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Cultures of Physical and Political Work in 19th-Century Germany

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the history of working class culture and workers' culture. It includes new approaches in the field of labour history such as civil societal approaches, the history of emotions and discourses as new aspects of the history of work in a global perspective, with its discussions about the boundaries between work and non-work as well as free and unfree labour. In the first part, the article looks at the work place where a spatial setting created a culture of (physical) work with special rhythms and time regimes and a set of symbols and representations. In a further step, this paper will raise the question what kind of work political work was. By doing so, this article also gives insights into the distinction between manual and non-manual work and enables perspectives on and cooperation with anthropological research.

Keywords: *working class culture; history of work; labour movement; Germany; 19th century; civil society; August Bebel*

Introduction: From Working Class Culture to Culture of Work

Culture in the realm of German labour history and working class history developed in four different ways.¹ First, culture is directly linked with the emerging German labour movement and its strong party and trade union organisations. They were the seedbed out of which, especially from the 1890s onwards, leisure organisations and clubs arose. They offered singing, gymnastics, cycling and many other leisure activities for hundred thousands of workers around 1900. Most of the workers spending their free time in these organisations were closely related to the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions.² Until the 1980s, this interconnectedness and this success was

- 1 See as overview Jürgen Kocka: *Arbeiterleben und Arbeiterkultur: Die Entstehung einer sozialen Klasse: Unter Mitarbeit von Jürgen Schmidt*, Bonn 2015, pp. 259–266.
- 2 Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.): *Arbeiterkultur, Königstein/Taunus 1979*; Frank Heidenreich: *Arbeiterkulturbewegung und Sozialdemokratie in Sachsen vor 1933, Weimar/Cologne/Vienna 1995*.

disputed in labour history with terms as ‘alternative culture’ or ‘subculture’ but also interpreted with concepts such as ‘*Verbürgerlichung*’ (describing a process in which organised workers became more and more influenced by the middle classes and their values besides or instead of a working-class orientation). These discussions in research were also linked with questions of class-building and milieu-building processes.

However, the whole research frame was seen as too narrow, excluding cultural aspects of those millions of workers who never joined this cosmos of a labour movement culture. Therefore, second, the culture of workers became interesting. The history of everyday-life played a crucial role here, describing and analysing working-class practices beyond the organised sphere such as drinking habits, consumption patterns, forms of family life, as well as values and experiences beyond the frame of organised labour interests and movements.³ The aspect of leisure of ‘ordinary workers’ in a formative period of popular culture played a crucial role, too. With the diminishing influence of labour history in the field of historical science both strands lost their attraction in the 1990s.

Third, in the early 2000s, relating the research on the history of workers with the history of German middle classes again brought new insights within the field. In addition, civil societal approaches analysed the culturally rich internal associational life of the labour movements regarding multiple facets.⁴ Furthermore, the histories of emotions and discourses were embedded in working class culture and workers’ culture. For example, the mobilising effect of emotions in strikes and the discourses within the labour movements about the reduction of working time were analysed.⁵

Fourth, especially the new interest in the history of work (in a global perspective) provided space for new research areas. Formerly relatively established concepts and categories such as the spread of wage labour were questioned; as Germany was a late comer, no slave work was performed in German colonies, but other forms of unfree labour like, for example, coolie-work were practised. In addition, the divide between work and non-work was reflected upon, as well as the workplace and the ways in

- 3 Alf Lüdtke (ed.): *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*, Frankfurt upon Main/New York 1995.
- 4 Thomas Welskopp: *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, Bonn 2000; Jürgen Schmidt: *The Early German Labor Movement as a Representative of Civil Society: Participation, Emancipation and Learning Democracy in 19th Century Germany (ca. 1848–1880)*, in: Sven Eliason (ed.): *Building Civil Society and Democracy in New Europe*, Newcastle 2008, pp. 293–315.
- 5 Christian Koller: *Streikkultur: Performanzen und Diskurse des Arbeitskampfes im schweizerisch-österreichischen Vergleich (1860–1950)*, Münster 2009; Philipp Reick: *“Labor is not a Commodity!”: The Movement to Shorten the Workday in Late Nineteenth-Century Berlin and New York*, Frankfurt upon Main/New York 2016.

which workers dealt with their workplace surroundings. Workers' bodies as a means of workers' identity came to the fore, too.⁶

This article will focus especially on this third and fourth perspective. In the first part, it will look at the work place where a spatial setting created a culture of (physical) work with special rhythms and time regimes and a set of symbols and representations. In a further step, the article will raise the question what work 'political work' was. This research has to be seen in the context that "it is obvious that more research has been undertaken into some types of work than others. Middle and upper class work is less well-known than manual labour in agriculture and industrial production."⁷ This special form of non-manual work will be analysed within the context of the emergence of the Social Democratic Party in the 19th century and one of its main protagonists, August Bebel.

Cultures of Physical Work

Work can be seen as both a burden and load as well as delight and pleasure. It could be perceived, on the one hand, as annoying, on the other as a means of self-realisation and pride. These dichotomies are true for physical as well as non-physical work. An icon of self-consciousness of workers performing physical work was created with a photograph of 11 construction workers taking their lunch break at a New York skyscraper site.⁸ They were sitting on a narrow girder, opened their lunch boxes, some smoked cigarettes—and below them the yawning depth, opening the view over New York's city landscape. None of these men is very muscular. It is the location that demonstrates their self-confidence. They worked on one of the highest buildings of the world and were able to meet the extreme demands. The photo shows unity among men, representing both their collectivity and individuality. Their dungarees characterise unity and adaption to their working conditions. The different caps and the distinct way in which they showed and clothed their torso demonstrated their peculiarities. It was long assumed that the photo was taken by Lewis W. Hine in 1930 at the Empire State

- 6 Karsten Uhl/Lars Bluma: Arbeit—Körper—Rationalisierung: Neue Perspektiven auf den historischen Wandel industrieller Arbeitsplätze, in: Lars Bluma/Karsten Uhl (eds.): *Kontrollierte Arbeit—disziplinierte Körper: Zur Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der Industriearbeit im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2012, pp. 9–31.
- 7 Andreas Eckert/Jürgen Kocka: *Work and Life Course as Historical Problems: Perspectives of the International Research Center „re:work“*, at: <https://rework.hu-berlin.de/en/mission-and-themes.html> (accessed on 25 April 2019).
- 8 The following chapter is the translated, slightly revised and significantly shortened chapter 4.1 of my book *Arbeiter in der Moderne: Arbeitsbedingungen, Lebenswelten, Organisationen*, Frankfurt upon Main/New York 2015, pp. 107–124.

Building, but more likely it was taken at the Rockefeller Centre in 1932. The perspective of the photograph was staged very dramatically, since only a few feet below the workers was a finished floor, and the photo did not illustrate an everyday lunch break.⁹ But these facts are of less importance here; rather the decisive factors are the values and connotations expressed in the photograph regarding the approach to the culture of (physical) work: respectability, collectivity, individuality, solidarity, communication and group formation.

Spaces of Work and Cultural Imprints

Work in modern times separated the private sphere and the workplace. Seasonal migrant workers and other occupations, such as seamen, have known this separation for a long time. But due to industrialisation, this process expanded to further jobs. In centralised workshops, the use of machines and methods of rationalisation demanded the permanent attendance of the workforce. Workers performed their work in a well-defined space,¹⁰ which not everybody was allowed to enter, where they were subordinate to special rules and where particular social relations existed. Some workplaces, like factories or barracks, were strictly controlled, while other places, such as plantations or meadows, were permeable. In addition, in some spaces, work and non-work intersected, for example in shops, department stores and hotels, where working people and consumers met. However, the differentiation between work and home was not established in all branches of employment. In agriculture, in general, and during the proto-industrial development in Europe in the 18th and early 19th century, work at home was a constitutive fact. Only the work of all family members in the fields and in the textile industry sustained the family.¹¹ Self-control, self-discipline and self-exploitation were part of this working environment—relevant topics to this day.

