos und ein Gemeinschaftsgefühl und löst dabei eine Hingabe und bedingungslose Opfergemeinschaft der Kämpfenden und überdies eine Arbeit des Erbarmens und der alle Schranken der naturgegebenen Verbände sprengenden Liebe zum Bedürftigen als Massenerscheinung aus, welcher die Religionen im allgemeinen nur in Heroengemeinschaften der Brüderlichkeitsethik ähnliches zur Seite zu stellen haben.“ (MWG I/19: 492).

division, technical and *bureaucratic* organisation of all man's ruling bodies, from the factory to the army and the state, particularly in Germany (as he argued in *Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order*, MWG I/15: 461), this in no sense excluded a sharp critique of the real economic and social development in Germany during the war.

The main question was: which interests, which strata or groups will influence the economic structures in post-war Germany? Since Weber's first foray into studies of politics on the status of agricultural workers in the areas east of the Elbe, the parameters of his analysis were clear: a critique of the social power structures in the East, concern about the well-being of a farming population that would be in a position of defending the eastern part of Germany culturally and, if necessary, militarily; critique of agrarian capitalism, critique of the efforts of the bourgeois middle-class in Prussia to create a feudal society with its tendency for capitalism based on unearned (pensioned) income (*Rentnerkapitalismus*); support of the workers and the trade unions on the one hand, and on the other hand (genuine) entrepreneurs; a plea for a modern economy that would enable the nation to sustain itself in competition with the large and politically powerful industrialised nations.

The constant target of his vitriolic critique in the war are the profiteers and those who benefitted undeservedly, that is, regarding their achievements for the nation and for the common good. He especially takes aim at the "war profiteers" who stayed safely behind at home. Not only because they profit from the war, while the mass of the workers and farmers dedicate their lives to the war effort, but particularly because Weber also foresees how the war-induced redeployment of wealth will burden the economic, social and political post-war restructuring of Germany by imposing heavy debts in peace time.

In autumn 1916 and winter 1916/1917, the military situation was completely undecided and during these months there were various tentative efforts for peace initiatives. It therefore seemed

entirely realistic that peace negotiations could soon materialise where Germany would emerge relatively unscathed with or without annexations. Between December 1915 and November 1916, Weber had planned out several detailed accounts of a foreign policy concept in the event that peace should prove within tangible reach. However, the first two war years had also made it clear that neither by following a ‘negotiated peace’ (*‘Verständigungsfrieden’*) nor a ‘victorious peace’ (*‘Siegfrieden’*) would Germany simply be capable of transferring its domestic and social policy to the normal daily agenda. Weber had personally indicated this in his first public speech on 1 August 1916 in Nuremberg, only he had done so in a roundabout way. The ideas of 1917 would be decisive, that is, the question concerning how Germany should be structured in contrast to the illusions of the ‘German ideas of 1914’¹¹ (MWG I/15: 660). It was the domestic development in 1917 that then persuaded Weber to substantiate his ideas given the present prolonging of the war and to portray these as the ‘ideas of 1918’.

Weber presented his detailed ideas about the future in 1917 and 1918 in a series of essays and newspaper articles, in particular, in *Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*¹²), *Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order*¹³), and finally in the pamphlet on “The Future Form of the German State” (*Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*, MWG I/16: 91–146), which emerged from two newspaper articles published in late November 1918. By mid-December, the editorial revision was finished, and the pamphlet was published in January 1919. In relation to the ideas of 1918,

¹¹ See Bruendel, 2003; Flasch, 2000 and especially Lübke, 1963.

¹² MWG I/15: 344-396. Written in Sommer 1917, published as a pamphlet at the start of December 1917 in the series *Der deutsche Volksstaat. Schriften zur inneren Politik* issued by the book publisher “Hilfe”.

¹³ MWG I/15: 421-596. Published as a pamphlet at the end of April or start of May 1918, based on five articles published in the *FZ* between late April and late June 1917.

this contribution has a special meaning, since Weber could now develop his ideas based on knowledge of the realistic post-war situation (defeat, overthrow in Berlin), however, he was completely uncertain about the peace-time conditions.

The reforms demanded in 1917 and 1918, before the armistice, count among Weber's 'ideas of 1918'. The most important political demands were 1) Equal suffrage for the "homecoming soldiers", i.e. the abolition of the Prussian system of three-class suffrage; 2) elevation of parliament's role to make it capable of exercising its actual functions, namely, on the one hand to produce accountable politicians who were capable of leadership, and on the other hand to practise an effective control of bureaucracy and government. In addition, 3) Enhancing the role of political parties and 4) Yet, only in connection with constitutional reform: reflections on the status of the Reich president. However, these proposals for political reform only partially outline Weber's ideas of 1918. He was concerned not only with reforms but with the organisation of peace (Bruhns, 2017: 68–70).