How important the reference to the workplace as a special space was is evident in the factory regulations which sanctioned or punished leaving the workplace. The fac-

- 9 John Anderson: How a Galway Pub Led to a Skyscraper, in: *New York Times*, 8 November 2012, at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/movies/lunch-atop-a-skyscraper-uncovered.html> (accessed on 5 April 2019).
- 10 See for concepts of space in general Susanne Rau: *Räume: Konzepte, Wahrnehmungen, Nutzungen*, Frankfurt upon Main/New York 2013, esp. pp. 142–43. With regard to the socialist labour movement see André Biederbeck: *Das Dortmunder Arbeitermilieu 1890–1914: Zur Bedeutung von Räumen und Orten für die Konstituierung einer sozialistischen Identität*, Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 2018.
- 11 Daniela Münkler: *Arbeitsplatz Acker—Umbruch in der Landwirtschaft*, in: *Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (ed.): *Hauptsache Arbeit: Wandel der Arbeitswelt nach 1945*, Bielefeld 2009, pp. 60–67; Hans Medick: *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650–1900: Lokalgeschichte als Allgemeine Geschichte*, Göttingen 1997.

tory regulation of a machine factory in Chemnitz stated in 1862: “Every worker can be frisked by the doorman [...] and has to submit inevitably to this measure.”¹² Until today, control and body search at entrance gates are work experiences. In colonial Samoa, the German administration decreed in 1905 that Chinese contract workers were not allowed to leave their workplaces in the first four weeks after their arrival.¹³

The culture of work consisted of two opposite strands. On the one hand, workers had to adjust and to submit. Amenability secured employment, wages and one’s livelihood. Max Lotz, who in his own words was “a notorious slowcoach” in his youth, got a well-paid qualified job in a mine around 1900 due to a “bold white lie”. He made use of this opportunity and “firmly and energetically held my position. The school of life made me reasonable.”¹⁴ Spending time in the regulated environment of a factory or mine disciplined, but gave footing and orientation, too.

On the other hand, attribution of spaces opened ways of creative appropriation, objection and individual and group-specific arrangements. The 11 construction workers at the skyscraper and, for example, two assemblers at a transmitter mast near Berlin gave their appropriation of space a very specific appearance in dizzying height. One worker on the transmitter mast even used a pole of the mast for a high bar exercise. Workers conquered their workplaces with wits, irony and adroitness.¹⁵ Even the miner Max Lotz did not submit without a will of his own, but still, from time to time, took “some” drifter days. The term ‘*Eigensinn*’ (strong-mindedness), coined by Alf Lüdtké, is helpful in understanding workers’ behaviour in this regard. It did not mirror resistance, but represented their choices for maintaining self-respect, dignity and free space within the confines imposed on them.¹⁶

- 12 Fabrikordnung der Maschinenfabrik Richard Hartmann, 1 November 1862, §26, quoted in Karlheinz Schaller: “Einmal kommt die Zeit”: Geschichte der Chemnitzer Arbeiterschaft vom Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg, Bielefeld 2001, p. 380 (translated by the author).
- 13 Samoanische Zeitung, Nr. 16, 22 April 1905, in: Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (henceforth BA Berlin), R 1001/2321, fol. 28.
- 14 Max Lotz, Letter dated 25 May 1908, in: Adolf Levenstein (ed.): Aus der Tiefe: Arbeiterbriefe: Beiträge zur Seelenanalyse moderner Arbeiter, Berlin 1909, pp. 16–17 (translated by the author).
- 15 See also Wolfgang Kaschuba: Arbeiterkultur heute: Ende oder Transformation?, in: Wolfgang Kaschuba et al. (eds.): Arbeiterkultur seit 1945: Ende oder Veränderung, Tübingen 1991, pp. 31–53, here p. 43. The photo by Georg Pahl in the 1920s can be found on https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Bundesarchiv_Bild_102-10678,_K%C3%B6nigswusterhausen,_Arbeiter_auf_Sendeturm.jpg (accessed 10 July 2019).
- 16 For the concept of ‘*Eigensinn*’ see Alf Lüdtké: Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus, Münster 2015; Thomas Lindenberger: Eigen-Sinn, Herrschaft und kein Widerstand, Version 1.0, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 2 September 2014, at: <http://docupedia.de/zg/Eigensinn> (accessed on 10 April 2019).

After the separation of work and home, the workplace itself offered possibilities of contact and communication. Newcomers had to be instructed and qualified. Depending on the work process, this ‘familiarisation’ took more time, or less. Both sides depended on each other, routines had to be learned. This contact was nothing more, but also nothing less, than a first point of origin of community. Work offered orientation among one’s own kind. In a small 19th-century crafts enterprise, this was probably easier than in a huge factory during the period of high industrialisation. Overall, one should not overestimate these contacts. The migration to spaces of work created new hierarchies, problems of acceptance, misunderstandings and mutual isolation. In transnational work migration, ethnic prejudices and dissociation could occur. In the 19th century, Italian construction workers came in great numbers to Southern Germany, Switzerland and Austria, to work at the railway sites seasonally—and remained among themselves.¹⁷

In addition, work itself consisted of rules and various hierarchies, which were also reflected on the symbolic level. Among 19th-century Hamburg dockworkers, those workers who organised the transportation of the goods between the ships and the docks (*‘Ewerführer’*), formed a kind of labour aristocracy. Going to work with patched clothing, for them, was as impossible as wearing dirty boots.¹⁸

In colonial contexts, foremen often acted cruelly, to defend and legitimate their leading position. Among contract workers, foremen brought their assigned workers into financial dependency through gambling, so that the foremen could gain influence over the renewal of contracts.¹⁹ The scope of their power was not defined precisely, therefore it was arbitrary.

Another hierarchy at workplaces was constituted through the gender aspect.²⁰ Three facets are important. First, physical work for both sexes meant using their bodies to earn money. In this context, the body was not a direct object, but an essential requirement within the work process. Work shaped bodies, either through degeneration or toughening. Iconography knows countless motives of the naked muscled male torso. However, in autobiographies, workers described the physical decline of their

17 René DelFabbro: *Transalpini: Italienische Arbeitswanderung nach Süddeutschland im Kaiserreich 1870–1914*, Osnabrück 1996; Hermann Zeitlhofer: *Zwei Zentren temporärer kontinentaler Arbeitsmigration im Vergleich: Der Böhmerwald und das Friaul um 1900*, in: Anemarie Steidl et al. (eds.): *Übergänge und Schnittmengen: Arbeit, Migration, Bevölkerung und Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Diskussion*, Vienna/Cologne/Weimar 2008, pp. 45–74.

18 Michael Grüttner: *Arbeitswelt an der Wasserkante: Sozialgeschichte der Hamburger Hafentarbeiter 1886–1914*, Göttingen 1984, p. 86.

19 German Consulate Kanton to German Embassy Beijing, 3 April 1908, BA Berlin, R 1001/2323, fol. 112–13.

20 See Karin Hausen: *Geschlechtergeschichte als Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Göttingen 2012; Kathleen Canning: *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class & Citizenship*, Ithaca/London 2006, esp. pp. 139ff.

body in clear terms. The unskilled worker Carl Fischer had to mould bricks in a factory. The heavy, hard lump caused him so much pain in his arms and back that he could not fall asleep at night due to the “pull” in his body, he wrote in 1903.²¹

The male as the female body were exploited, but could also become direct objects of exploitation. Sex work of women and men and wet-nursing are examples. Military forces used the male body to discipline and to humiliate soldiers.²² At the workplace, the female body was subordinated to violence and disciplinary measures by male colleagues and supervisors. Media scandalised such events for very different reasons: they wanted to denounce women’s work, show the exploitation of females or promote the sale of their publications. Nevertheless, sexual abuse was proved in many autobiographies.²³ In colonial contexts, the South Seas became both places of sexual desire and places of fright and sexual subordination for indigenous servants. These different experiences of violence cannot be generalised, but the different sexes perceived the workplace differently: for women the potential threat to their bodies had to be added to that of general exploitation.²⁴

Secondly, the well-known fact that places of work were constructed differently has to be considered. The assumed place for women to operate was the household and the private sphere. If they worked at all, employment was meant to be only an episode in their biographies. The family was supposed to remain their main reference point. This role model could also be interpreted as a kind of precaution to protect the female body from violence by keeping it in a secure space.

- 21 Carl Fischer: *Denkwürdigkeiten und Erinnerungen eines Arbeiters*, edited by Paul Göhre, Leipzig 1903, p. 368.
- 22 See Otto Krille: *Unter dem Joch: Die Geschichte einer Jugend* (1914), edited by Ursula Münchow, Berlin 1975, p. 75.
- 23 See for example Moritz Th. W. Bromme: *Lebensgeschichte eines modernen Fabrikarbeiters* (1905), edited with an epilogue by Bernd Neumann, Frankfurt upon Main 1971, p. 217; Wenzel Holek: *Lebensgang eines deutsch-tschechischen Handarbeiters*, edited by Paul Göhre, Leipzig/Jena 1909, pp. 81ff., 115–16; Heinrich Holek: *Unterwegs*, in: Stefan Riesenfellner (ed.): *Arbeiterleben: Autobiographien zur Alltags- und Sozialgeschichte Österreichs 1867–1914*, Graz 1989, pp. 202–213, here pp. 205, 208, 210–11, 213.
- 24 With regard to womens’ work see Karin Hausen: *Wirtschaften mit der Geschlechterordnung: Ein Essay*, in: idem (ed.): *Geschlechterhierarchie und Arbeitsteilung: Zur Geschichte ungleicher Erwerbschancen von Männern und Frauen*, Göttingen 1993, pp. 40–67; for servants see Dorothee Wierling: *Mädchen für alles: Arbeitsalltag und Lebensgeschichte städtischer Dienstmädchen um die Jahrhundertwende*, Berlin/Bonn 1987; for the colonial context see Thomas Schwarz: *Ozeanische Affekte: Die literarische Modellierung Samoas im kolonialen Diskurs*, Berlin 2013, pp. 115ff., and Emma Thomas: *Rape, Indenture and the Colonial Courts in German New Guinea*, in: Hartmut Berghoff/Frank Biess/Ulrike Strasser (eds.): *Explorations and Entanglements. German in Pacific Worlds from the Early Modern Period to World War I*, New York/Oxford 2019, pp. 255–276.

Thirdly, the workspace opened opportunities for the emancipation of women. Women could leave the private sphere and gain economic autonomy, respectability and assertiveness through work. These values helped them become active in judicial, social and political emancipation. How difficult this path was, is evident in Otilie Baader's case. As the oldest daughter, she had to take care of her father, besides her wage work as needlewoman. But it was only after a "vigorous" demand that Otilie's father allowed her to visit workers' meetings. It was the self-consciousness obtained at work that made her strong.²⁵

Rhythm and Time of Work

The culture of physical work did not only have a spacial dimension in terms of behavioural pattern. Rather, culture of work also meant adjustment to working rhythms. Especially in agricultural work, music and rhythm were used as assistive tools. On big farms in the Zurich region, a lot of cradlers worked together. As late as the end of the 19th century, the reaping was performed in time to the beat of the music. A fiddler walked in front of the cradle crew and set tempo and rhythm. Work songs on plantations also determined the pace of work, made work easier and expressed feelings of belonging together and suffering.²⁶

The noise and rhythm of the machines in factories made such practises impossible. In contrast to the described work in the fields, work processes as the crucible steel production at the Krupp enterprises during the 19th century appeared like military drill. To found a steel block of 100 tons, about 800 workers were needed who carried "2,200 knee-high crucibles, filled with 2,000°C hot 45 kg steel" to the casting mould in pairs. The flow of the steel had to be uninterrupted: "everything happens in perfect order without any commands, only according to a signal whistle", a journalist described this spectacle. Newcomers had to learn the signals and steps "with crucibles filled with ash and which had been heated till they glowed": "After about 8 days they had learned enough to be able to help".²⁷ This example shows that physical work meant adjustment and subordination to time regimes and work rhythms.

25 Karin Hausen: *Wirtschaften mit der Geschlechterordnung: Ein Essay*, p. 49; Otilie Baader: *Ein steiniger Weg: Lebenserinnerungen einer Sozialistin*, Stuttgart/Berlin 1921, p. 23, 26.

26 Albert Hauser: *Das Neue kommt: Schweizer Alltag im 19. Jahrhundert*, Zurich 1989, pp. 95–96; Ted Gioia: *Work Songs*, Durham et al. 2006; Karl Bücher: *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, Leipzig 1899 (I would like to thank Uwe Spiekermann for this hint).

27 All quotations according to Heinz Reif: "Ein seltener Kreis von Freunden": *Arbeitsprozesse und Arbeitserfahrung bei Krupp 1840–1914*, in: Klaus Tenfelde (ed.): *Arbeit und Arbeitserfahrung in der Geschichte*, Göttingen 1984, pp. 51–91, here pp. 62–64 (translated by the author).

Edward P. Thompson pointed to the close relation between the industrial revolution and the establishing of a model of linear time: “Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent.”²⁸ As within the category of space, two possible reactions also existed in the category of time. During a historical period in which productivity was increasingly measured in dependence from time, enterprises enforced time regimes and demanded that they be adhered to. This happened inside as well as—with the help of the state—outside of the realm of work and the means ranged from acoustic signals for the beginning and end of work hours to the abolition of church holidays.²⁹

Workers could react with protest, resistance, or simply disregard the rules. The ‘Saint Monday’ of the artisans, during which they did not show up at the workplace, continued throughout the 19th century and disrupted operational schedules in the developing factories.³⁰ That factory rules repeatedly emphasised punishment for ignoring time regimes indicates that work discipline was not only difficult to enforce but that it was also still being violated. In general, however, another strategy was more successful. Workers accepted the relation between productivity and time and began influencing these factors. Recognising time regimes enabled the (organised) workforce to fight for higher wages and shorter working hours. The mixture of adaption and appropriation opened new options of behaviour. And the private watch gained great importance for workers, not only because it symbolised wealth and property, but also because the watch allowed for autonomous control over the imposed time regime.

In colonial spaces, by contrast, a *mélange* of very different conceptions of time management emerged. Firstly, among colonisers the image of the lazy native prevailed. The natives—as the workers in the centre/home country—had to be disciplined and to be accustomed to hegemonic time forms. But the workforce in the colonies resisted, too. Beyond the realm of work itself, their forms of resistance could have additional meanings. For the colonisers, laziness and idling demonstrated the backwardness of the colonised. The colonisers, therefore, threatened the lifestyle of the colonised as well. When the natives fought against working conditions and time regimes, they also defended their cultural, societal and political identity.³¹ However, processes of adaption existed both resulting from the insight that adjustment could bring (financial) advantages and from physical coercion.