However, Weber regarded the organisation of the future peace as in dire jeopardy through an attack of the 'Prussian plutocracy' on domestic peace in early 1917.¹⁴ In Weber's eyes, Prussia represented a heavy burden for the future on several grounds. To understand his agitation about this domestic policy breach of peace, it is necessary to revisit the year 1904 when in addition to the two famous essays that he published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (*AfSS*) on "The 'Objectivity' of Social-Scientific and Socio-Political Knowledge" (*Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*) and *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism*, he published a third essay, which nowadays tends rather unfairly to be overlooked: "Considerations

¹⁴ *Deutschlands äußere und Preußens innere Politik*, MWG I/15: 214. *Ein Wahlrechtsnotgesetz des Reichs*, MWG I/15: 217 and 221.

on the Question of Entailed Estates in Prussia from the Point of View of Agricultural Statistics and Social Policy”¹⁵.

In 1903, the Prussian state government had submitted a “Provisional Draft Law on Entailed Estates” (*Vorläufiger Entwurf eines Gesetzes über Familienfideikommisse*). This was the incentive for Weber to write his essay for the *AfSS* which was well received by the general public. In the light of the numerous critical objections – not only from Weber – the government subsequently withdrew from proposing the new legal bill in the state parliament and engaged in further consultation. Weber regarded the particular subject as his specialist domain of expertise, since he had originally devoted years of study to agrarian policy in the East and then made this a central theme of his inaugural lecture on national economic policy delivered in 1895 at the University of Freiburg (*The Nation State and Economic Policy*, MWG I/4). In his essay published in the *AfSS*, he discussed the social and economic consequences of the planned legislation:

There is in my opinion no point of view per se under which the further assertion of the Prussian civil service with that type of ‘would-be noble’ could emerge as a gain. Through the authorisation of the formation of numerous smaller entailed estates the ‘aristocratic principle’ is not produced in any sense of the word but – as must be repeatedly stated – families are filled with feudal pretensions who otherwise would have income levels appropriate for a modest middle-class conduct of life. However, the possibility for the bourgeois and letter nobility to form entailed estates tends to steer – by appealing to the most contemptible vanity – bourgeois German capital from the path of economic conquests in the wide world more heavily towards the creation of rentiers which in any case falls

¹⁵ Max Weber, *Agrarstatistische und sozialpolitische Betrachtungen zur Fideikommissfrage in Preußen*, MWG I/8: 92-188). *Familienfideikommiss* refers to the capital of an entailed estate that is inalienable (not for sale), indivisible and generally held as land estate.

under our protectionist policy. For the protection of rents is indeed the hallmark of our economic policy (MWG I/8: 185).

His essay concluded with the remark “that the surrender of the best estates to the vanity and rulership interests of agricultural capitalism” – that would be the result of the intended “*material* freedom to create entailed estates” – “cuts off the vital interest of the nation in a thriving and strong farming population.” (MWG I/8: 188).

To return to the events of the war: prior to the outbreak of war, the Prussian conservatives had already presented to the state parliament a new, revised draft bill for entailed estates. Originally, this was to have been reviewed in spring 1915. The Prussian government then suspended consultations throughout the war due to the intervention of the Progressive Party (*Fortschrittspartei*). To compensate for the movement of Bethmann Hollweg’s policy to the left, in 1916 members of the Prussian house of lords demanded a resubmission of the draft bill. The Prussian Minister President – and Reich Chancellor – Bethmann Hollweg authorised this, so the draft bill was introduced in the Prussian parliament on 16 January 1917.

Weber was outraged about this action. He took the matter seriously to task in an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 1 March 1917. The title already indicates the gist of the article: “The Nobilisation of War Profits” (*Die Nobilitierung der Kriegsgewinne*) (MWG I/15: 206-214). He exposed the draft bill about entailed estates as a breach of the party truce enacted by a privileged minority. Moreover, in a further article (“An Emergency Suffrage Law for the Reich. The Rights of Homecoming Soldiers; *Ein Wahlrechtsnotgesetz des Reiches. Das Recht der heimkehrenden Krieger*), he demanded that the Reichstag should pass an emergency suffrage law that would grant homecoming soldiers universal suffrage in their respective regional state and indeed “in the event that the suffrage here is graduated, in the most favoured class or type.” (MWG I/15: 217-216.) Of course, he was referring to Prussia and

its three-class system of suffrage, whereas the draft bill for entailed estates now aimed to achieve the 'nobilisation of war profits'. What was about to proceed here, according to Weber, was "the most morally intolerable action that a minority, which was maintained in power through plutocratic suffrage, could take out against the nation." Weber was now in his element politically, emotionally and academically.

He repeated his objection dating from 1904 that the planned legislation would not breed capitalists ("businessmen") but rentiers or those with unearned income. However, this was above all a breach of Germany's military interests: the sparse population in Germany's eastern regions would be perpetuated; thus, one would prevent the necessary reinforcement of the numbers of the rural population. An exorbitant *ten army divisions* could be recruited here from the potential farmers' positions to be created. Instead, if one were to plan for German farmers settling "out there in Kurland" where "in the event of war they would be the first to stop the collision with the barbarians", then this was an intolerable "intertwining of the Reich's policy of Eastern expansion and Prussia's domestic policy".

On this point, Weber combines both his lines of criticism: on the hand, he objected to the expansionist plans of the *Alldeutschen* and their associated groups, and on the other hand to the stabilisation of traditional rulership structures through war gains. Germany was conducting a war for its existence. Even if it were to win the war, the peace would be in double jeopardy: externally, due to the complete incapacity of diplomacy and the unpredictable behaviour of the dilettantish "crowned bighead" – as he called Wilhem II – and internally as well as externally due to the unfinished building of the nation. For Weber, Prussia represents the most severe debt burden here and this also applied emotionally: "We most definitely reject being vassals of the

Prussian privileged castes”.¹⁶ What Weber first refers to as the ideas of 1917 and then the ideas of 1918 imply the unfinished nation building.

The central elements of his reflections can be classified under three key headings: firstly, nation and state citizens; secondly, Prussia; and thirdly, tradition, history and political culture.

Nation and state citizens

Weber had summarised the ‘ideas of 1914’, which he contested, and his own ideas of 1918 under the question of what the soldiers were fighting for and died for. He thus focused on political and social justice and civic equality. The concept of the citizen of the state is an expression of the unity of the nation; the effective authority of the state over life and death in return demanded civic equality, that is, “*equal suffrage*”, whereas inequality otherwise prevailed in all other spheres of life *Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, (MWG I/15: 369-370.). While for Weber the state is an organisation, an enterprise¹⁷, the nation is a political community. This is differentiated for him from other types of communities due to the fact that “community action, at least usually, involves coercion through the threat and destruction of life and freedom of movement both of outsiders as well as those concerned.” “The serious nature of death” grants the political community its specific pathos, as he had already stated before the war:

It also gives them a permanent basis for their feelings. Common political destinies, i.e. first and foremost common political struggles for life and death, create communities of remembrance, which often have a stronger effect than bonds

¹⁶ *Parliament and Government (Parlament und Regierung)*, MWG I/15: 561. The same in a letter to Hermann Oncken, 20 April 1917.

¹⁷ “The modern state is an ‘operation’, in terms of social science equally a factory: that is precisely its historic specificity.” *Parliament and Government (Parlament und Regierung)*, MWG I/15: 452.

of the cultural, linguistic or ancestral community. It is they who – as we will see – first give the ‘nationality consciousness’ the last decisive note.¹⁸

During the war, Weber makes a categorical distinction between the state and nation. He asserts a powerful intensification of the prestige of the state, for in wartime it is “the carrier of the most unlimited provision of all the economic goods available to it”. The consequence is “that the inevitable conclusion was that it must – especially for valuations linked to ‘politics’ – also be the last ‘value’ whereby the vital interests of all social action must ultimately be estimated” (WL, 539). This was incorrect not only because of the intermingling of values and facts, but also because the state is not capable of certain things as is evident in nationally mixed states. For instance, the state could not coerce the free devotion of the individual to a matter represented by the state. In a letter to Bernhard Guttman of 4 September 1916, he expresses this in the following terms. After the war, it was “necessary in the national interest, and also in the interest of *power politics* [...] contrary to the prevalence of *state* idolatry at all costs to swim ‘*against the tide*.’” The state, which is only a state, would never force free devotion. This would be voluntarily bestowed on the nation as a cultural community, even against the political interest of the state.

Finally, for Weber, universal suffrage is a question of decency and honour. This was also supported by the idea that in historical terms suffrage was associated with military qualification. This then leads to the decisive justification that the idea of the citizen of the state is an expression of “the unity of the nation’s population in place of the disunity of the private life spheres”. For Weber, the

¹⁸ „Er stiftet auch ihre dauernden Gefühlsgrundlagen. Gemeinsame politische Schicksale, d.h. in erster Linie gemeinsame politische Kämpfe auf Leben und Tod, knüpfen Erinnerungsgemeinschaften, welche oft stärker wirken als Bande der Kultur-, Sprach- oder Abstammungsgemeinschaft. Sie sind es, welche – wie wir sehen werden – dem ‚Nationalitätsbewußtsein‘ erst die letzte entscheidende Note geben.” (MWG I/22-1: 206).

meaning of “numeral electoral law” (one person, one vote) of the modern state was not based on any kind of theories about the natural equality of mankind. On the contrary, he intended this as the formation of an element of counterbalance against the “unavoidable social *inequalities*, which were caused through social conditions, particularly *money*, yet not associated with *any form* of natural differences”. The ballot paper therefore becomes the only means of power, which gives the subordinate parties a minimum of co-determination over the affairs of the community, for which they should pay the ultimate sacrifice (*Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, MWG I/15: 369-371).