28 Edward P. Thompson: Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism, in: Past and Present 38 (1967), pp. 56–97, p. 61.

29 Rainer Postel: Das Ende des dritten Pfingsttages, in: Rainer Hering/Rainer Nicolaysen (eds.): Lebendige Sozialgeschichte: Gedenkschrift für Peter Borowsky, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 599–612, p. 610.

30 Edward P. Thompson: Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism, p. 74.

31 Andreas Eckert: Zeit, Arbeit und Konstruktion von Differenz: Über die koloniale Ordnung in Afrika, in: Comparativ 10:3 (2000), pp. 61–73, pp. 63–64.

Force and oppression represented the second factor within colonial time regimes. The colonisers feared losing control over time, as well as losing control over the colonised. “Time violation” was punished severely. In an assembly of the Governmental Council in the German colony Samoa, plantation owners complained that “diligence and good behaviour” of Chinese contract workers “since introducing arrest instead of formerly practised corporal punishment had considerably declined. [...] Even dark arrest would have no effect. The only effective sentence would be without doubt corporal punishment.”³²

While colonial powers vehemently tried to force the indigenous population to adopt their imagination of strict time, the colonisers themselves, thirdly, sometimes developed time rules in the periphery, which were totally different from the conditions at the centre of the colonial territory. Around 1900, the South Seas became a place for dropouts. Siegfried Genthe, a travel writer, wrote around 1900 about “savaged whites [*verwilderte Weiße*] who in language, clothing and way of living are more wogs [*Kanaken*] than Europeans” and whose ideal was a “footloose and fancy-free life without much constraints and concessions to virtue and good order”.³³

But not only these “beachcombers” stood for the escape from European time systems. Colonial administrations also adjusted to local time rhythms. Frieda Zieschank, a German plantation owner’s spouse, noted in her diary: “The notion of hurry gets totally lost here!”³⁴ While in the German colonial centre the measuring of time became more and more accurate and the relation between work and time clearly fixed, 20,000 kilometres and weeks away from home a refuge of timelessness was established—which in Germany, in turn, led representatives of the labour movement to criticise laziness in the colonial periphery.³⁵

32 Minutes of the meeting of the government council in Apia, 11 October 1909, BA Berlin, R1001/2324, fol. 37 (translated by the author).

33 Siegfried Genthe: Samoa: Reiseschilderungen, edited by Georg Wegener, Berlin 1908, pp. 33–34 (translated by the author).

34 Frieda Zieschank: Ein Jahrzehnt in Samoa (1906–1916), Leipzig 1916, p. 53 (translated by the author).

35 Claus Gossler: Der Kaufmann August Unshelm (1824–1864): Pionier des Hamburger Handelshauses Joh. Ces. Godeffroy & Sohn in der Südsee, in: Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte 95 (2009), pp. 23–97, p. 25; Christian Kracht: Imperium: A Fiction of the South Seas, New York 2015; Siegfried Genthe: Samoa: Reiseschilderungen, pp. 32–34; Hermann Joseph Hiery: Das Deutsche Reich in der Südsee (1900–1921): Eine Annäherung an die Erfahrungen verschiedener Kulturen, Göttingen/Zurich 1995, pp. 35ff.

Symbols and Representations of Work

Work as a life-shaping and life-determining category stimulated cultural appropriation and the attribution of meanings. Symbols can be used for verbal and non-verbal exchange.³⁶ Since workers' culture is strongly shaped by oral traditions, many of these aspects are lost as far as the 19th century is concerned. However, autobiographies, mass media of the labour movement, early social science research and interviews from around 1900 open access points to symbols and representations of physical work within the workforce of that time. Besides this, there exists a form of representation of work 'from the outside', a view of the working world and labour relations. Because work is so central, many motifs in painting persist throughout the centuries. One of the first films screened publicly was *The Blacksmith Scene* shot by W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise for T. A. Edison at the Brooklyn Institute in 1893.³⁷ Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936) criticised alienated work on the assembly line under the conditions of Fordism.

However, the view from outside and from within cannot be as accurately distinguished from each other as it seems at first glance. Workers who wrote their memoirs, filled in questionnaires, or were culturally active always had the outside world in mind, too, to which they wanted to convey their working situation as authentically as possible. The view from outside, again, always included—as open-minded, prejudiced, sympathetic or dismissive these views might have been—the necessity to deal with the counterpart (for example the critical bourgeois observer who at least somehow had to reflect the position of the workers).

The anvil and the blacksmith symbolised power and endeavour in physical work. With hard beats, the blacksmith shaped the glowing iron. Despite his hard labour, the blacksmith did not only rule the fire, with his physical power and skills he also constructed something new, firm and lasting.³⁸ The opposite was represented with the work at the loom where the weaver was subordinate to the machine. However, such classifications and codes have to be scrutinised. For example, Richard Richter, a weaver from Forst in Brandenburg (Germany), remembered his relationship to the loom in 1908:

When I started working at the loom, it stirred my interest immediately. I wanted to understand the secrets of this complicated mechanism, and I did not rest, un-

36 See Susanna Brogi et al. (eds.): *Repräsentationen von Arbeit: Transdisziplinäre Analysen und künstlerische Produktionen*, Bielefeld 2013.

37 I thank Daniel Eisenberg (New York) for this information.

38 Michael Mende: "Männer des Feuers und der eisernen Kraft": Die Arbeit des Schmieds, in: Wolfgang Ruppert (ed.): *Die Arbeiter: Lebensformen, Alltag und Kultur von der Frühindustrialisierung bis zum „Wirtschaftswunder“*, Munich 1986, pp. 224–235.

til the ultimate thought of the designing engineer became apparent to me. [...] Therefore, I never can feel as slave to the machine.

At the same time, the weaver Richard Richter registered different perceptions of work between him and the interviewing social scientist, Adolf Levenstein. For Levenstein, Richter perceived, it seemed “incomprehensible”, how one could find joy in working when “one always had to do the same work in the dry, oil-odour impregnated and dust-filled air of the factory”. Richter admitted that the working conditions troubled him. However, “the consciousness of having found a place which nourishes me”, which gives time “to lose oneself in useless brooding” and the “dull influence of custom” made work bearable for Richter. And, finally, he added self-confidently, he still worked “with joy because I do not perform my work in a slavish manner, but—as all my work—with love and scrupulous care.”³⁹

Despite such ambivalences, images of hard physical work could easily be used in an ideological mode. In 1844, Heinrich Heine, in his poem *Die schlesischen Weber* (*The Silesian Weavers*), related the adjustment of the worker to the loom and the horrible noise of the permanent seesaw of the fly-shuttle with the economically and politically suppressed situation of the weavers. Frequently, one interpretive pattern of physical work was so dominant that it could easily be used for political purposes. For example, around 1900, a socialist postcard showed August Bebel, leading figure of the Social Democracy, as a blacksmith. At first glance, this could have appeared as a caricature because Bebel was of slight build. Nobody would have hired him as blacksmith. Rather, the message was a political one: just as the blacksmith transformed hard metal with his power, under the stroke of Bebel’s hammer, a new political system should emerge.⁴⁰

Within the working class, original photography and a particular language of images could not yet develop in the 19th century: the technical equipment was too expensive. On pictures of factories, taken for the representation of enterprises, workers were used as objects. Due to the long exposure time, working processes had to be staged extensively. Workers appeared as disciplined and part of the predominant organisation and order. However, some photographed workers penetrated the apparent authenticity and came to the photo shooting with bright patent leather shoes instead of their chunky steel-toe boots. Despite all staged performance, the photos of the work processes documented the dangers, requirements, stress and toil.⁴¹

39 Richard Richter, Letter from 25 July 1908, in: Adolf Levenstein (ed.): *Aus der Tiefe: Arbeiterbriefe: Beiträge zur Seelenanalyse moderner Arbeiter*, Berlin 1909, pp. 89–90 (translated by the author).