The campaign against the Prussian bill on entailed estates and for equal suffrage was closely connected. Four weeks after his article about the nobilisation of war profits, as mentioned, on 28 March 1917 the *Frankfurter Zeitung* published a legislative proposal written and justified by Weber: “An Emergency Suffrage Law for the Reich” (*Ein Wahlrechtsnotgesetz des Reiches*). The Reich should intervene by law in the suffrage of the individual states and thereby to grant universal suffrage to those enlisted for military service in their respective state; and moreover, if this concerned a graduated suffrage system, for suffrage in the most privileged class. Weber’s explanation is clear: if the first elections after the war were held under adherence to the old census-based electoral system, then the “great war profiteers (the legitimate profiteers as well as the real war usurers) and the great new war rentiers (would) give the decisive vote in the city and country.” The second class would also still be dominated by the privileged group, those that stayed behind. Furthermore, the numerous “middle class elements” (factory and shop owners, farmers, home owners burdened with debts), who “are paralysed for the longer term in their taxable capacity *because of military service*” would sink into the third census class. Accordingly, “the lucky ones, in whose hands more than a third of the national wealth has accumulated because of the war” would then decide on the new order of things. However, those individuals who had maintained the state with their blood and now

“must generate with their spiritual or physical work the interest for those war rentiers would be condemned to political powerlessness.” Indeed, it was the army conducting the battles that was supposed to have the decisive voice in the reconstruction of the nation after the war (“An Emergency Suffrage Law for the Reich”; *Ein Wahlrechtsnotgesetz des Reichs*, MWG I/15: 218-221).

Prussia

Of course, Prussia was not the only place to harbour the ‘war profiteers who stayed at home’ whom Weber repeatedly attacked. The proposal for the bill on entailed estates gave him the opportunity not only to take up an old fight again but also to tackle a fundamental constitutional problem. Nonetheless, he conceded that the interference of the Reich in the constitution of the individual states should only remain an exception justified by the war (“An Emergency Suffrage Law for the Reich”; *Ein Wahlrechtsnotgesetz des Reichs*, MWG I/15: 220). However, in an article published in the *Europäische Staats- und Wirtschaftszeitung* he added that it was “untrue that the Prussian electoral reform was only an ‘internal Prussian’ affair” (“Prussian Suffrage”; *Das preussische Wahlrecht*, MWG I/15: 228). The leadership of the policies of the Reich, as they were controlled by Prussia for a whole generation, was responsible for the unsuccessful status of the German policies. Hence, the legislative introduction of the equal electoral franchise in Prussia was a “demand of the state policy of the Reich”. Never again would the nation be mobilised for a war as it had been this time without the inner acceptance of the nation to defend this state as *its* state (*Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, MWG I/15: 392 f).

For Weber, the reduction of the Prussian influence in the empire was a necessary precondition for the new order of Germany and for a stable construction of the nation state. After the defeat, this became a crucial and central element of his ideas of 1918. Regarding the constitutional debate, in December 1918 he emphasised his conviction that “a republican, great-German and

not great-Prussian form of the state as a federative and also democratic character was not [...] altogether impossible” (“The Future Form of the German State”; *Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*, MWG I/16: 98). However, the conditions for this were the abolition of the hegemonial great-Prussian structure of the Reich, which in reality meant the domination of a caste, the abolition of great-Prussian elements of the constitution, particularly the double function of Reich Chancellor and Prussian Prime Minister as well as the Prussian prerogatives in the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*). Like Hugo Preuß and others, Weber also considered splitting Prussia into partial states and, in the interest of a unitary solution based on the model of Australia or Canada, he proposed “representative bodies” and “political administrative authorities”, i.e. essentially the parliament and ministries to be relocated from Berlin (“The Future Form of the German State”; *Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*, MWG I/16: 110, 117, 137).

As the young Weber had attested that the Prussian nobility, notwithstanding every acknowledgement of its great historic merits for Germany, had played out its role for decades and that its privileges were now not only unjustified but damaging, in the same vein he recognised Prussia’s role in the foundation of the empire. At the same time, however, he identified its negative role as regards the consolidation and modernisation of the German nation state.

Tradition, history and political culture

Weber’s ideas of 1918 incorporated another complex. As much as he contrasted the model character of Bismarck’s foreign and alliance policy compared with the imperial ideas of the *Alldeutschen*, so too he severely criticised Bismarck’s domestic policy legacy: “a nation *without any and every political education [...], without any and every political will*” (*Parliament and Government*, MWG I/15: 449). Regarding Germany’s necessary new order and the reform of the electoral franchise, he posed the question of which strata were capable of political thought. In the atmosphere of the ideas of

1914 with their vision of a specifically German conception of the state and state order, all manner of possible proposals had been made for class-oriented voting privileges: according to marital status, profession, property or ownership of independent enterprises, military achievements and so on. Weber swept all of these ideas off the table and grew especially agitated about the demands for voting privilege based on education. The capacity for political thought was in no case to be discerned among academics or for examination candidates emerging from public educational institutions. Indeed, he derided what he called the 'young shoots of German exam factories who hungered for employment, promotion and salaries' ("Prussian Suffrage"; *Das preußische Wahlrecht*, MWG I/15: 231). He became excited about the characteristic German belief that the public educational institutions could be places of political training. This was one of the "most ridiculous prejudices". The purpose of the examinations were the prebends, the salaries which were secure and appropriate to a person's social standing as well as granting the benefits of a pension. None of the many idle projects of an organic electoral regulation arose from objective political considerations but purely "from the entirely mean *conardice* of our sterile literate classes especially regarding the reality of 'democracy'." ("Prussian Suffrage"; *Das preußische Wahlrecht*, MWG I/15: 232). One could soonest count on

the stratum of technicians and others as employees of large private companies thrust out into free competition. These specifically modern personalities, who risk their necks in the economic struggle for existence and in doing so practically feel the political structure of the state, have a greater sense of political realities than the holders of any 'academic diploma', the stratum of salaried candidates.¹⁹

¹⁹ „die Schicht der Techniker und der anderen als Angestellte großer Privatfirmen in den freien Wettbewerb hinausgestoßenen Schichten. Diese

What can the political culture of Germany build on in future? Not on an aristocracy that in Germany had not existed “in sufficient breadth and political tradition”, and that had not been capable of creating a “distinguished German form of society”. “The German form”, the rigid conventions adhered to by the member of political clubs or academic fraternities (*Couleurmensch*), who dominated large swathes of the upcoming generation of the influential strata, were in contrast to England’s aristocratic customs or those of the Romance countries not capable of embracing democracy but rather wedded to the formal conventions of castes and characterised as plebeians. If democratisation – also facilitated through equal suffrage – were to remove the social prestige of “the worldly man of honour and scholarly diplomas” (*satisfaktionsfähiger Prüfungsdiplommensch*) then the path would be free “for the development of our *middle-class* social and economic structure of appropriate and thus ‘genuine’ and distinguished form values” (*Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, MWG I/15: 386-389).

The “homecoming soldiers” played a dual role with regard to the anticipated change of social structure and political culture. On the one hand, these changes should be a fair compensation for their service for the nation in the war; on the other hand, Weber counted on the soldiers returning from the war being involved in the reconstruction of the nation as active citizens with equal suffrage. Nevertheless, on this account he did not indulge in too grand illusions. Indeed, nothing was known about the attitude of the soldiers or what their political outlook would be. It must be estimated that this would be extremely authoritarian. “For there will always be strong ‘conservative’ parties because there will always be people whose attitude tends to be authoritarian. Then

spezifisch modernen Persönlichkeiten, die ihre Haut im ökonomischen Kampf ums Dasein zu Markte tragen und dabei die politische Struktur des Staates praktisch an sich zu spüren bekommen, haben mehr Augenmaß für politische Realitäten als die Inhaber irgendeines akademischen Fachdiploms”, die Schicht der Pfründenanwälter. (“Prussian Suffrage”; *Das preussische Wahlrecht*, MWG I/15: 230 -31).

they choose to establish the state with the ballot card in their hands according to their ideals, and those of us who stayed at home will go about our daily work.” However, Weber was by no means unhopeful:

Whatever the mood of the returning combatants may be, they bring with them encounters, impressions and experiences that only they have had. What we expect from them above all to be allowed to believe is at least a relatively greater degree of objectivity. Because in the highest measure the tasks, which the modern war poses, are objective. And furthermore: a greater degree of immunity against mere literary phrases, no matter which party (*Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, MWG I/15: 373).

It is obvious that Weber’s idea of educating objectivity through the war was mainly based on a self-deception, as he was to learn in the chaos of the revolution. Nor did he reflect on the effects of years of violence on the minds of the young generation, unlike Emil Lederer, who published his *Soziologie der Gewalt* in the year after Weber’s death. (Lederer 2014 [1921]: 217-234).