40 Bebel-postcard in Ilse Fischer and Werner Krause: *August Bebel 1840–1913: Ein Großer der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Bonn 1988, pp. 183–84.

41 See Wolfgang Ruppert: *Die Fabrik: Geschichte von Arbeit und Industrialisierung in Deutschland*, Munich 1983; Klaus Tenfelde (ed.): *Bilder von Krupp: Fotografie und Ge-*

This in mind, the image of a specific German ‘joy of work’ has to be modified with regard to the working class. For most workers, work remained an ambivalent framework, as illustrated in the statements by the weaver Richard Richter. When Adolf Levenstein asked miners, textile and metalworkers, what work they would like to perform most, between 20 per cent (miners, metalworkers) and 28 per cent (textile workers) of nearly 4,500 interviewees answered: “The work that yields most money”. Answering the question how many hours they wanted to work, however, only 1.4 per cent of all said “zero”.⁴² Facing daily physical work definitely created a yearning for leisure and closing time; however, the (interviewed) workers could not imagine a life without work. For the most part, they identified with their work and created their identity through their work—but this does not mean they enjoyed it.

Overlong working hours during the industrial revolution and intensified working hours during high industrialisation shaped workers’ lives. Therefore, physical work was a coordinate that influenced workers’ perceptions and attitudes. Work created a complex, also ambivalent, frame of references. On the one hand, work guaranteed integration and solidarity, and gave space for mutual learning and help. On the other hand, work could also be combined with values of exclusion and subordination. Hierarchies at the workplace could be reproduced in everyday life. Finally, work required the acceptance of rules, control and leadership. On the one hand, businessmen and employers not only possessed the means of production, they also—with or without contract—tied the workers to themselves and were authorised to give instructions. On the other hand, this front line, which could be split up into very different hierarchical levels, contributed to the process through which negotiating rules, norms, values and interests became part of the workers’ and working class culture.⁴³

schichte im Industriezeitalter, Munich 1994; Jürgen Hannig: Die “letzte Schicht des Hammers Fritz”: Die Deutungen von Fotografien zur Industriegeschichte, in: Gerhard Paul (ed.): Das Jahrhundert der Bilder, Göttingen 2009, vol. 1, pp. 116–123.

- 42 Joan Campbell: *Joy of Work, German Work: The National Debate, 1800–1945*, Princeton 1989, pp. 92ff.; Adolf Levenstein: *Die Arbeiterfrage: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der sozialpsychologischen Seite des modernen Großbetriebs und der psycho-physischen Einwirkungen auf die Arbeiter*, Munich 1912, pp. 151, 166, 172 (translated by the author); Gerhard Schildt: *Die Arbeiterschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1996, p. 93.
- 43 For the second half of the 20th century, see Peter-Paul Bänziger: *What Makes People Work: Producing Emotional Attachments to the Workplace in Post-WWII Western German Vocational Schools*, in: Anne Schmidt and Christoph Conrad (eds.): *Bodies and Affects in Market Societies*, Tübingen 2016, pp. 41–58.

What Work is Political Work?

Forms, Functions and Practice of Political Work

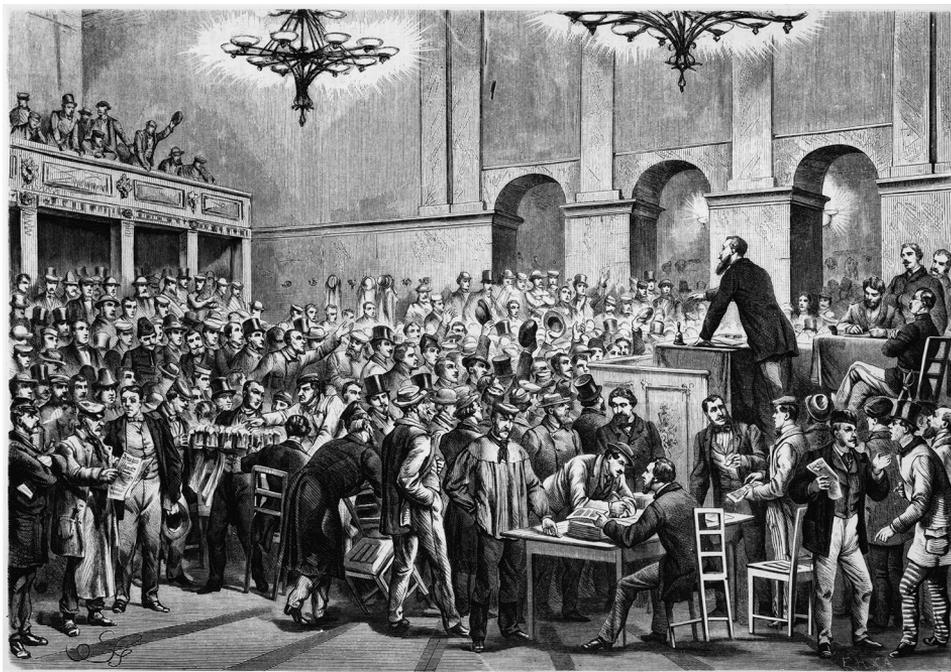
The iconic working-class hero August Bebel was already mentioned in the previous section. There, Bebel's work was illustrated and represented in the concrete manual work of a blacksmith. But, first of all, political work contained very basic working processes which can be summarised in five characteristics of which some are opposed to those of physical work: it is to read, to write, to speak, to think and to organise. The functions of these work processes can be analysed and described regarding three aspects. The first is the contact and communication function. Building networks is the key element here. The second aspect is the management function. The aim of the labour movement was to establish permanent, resilient and sustainable structures in their movement. And the third function was that of intermediation. Intermediation especially meant enforcing the interests of the working classes and gaining power. Political work, hence, is to be understood not only in the Weberian sense of "politics as vocation",⁴⁴ but also as a concrete working practise.⁴⁵

To realise these working processes and functions in political work special skills and characteristics were required of the "political worker".⁴⁶ An analysis of two illustrations can show what some of these skills looked like and how they changed. The first is a print of a workers' meeting in Vienna in 1868.

44 Max Weber: Politics as a Vocation, in: Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations, edited and with an introduction by John Dreijmanis, translated by Gordon C. Wells, New York 2008, pp. 155–207; central for social democratic politicians is Wilhelm Heinz Schröder: Politik als Beruf? Ausbildung und Karrieren von sozialdemokratischen Reichstagsabgeordneten im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik, in: Dieter Dowe/Jürgen Kocka/Heinrich August Winkler (eds.): Parteien im Wandel: Vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik: Rekrutierung—Qualifizierung—Karrieren, Munich 1999, pp. 27–84.

45 The following section is based on my research at the International Research Centre "Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History" (re:work) at Humboldt University Berlin and my publications on the early German labour movement as well as my August Bebel biography (Jürgen Schmidt: Brüder, Bürger und Genossen: Die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung zwischen Klassenkampf und Bürgergesellschaft 1830–1870, Bonn 2018; Jürgen Schmidt: August Bebel: Kaiser der Arbeiter: Eine Biografie, Zurich 2013 [English translation: August Bebel: Social Democracy and the Founding of the Labour Movement, London/New York 2019]). I would like to thank all participants of the "re:work" Tuesday talks for very helpful suggestions and advice.

46 See, however, in different time and context Jan Kiepe: Für die Revolution auf die Schulbank: Eine alltagsgeschichtliche Studie über die SED-Funktionärsausbildung in Thüringen, Bonn 2016.