Among the contributions of writers and academics that Weber despised in the context of the ideas of 1914 was also the evocation of Germany’s classical tradition of philosophy and also religion. In his speeches and writings during the final war years and the early post-war years, on several occasions Weber recalled Alexander Herzen and applied his warning concerning Russia to Germany: the German fatherland was not the land of its fathers, but the land of its children. This also held true in relation to the political problems. As a solution to these problems, the ‘German spirit’ was “not to be distilled, even from such valuable works of our intellectual tradition” (*Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, MWG I/15: 390). These humanist writings could contribute to the formal training of individual intellect, though they were not useful for the political structures of the future. The classical works of German Idealism, according to Weber, emerged from an unpolitical period

even when their focus was political and economic. They were constructions in a political and economic domain that was devoid of passionate concern:

But as far as another political passion was alive in them than the angry rebellion against foreign rule, it was the ideal enthusiasm for moral demands. Beyond that, there remained philosophical thoughts which we can use as a means of stimulating our own position according to our political realities and the demands of our day – but not: as signposts. The modern problems of parliamentarism and democracy, and the nature of our modern state in general, were completely beyond their horizons.²⁰

This was also a clear rejection of the ideas of 1914 and a request to make the political culture and political philosophy of Western Europe the basis of post-war Germany. Weber wrote this in 1917 at a time when scarcely anybody could imagine the conditions under which Germany would have to organise its future after the war. One could only say how the ‘German ideas of 1918’ could or should look after the end of the conflict. Thus, Weber compiled his call for objectivity: one would have to start from the realistic situation. In December 1918, the reality was defeat and revolution as well as military and economic foreign rule. The future of a democratic Germany not only depended on political reforms but also on the establishment of an economic order. However, it was impossible to create a politically and

²⁰ „Soweit aber eine andere politische Leidenschaft in ihnen lebte als die zornige Auflehnung gegen die Fremdherrschaft, war es die ideale Begeisterung für sittliche Forderungen. Was darüber hinaus liegt, blieben philosophische Gedanken, die wir als Mittel der Anregung zu eigener Stellungnahme entsprechend unseren politischen Realitäten und der Forderung unseres Tages benutzen können, – nicht aber: als Wegweiser. Die modernen Probleme des Parlamentarismus und der Demokratie und die Wesensart unseres modernen Staates überhaupt lagen ganz außerhalb ihres Gesichtskreises.“ (*Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, MWG I/15: 390).

economically stable order “without the free cooperation of the middle classes”. This also belonged to the “uncomfortable truths” which Weber argued both vis-à-vis the “radical illusionists” as well as the supporters of the old regime (“The Future Form of the German State”; *Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*, MWG I/16: 145-46).

1918/1919: The lost peace and Max Weber’s post-war Europe

“The real compulsion to make peace can only be given when the human reservoir is genuinely exhausted, when the masses of humanity are used up.” Emil Lederer was already writing this in January 1915 in his reflections *Zur Soziologie des Krieges* (Lederer, 2014 [1915]: 106). This rather more resigned than cynical observation basically expressed the same as Weber later in that year on 24 August after a short journey to Brussels, when he wrote to his wife: “Every victory brings us further from peace.” This remark also proved true, even after the ‘victory’ in the East where “the imperial domination of the [German] military [ran riot] and unchecked”. The “forced peace (*Gewaltfrieden*) of Brest-Litowsk” finally buried, according to Wolfgang Mommsen, the chances of bringing the war to a timely end by the negotiating path (Mommsen, 2002: 143). In May 1917, after the collapse of the government that in his view was the actual incentive for war, Weber still hoped that it would be possible to live in peace with a democratic Russia. He expected resistance more on the Russian side.²¹ Yet now, in January 1918, it sounded different: “political madhouse”, “a military gone crazy”, intrigues of the “group of heavy industry”, an “absolutely infamous control” by the *Alldeutschen* and the military command – these were Weber’s commentaries on the conditions imposed on the Russians during the first weeks of 1918 – “equivalent to the loss of 34 per cent of the inhabitants of the former Tsarist empire as well as 54 per cent

²¹ Cf. Weber’s article *Die russische Revolution und der Friede* in *Berliner Tageblatt*, 17 May 1917. MWG I/15: 291-297.

of its industrial companies and 84 per cent of its coal mines” (Mommsen, 2002: 142). Furthermore, the parallel ongoing preparations for a major offensive in the West whose losses, according to Weber in January 1918, had been “*calculated* for us” by the General Staff as 600,000 dead were “fairy-tale and horrifying”.²²

Since autumn 1914, one question dominated Weber’s thinking: “How can we think of peace?”²³ The ideas of 1918 should be the basis for the plan of the inner construction of peace. On 17 January 1918, Weber wrote to Franz Eulenburg, he wagered 2:1 on peace in the autumn. “But I certainly am not placing a bet, for the military has gone completely crazy here. [...] Rathenau still wagers on 3 more years of war; that must be nonsense. It would not come off without revolution [...]” Weber’s prognosis was to prove correct: the war ended in autumn 1918, however, not as he had expected but even worse than he had feared. On 8 May 1917, in a letter to Friedrich Naumann Weber had painted a dark scenario for the future that should now prove too optimistic: if the war were to continue into the following year and Germany were to become diplomatically more isolated and its supply situation (food, coal) even more difficult than presently, then the war would be “flatly lost” due to the domestic situation on the one hand and the financial bankruptcy on the other. Even in the case of favourable peace-time conditions, Germany would then become completely incapable of any kind of world and colonial politics for the time-period of generations and be “financially incapable of forming alliances”. On the other hand, the opponents would remain capable of action thanks to the American subsidies. One year-and-a-half later that would have been described as a relatively good outcome of the war in comparison with the conditions of the armistice and the peace treaty. Even in October 1918, when in the

²² Letter to Marianne Weber (16 and 17 January 1918), Mina Tobler (16 January 1918), Franz Eulenburg (17 January 1918), Hermann Oncken (1 February 1918).

²³ Cf. *supra*, Letter to Ferdinand Tönnies, 15 October 1914 .

name of the Supreme Army Command Ludendorff had described the military collapse as imminent and had pushed the government to petition for a ceasefire, Weber probably still saw the future as too rosy: “In any case, peace will then look very bad. One must begin re-building Germany again from scratch and we want to do that. Then, it is also worth being a German.”²⁴ Weber probably had in view how bad the peace would look when he argued in a concise article published on 27 October under the title “Armistice and Peace” (*Waffenstillstand und Frieden*) that it would have been better not to bring the offer of the ceasefire so much to the fore. One could also conduct peace negotiations without a ceasefire “in case the enemies insist on continuation of the slaughter.” (MWG I/15: 642).

In Weber’s historical sociology war and violence are omnipresent. War is a kind of natural occurrence of the history of states, a form of inevitable “eternal struggle of nation-states”²⁵; it is produced from the structure of society itself. “The Basic Concepts of Sociology”, which Weber defined after the war, incorporate the concept of struggle (*Kampf* § 8) as a social relationship, but this does not include the war (MWG I-23: 192–94). Furthermore, “The essence of politics is: struggle (*Kampf*)”.²⁶ War is one among

²⁴ Letter to his cousin Alwine Müller, 10 October 1918.

²⁵ Cf. Joas, *Kriegsideologien*, 340. The expression striving or “struggle for a nation-state” (“Ringens der Nationen”) occurs, among others, in Weber’s inaugural lecture in Freiburg, *The Nation State and Economic Policy*: MWG I/4: 560: “[...] the expanded economic community is just another form of the struggle of the nations with each other”, (cf. Max Weber, *The Nation State and Economic Policy*, in: *Political Writings*, eds. Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, Cambridge 1994, p.16). On political entities which in varying degrees are “Gewaltgebilde”: *Gemeinschaften*, MWG I/22-1: 222 and 228–229. “Ringens der Nationen um die ökonomische Herrscherstellung”: (MWG I/5: 653).

²⁶ *Parliament and Government (Parlament und Regierung)*, MWG I/15) 460 Note 2: “Aber ein ungeheurer Literatenirrtum ist es, sich einzubilden, die *Politik* eines Großstaates sei im Grunde nichts anderes als die *Selbstverwaltung* einer beliebigen Mittelstadt. Politik ist: *Kampf*?”

several methods to disrupt social relationships. In his sociological definition of struggle (peaceful or forceful struggle, competition, social or biological selection, etc.), Weber alludes to the outcome of the world war: the purely accidental success or the interruption of a social relationship through purely concrete reasons e.g. of a state association, was no argument against its “*general* ‘adjustment’”, and had nothing to do with the competitive selection of individual types in the social or biological sense (MWG I/23: 194).

Max Weber’s conception of Europe was particularly characterised by a historical perspective. The *ideal* European system of states striving for balance, including Germany, is comprised for him of ‘powerful nation-states’ (*Machtstaat*) and those that are not like this: small states (*Kleinstaat*). Only the “counterbalance of the great powers against each other” guaranteed the freedom of the small states, he commented in his Munich speech in October 1916 about “Germany under the European World Powers” (*Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten*) (MWG I/15: 193). However, the political action of the power-states is subject to laws governing history: “For everything and everyone that participates in the goods of the power-state (*Machtstaat*) is implicated in the necessity of the pragmatics of power that govern all political history”, he wrote in spring 1916 in *Between Two Lams* (MWG I/15: 98). When Weber comments that a “nation organised as a power-state” that was greater in numbers was confronted on the basis of this quality alone with entirely different tasks than smaller nations like the Swiss, Danes, Dutch or Norwegians (*Between Two Lams*, MWG I/15: 95–96), then he places emphasis on ‘task’ just as in his conception of politics the emphasis is on ‘responsibility’.²⁷

²⁷ Cf. Duran, *Fabrique des hommes politiques*, 76, cf. also Chazel, *Écrits politiques* and Id.: *Propositions pour une lecture sociologique*.