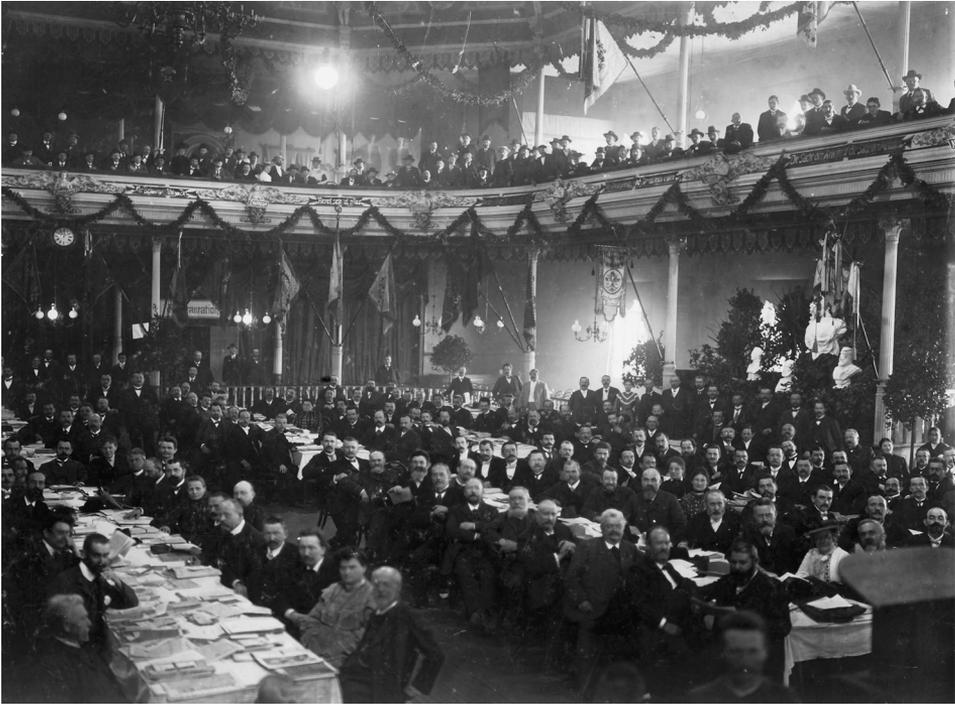


“Arbeiterversammlung Wien”, © akg-images, AKG 76647, aus: *Über Land und Meer*, Nr. 28, April 1868

First of all, the atmosphere of the meeting combined sociability and political work, leisure and political work: much beer was served to the audience. Then, the different work processes, functions and attributes can be seen as presented in a nutshell. In the foreground, the organisational aspect is demonstrated where new members could subscribe to the association. In the centre right, the central aspect of speaking, agitating and convincing the audience is demonstrated by a single speaker. On the right in the background, some members write the minutes and in the right corner of the print, the aspect of contact and face-to-face-communication can be observed. It is a male world. Due to the Austrian context, one can detect different headpieces that demonstrate different ethnic origins.

The second illustration is a photo of the Social Democratic Party conference in Bremen in 1904.

The difference to the former image is obvious. While the 1868 meeting was public, in Bremen elected delegates assembled. The scene radiates values of respectability, order and perfect organisation. The decoration of the “Casino” hall in Bremen created a solemn atmosphere. With regard to political work, the piles of paper on the tables demonstrate intense work on texts: discussing, arguing, convincing, fighting for one’s viewpoint would determine the activities during the meeting.



© Bildarchiv des Archivs der sozialen Demokratie, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

To stand one's ground both in such eventful meetings in the 1860s and in organised party conferences after 1900 required rhetoric skills and at least some charismatic traits. This is also the central topic one can find in the sources. For example, the social democrat Wilhelm Bracke was characterised as one of the most popular speakers who was able to "carry away the masses".⁴⁷ This ability was based on several techniques which the party workers had to learn. These abilities were trained through learning by doing as well as in rhetoric seminars for active and interested members. Especially during the early years, self-education and the willingness to read were central for active party members. One very common result and technique of this 'reading adventure' was that political workers used quotations in their speeches. An example is the autobiographical writing of Hermann Molkenbuhr. He described this rhetoric technique and interpreted this political and rhetorical effort as work:

47 Wilhelm Bloss: *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Sozialdemokraten: Erster Band*, Munich 1914, p. 126 (translated by the author).

What should we offer our audience? The results of our own research were limited. So we *worked* with the ideas of other people, and it was already a *remarkable piece of work* to know the ideas of others and make out of these ideas a tasteful meal.⁴⁸

In this case, work meant interpretation and creativity, too. In 1906, in the process of professionalising political work, the Social Democratic Party established a party school in Berlin to train already experienced political talents. Among the teachers were Rosa Luxemburg and Rudolf Hilferding, among the ‘pupils’ Friedrich Ebert and Wilhelm Pieck.⁴⁹

In contrast to these professionalised trainee programmes after 1900, August Bebel’s political career started in the atmosphere of the early workers’ association meetings. In several Leipzig newspapers, advertisements invited the interested public to come to the foundation meeting of an Industrial Educational Association (*Gewerblicher Bildungsverein*) on 19 February 1861 in the ‘Vienna Hall’. Here, Bebel found his future political home. To (co-)spearhead an organisation, to take the floor, to voice his opinion and to assert it, to be in the public limelight: that was the 21-year old’s dream and vision of the future, when he listened to the debate among the members of the Leipzig Industrial Educational Association. As early as 1862, Bebel was elected as an executive member of the association, heading the departments of library and leisure. In his autobiography, he remembered:

My desire to talk in public has been met in the association after a short time. A friend later told me that, when I talked for the first time to support and justify a motion, the people at his table looked at each other in surprise and asked: ‘Who is that man with such an appearance?’⁵⁰

However, political work involved (and involves) more than just discussing ideas, concepts and programmes, fighting positional and factional struggles within a political system. We have to bear in mind that Bebel’s path into politics and political work in the German labour movement in general is also a ‘history from below’. Due to a combination of sociability, entertainment, pleasure and education, the associations proved to be an attractive choice for young men who had only limited privacy while living in their masters’ households and, in line with tradition but with a tendency to decline,

48 Bernd Braun: “Ich wollte nach oben!” Die Erinnerungen von Hermann Molkenbuhr 1851 bis 1880, Bonn 2006, p. 225 (emphasis by J. S., translated by the author).

49 <http://erinnerungsorte.fes.de/die-parteischnule> (accessed on 28 June 2019).