Consequently, among the tasks in world war is the struggle against the “fear of peace”, against the “cowardly *will for paralysis*”²⁸ and the search for *inner*-political preconditions for a lasting peace. In other words, the recognition that the foreign policy goal, the acknowledgement that the position of Germany as the ‘powerful nation-state’ (*Machtstaat*), which was on an equal footing in law, in the European polity of states could not be achieved nor be permanent without the inner reconstruction of the German nation-state. In December 1918, Max Weber revised his great plea for the republic “without reservation and ambiguity”. However, what this republic should look like depended “on the tasks that we set it.” (“The Future Form of the German State”; *Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*, MWG I/16: 107–109). These tasks were, firstly, a clear relinquishment of imperialist dreams, in other words: “a purely *autonomist ideal of nationality*”. Secondly, under the precondition that an acceptable peace could be created, a “*systematic demilitarisation*” and particularly “subordination of military power under that of the civil power”. Thirdly, the “*abolition of the hegemonial great-Prussian structure of the Reich*”, which meant the rulership of a caste. Fourthly and finally: an option in the interest of the private commercial future organisation, for a federal state and against a centralised state. Weber does not fundamentally reject the unitary solution, but doubts on economic grounds (Austria’s interests) and political grounds (the attitude of the victorious powers) that this represented a realistic option.

The European post-war order of states, which Weber had in mind, had at its geopolitical centre a German ‘power-state’ (*Machtstaat*) through the recognition of its right to exist, through an alliance system and advanced line of defence – though without annexations – and with foreign policy guarantees. This was traditional thinking that could to a certain degree be associated with Bismarck. As we have shown, however, the domestic new

²⁸ *Zur Frage des Friedensschließens*, MWG I/15 : 65; *Deutschlands künftige Staatsform*, MWG I/16 : 106.

order in Germany was much more difficult and at least as important for Weber. He saw in it the essential precondition for a permanent organisation of peace.

Not merely since Wolfgang Mommsen's major study ([1959] 2004) *Max Weber and German Politics* has Weber been politically classified as a nationalist for whom the nation-state formed the ultimate horizon. "Max Weber had chosen the power of the nation-state as the ultimate value [...]." For Raymond Aron, who is quoted here as representative of many others, it was true that Weber had decided once for all that the highest value, to which he would subordinate everything in politics, was Germany's greatness. The interest in political power had been a goal in its own right and the power-political interests of the nation had a "sacred value" (Aron, 1965: 114, 107 und 120). For Ernst Nolte, to quote another opinion, the powerful nation-state embodied for Weber an "insurmountable step" in the universal process that he observed (Nolte, 1999: 122).

That is a complete misjudgement of Weber's historical and political thought. On the question of the nation-state it is worthwhile consulting Weber's report on the "Arbeitsausschuss für Mitteleuropa" in a meeting of the *Verein für Socialpolitik* on 6 April 1916 (MWG I/15: 140–152). Here, his primary concern was the solution of the "most urgent question of peace" that will present itself and in whose light the talk of the "importance of Belgium", not to mention the "patriotic fantasies about the Baltic provinces" would melt away into nothing – "the actual vital question for us: *Poland*."²⁹ If Poland were to be annexed to Austria or Hungary, then the consequences for Silesia and the German eastern border would be so serious that they could not be counterbalanced by military and customs alliances for however long time period they were concluded, "but only through a political, military, currency- and trade policy *Äternat*, an absolutely

²⁹ *Die wirtschaftliche Annäherung*, MWG I/15: 140. Cf. Mommsen, *Politik*, 231 and 246 n. 141.

eternal insoluble obligation of the participant states [...].” The unavoidable demand would then be an eternal confederation of states with a common currency and banking system, the radical abolition of all internal customs barriers, with a common foreign policy, common trade policy, common railway policy, the same transport law and the same social policy:

However, it remains unclear how such a community would function between sovereign states with completely separate bodies, but where the common bank would feel all the mistakes that one state makes in its economy and laws and would have to pass the cost on to the one or other involved states. It is clear that for the foreseeable period Germany alone would bear the sacrifice (*Die wirtschaftliche Annäherung*, MWG I/15: 142).

Therefore, there can be no discussion of the nation-state having represented for Weber the “insurmountable step” in the historical process. However, to transfer the idea of a federation of nation-states to Europe as a whole, and furthermore in the middle of the war, under the prevailing circumstances would have been for Weber a completely unhistorical idea.

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