50 August Bebel: *Aus meinem Leben* (1910–1913), Munich 1995, p. 46 (translated by the author); Wolfgang Schröder: *Leipzig—Wiege der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Wurzeln und Werden des Arbeiterbildungsvereins 1848/49–1878/81*, Berlin 2010, pp. 72–73.

were unmarried as long as they were journeymen. They lived a life of restricted masculinity. In the associations, however, they were respected and recognised.⁵¹

We also have to consider that Bebel entered the political stage at a time when workers' associations and workers' educational associations increasingly began to gain momentum. The right 'timing' for a political career and political work is of importance. But not only the timing, also the place where Bebel started his political commitment proved to be lucky. Leipzig became a field for experimentation of workers' policies in the early 1860s. Here, workers prepared a workers' congress and invited Ferdinand Lassalle to draft a programme for workers. Leipzig was probably not the only 'cradle of the German labour movement', but—to use the same metaphor—its strongest offspring grew up there. Bebel was not among these pioneers, because, until the mid-1860s, he remained part of the liberal workers' association movement. But for his political work and career it was crucial that he was a 'real' worker in a movement which was led mainly by educated middle class members. Therefore, he was promoted in his political advancement because he validated these middle class leaders' claim that they were interested in the workers' lives and fate.⁵²

From the 1860s until the 1880s, Bebel's life was characterised by his multiple activities as craftsman, business man and political activist. At the end of the year 1888, he decided to abandon his commercial career and to concentrate on his work as a professional politician. However, the political work did not come naturally to Bebel and remained hard and arduous. No sooner had he decided in favour of professional politics, than he wrote to Friedrich Engels regarding the next session of the *Reichstag*: "All this business ruins one's summer. But that's how it is, one just has to do it."⁵³ These remarks reveal the sense of duty and honour typical for a labour party. This was by no means only true for Bebel. Rosa Luxemburg lamented in 1905: "One has to go to work, go to work! Dear Lord, how much work awaits me!"⁵⁴ In social democrats' correspondence, functionaries shared their woes and the appeal and burden of political work. Politics was a 'serious matter'. The amount of time required and the intensive work process involved was due to the multi-functionality of the labour leaders and—against the backdrop of being politically excluded—to their desire to shine

51 Thomas Welskopp: *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, pp. 408–418; Jürgen Schmidt: *Brüder, Bürger und Genossen: Die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung zwischen Klassenkampf und Bürgergesellschaft 1830–1870*, pp. 91–92, 337.

52 Wilhelm Schröder: *Leipzig—Wiege der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, passim; Jürgen Schmidt: *August Bebel: Kaiser der Arbeiter: Eine Biografie*, pp. 60ff.

53 August Bebel to Friedrich Engels, 14 April 1889, in: *August Bebel: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, edited by Horst Bartel et al. and the International Institute for Social History Amsterdam, Munich et al. 1995–97, vol. 2, p. 326 (translated by the author).

54 Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 30 September 1905, in: *Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Briefe*, Berlin 1982/83, vol. 2, p. 178 (translated by the author).

through their skills and achievements. Another reason for labour leaders to work as hard as they could was that they felt obliged to the majority of party members who performed hard, physical work. The functionaries' intellectual political work, encouraged by the grassroots supporters, was their contribution and sacrifice in the fight for the party's cause. Self-stylisation in such lamentation was certainly also part of the political work, even among party friends.

Structural Considerations on Political Work

Finally, and as a further step in the argument, I now would like to make a first attempt at describing the structural specifics of political work. First, within the discussion of free and unfree labour, political work was not only free work. In the labour movement of 19th-century Germany, for most active members it was voluntary work.⁵⁵ This aspect links the question of political work to the broad context of civil societal engagement and to the issues of access to money, time and availability. Especially in his early career, this problem troubled August Bebel. In June 1865—Bebel was already second chairman of the Leipzig Workers' Educational Society—he wrote to his fellow board member Leopold Sonnemann: "I do not have the freedom of disposing myself as I may see fit. Even though I have my own business, I am forced to secure my livelihood through hard work every day."⁵⁶ And, in 1884, Bebel complained to Engels: "I am the best example that a leading role in politics is impossible to reconcile with a normal business on a long-term basis."⁵⁷

Second, political work had an ambiguous position between paid and unpaid work. Journalists and editors of the social democratic newspapers of course got salaries from the beginning of the organisations. Talented agitators did not only receive reimbursements for their travels, but also incentives for their agitation tours. In the General German Workers Association (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*, ADAV) the remuneration of its second president Bernhard Becker caused many problems and members

- 55 In general see Robert J. Steinfeld: *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 2001; Michael Mann: *Die Mär von der freien Lohnarbeit: Menschenhandel und erzwungene Arbeit in der Neuzeit: Ein einleitender Essay*, in: *Comparativ* 13:4 (2003), pp. 7–22; Gisela Notz: "Freiwilligendienste" für alle: Von der ehrenamtlichen Tätigkeit zur Prekarisierung der "freiwilligen" Arbeit, Neu-Ulm, 2012; Oliver Stengel: *Jenseits der Marktwirtschaft: Ökonomie im 21. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 2016, pp. 141ff.
- 56 August Bebel to Leopold Sonnemann, 23 June 1865, in: *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD)*, Bonn, Bestand Frühzeit der Arbeiterbewegung, A 6 (translated by the author). See also Thomas Welskopp: *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, p. 200.
- 57 August Bebel to Friedrich Engels, 28 December 1884, in: *August Bebel: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 163–164 (translated by the author).

left the organisation.⁵⁸ In the long run, the labour movement underwent a process of professionalisation which, however, did not end the discussions. At the party conference in Frankfurt upon Main in 1894, for example, trade union leader Carl Legien pointed out that many workers “have an annual income of only 800 to 900 Mark”. He then asked critically: “Is it just and fair that some comrades receive exorbitant salaries out of the workers’ pennies for the membership fee that are heavy burdens for them?”⁵⁹ And critics saw the danger of organisational immobility, structural incrustation and over-bureaucratisation of the labour movement in this professionalization, among them Robert Michels at the turn of the 20th century.⁶⁰ For Bebel, it was also important not to earn his livelihood from paid party functions. In 1908, he advised Karl Liebknecht, Wilhelm Liebknecht’s ambitious son and later founding member of the Communist Party in Germany: “If you ever hold a leading party office, you have to be financially independent from the party.”⁶¹

Third, political work was and is until today related to specific values. Respectability, trust, knowledge and endurance already became apparent in what I described above. In addition, political work often includes struggles and fighting, it contains an antagonistic principle. And to be successful in this confrontation means emerging as heroes and charismatic leaders. This means that emotional aspects of political work have to be considered, as well. August Bebel, for example, could get very agitated about the “loud-mouths of the National Association and the Progress Party”, who let “down freedom and fatherland in an unscrupulous and dishonourable manner”, so

- 58 Toni Offermann: *Die erste deutsche Arbeiterpartei: Organisation, Verbreitung und Sozialstruktur von ADAV und LADAV 1863–1871*, Bonn 2002, pp. 134–138; Jürgen Schmidt: *Brüder, Bürger und Genossen: Die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung zwischen Klassenkampf und Bürgergesellschaft 1830–1870*, pp. 388–89.
- 59 Carl Legien, 22 October 1894, in: *Sozialdemokratische Parteitage 1890–1914*. Online-edition of the library of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Frankfurt upon Main 1894, p. 73, at: <http://library.fes.de/parteitage> (accessed on 12 April 2019) (translated by the author).
- 60 Robert Michels: *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie: Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens* (1911), Stuttgart 1989.
- 61 August Bebel to Karl Liebknecht, 10 November 1908, in: *August Bebel: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, vol. 9, p. 164 (translated by the author). Although Bebel correctly stated that he never had a salaried party function, after successfully selling his enterprise to his business partner, he lived off the social democratic party, because it was mainly the members of this organisation and this milieu who bought Bebel’s book *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* and made him a bestselling author, with more than 140,000 copies sold until the First World War. In addition, he was a successful writer for social democratic newspapers. It was said that he received fees in the amount of 3,600 Mark annually for his freelance work for *Die Neue Zeit*, the social democratic ‘flagship’ for debates on culture and theory—two or three times the annual salary of a skilled worker.

that “I sometimes felt so disgusted I could spit in their faces, with all due respect”.⁶² This was not only the eagerness of a young politician who felt betrayed by liberalism, his former political home. Bebel was caught by his passion for politics paired with the hope of changing and improving Germany by political means.

Strong emotions and antagonistic principles open, fourth, a perspective onto the ‘dark’ sides of political work. In the 1860s and early 1870s, the conflicts between the rivaling social democratic currents were not only fought with arguments and words. Meetings were disrupted, small groups of one political party infiltrated assemblies of the adversaries and made discussions impossible through shouting and whistling. Physical violence also occurred. In addition, one accused the other of buying votes in elections with a *schnaps*.⁶³

Fifth, political work in the 19th century meant different things for different political parties. Compared to social democrats, middle class members active in conservative or liberal parties had better education, were financially secured and—except for some radical left liberals and Catholic politicians—did not have to fear persecution. The opposite was the case for active members of the Social Democracy. For example, Johann Salm from Erfurt wrote in 1870: “You expect us to do more? But I have to tell you that I am surrounded and watched and will be out of bread at the very first opportunity. And I have a family with three small children.”⁶⁴ It is safe to assume that under such conditions more socialist politicians did in fact give up and withdrew from politics than carried on.

This aspect of diversity in different political currents has to be considered in future research as well as, sixth, the relation between change and continuity over time in political work. The role of mass media, for example, and the public perception of political work changed dramatically. However, already in 1910, Theodor Heuss as observer of the Social Democratic Party conference in Magdeburg wrote to his wife: “Today party conference. Quite dull, so far. Tomorrow Bebel and [Ludwig] Frank going head to head—read the evening papers tomorrow.”⁶⁵ Heuss anticipated that the internal conflicts between Marxists and ‘revisionists’ in the party would cause huge media response.

62 August Bebel presumably to Leopold Sonnemann, 11 September 1867, in: August Bebel: *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 550 (translated by the author).

63 *Demokratisches Wochenblatt*, Nr. 11, 13 March 1869, p. 112; *ibid.*, Nr. 32, 7 August 1869, p. 363.

64 Johann Salm to August Bebel, 24 January 1870, quoted from Jürgen Schmidt: *The Early German Labor Movement as a Representative of Civil Society: Participation, Emancipation and Learning Democracy in 19th Century Germany* (ca. 1848–1880), p. 297.

65 Theodor Heuss to Elly Heuss-Knapp, 18/19 September 1910, in: *Theodor Heuss: Aufbruch im Kaiserreich: Briefe 1892–1917*, edited by Frieder Günther, Munich 2009, p. 310 (translated by the author).

Seventh, with regard to biographical aspects, we can ask during what life-cycle period political work for the labour movement started. Was it a life-long occupation or of limited duration? What were the reasons why some stayed in this political sphere and others resigned?⁶⁶ With the labour movement, a new generation came into the political sphere. Parliament members from conservative and liberal parties were astonished when they saw August Bebel for the first time. They had expected a man in his “forties” or “fifties”, but Bebel was only 27 years old when he was first elected.⁶⁷ Especially on the local level and in unpaid civil societal engagement, most activists started their political work in their 20s; some became ‘veterans’ in the local movement, while others left political work, and few made a career in paid political work.⁶⁸ Related to the life-cycle aspect is the fact that political work in pre-professionalisation times in a lot of cases was family work. Active members’ children had to write their fathers’ correspondence or had to take letters to the post office. Spouses undertook the task of writing manuscripts properly. And Julie Bebel did not only have a great share in securing the enterprise while her husband August was jailed, she also was active for the party, although she always acted in the background.⁶⁹

Finally, the question what the product of political work was (and is), is difficult to answer. Laws were a concrete outcome of political work which, however, the Social Democrats could not achieve, despite increasingly growing stronger in the *Reichstag*. From the labour party and movement perspective, stable organisations, convincing and motivating programmes, a politicised and active membership and success in elections were central goals. August Bebel emphatically stressed the primacy of engagement, in words that are still relevant today. To his question “what is politics?” in a speech in front of students he replied in 1897: “it is every man’s duty, from the moment in which he becomes capable of forming an independent judgment, to take an interest in public affairs”.⁷⁰ This was the plea to the citizen and civil society, the call “Get involved!”, one hundred years before French activist Stéphane Hessel’s famous

66 Jürgen Schmidt: Generational, Biographical and Life-Course Approaches to the History of the German Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century, in: *German History* 2019 (forthcoming).

67 August Bebel: *Aus meinem Leben* (1910–1913), p. 139.

68 Jürgen Schmidt: Sozialdemokratische und bürgerlich-nationale Milieus: Parteiführungen und Parteikarrieren in Erfurt, in: Dieter Dowe/Jürgen Kocka/Heinrich August Winkler (eds.): *Parteien im Wandel: Vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik: Rekrutierung—Qualifizierung—Karrieren*, pp. 229–267, esp. p. 239; Wilhelm Heinrich Schröder: *Politik als Beruf? Ausbildung und Karrieren von sozialdemokratischen Reichstagsabgeordneten im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik*, pp. 66–73, 78.

69 Jürgen Schmidt: *August Bebel: Kaiser der Arbeiter: Eine Biografie*, pp. 139–44.

70 August Bebel: *Akademiker und Sozialismus*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1906, p. 8 (translated by the author).

plea to get involved rather than to be indignant.⁷¹ The *zoon politikon* August Bebel followed exactly this path and became a professional politician. But he experienced the difficulties of realizing this claim in the daily arduousness of the lowlands of political work.

Conclusion

Bringing the cultures of physical work into relation with the cultures of political work in this article was an attempt at reconsidering the “distinction between manual and non-manual activities”.⁷² On the one hand, differences are revealed. Of course, and very basically, the skills and concrete work practises differed fundamentally; they are the pre-condition on which the distinction rests. In addition, physical work in the space of factories was regulated, but also served a regulating function with regard to time—and the more power workers and trade unions gained, the more strain was exerted upon them in terms of time regimes. Political work, by contrast, did not know such boundaries. Such a removal of constraints was similar those experiences which ‘false self-employed’ made in proto-industrialisation industries, during high industrialisation and in our current times. Additionally, the physical work described in this article was performed to gain income, while political work in most cases was realised during one’s leisure time and without payment. Can this form of activity, therefore, be considered as work? It was definitely more than a mere leisure activity, and could go hand in hand with feelings of stress and hardship.

This observation shows that the boundaries between the two categories of physical and political work were blurred and similarities can be registered, too. Within the process of professionalisation, some activists received money and even gained their livelihood out of political work, both categories merged. In addition, the perception of the work which was performed showed similarities. It was not simply that hard, physical work was experienced as alienated and slaverish, while political work was seen as enriching and enhancing. Due to the lack of sources one has to be careful in generalizing, but workers perceived their physical work in its ambivalence of livelihood securing activity, self-respect and identity strengthening action and exhausting and tiring burden. Activists of the early labour movements, in turn, had to face heavy defeats (for example, after the German unification 1871), see how their engagement fell on barren ground and realise that the fundamental change of society would not

71 Stéphane Hessel: Engagez-vous! Entretiens avec Gilles Vanderpooten, La Tour d’Aige 2011.

72 Andreas Eckert/Jürgen Kocka: Work and Life Course as Historical Problems: Perspectives of the International Research Center „re:work“.

happen. On the other hand, however, they believed in a growing movement and saw the increase happen.

Finally, addressing the cultures of work is an approach that enables cooperation with historical anthropology. However, the leading German journal *Historische Anthropologie* published only few articles related to workers. It seems that there still are reservations while, with regard to approaches in industrial anthropology, a lot of possible interactions are made use of.⁷³ Furthermore, one should also use the new, fresh perspectives gained from cultural history, on the micro and anthropological level. They can serve as access points to the research on the history of the organised working-class movement. And, besides the enthusiasm and success of cultural history, one should bear in mind the ‘hard’ socioeconomic facts of the history of work, workers and working class movements.

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73 Andrew Sanchez/Christian Strümpell: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on India’s Working Classes, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 48:5 (2014), pp. 1233–1241.