

Tomaž Mastnak*

Is Economic Power an Institution? The Limits of August Ludwig von Rochau's Redefinition of Liberal Politics

Keywords

August Ludwig von Rochau, *Realpolitik*, economic power, counterrevolution, Bonapartism, Liberalism

Abstract

The article deals with August Ludwig von Rochau's reformulation of Liberal politics after the defeat of the 1848 revolution. In response to the widely perceived crisis of Liberalism, von Rochau developed a realistic view of politics (he is credited with the invention of the concept of *Realpolitik*) as the basis for a renewed Liberalism. His realism with regard to politics, however, did not extend to a critical view of economic power. Economic power was exempted from political reflection and control.

Ali je ekonomska moč institucija? Meje redefinicije liberalne politike Augusta Ludwiga von Rochaua

Ključne besede

August Ludwig von Rochau, *Realpolitik*, ekonomska moč, kontrarevolucija, bonapartizem, liberalizem

Povzetek

Članek obravnava reformulacijo liberalistične politike po porazu revolucije leta 1848, ki jo je ponudil August Ludwig von Rochau. Von Rochau je kot odgovor na očitno krizo liberalizma razvil kritično razumevanje politike, na katerem je utemeljeval prenovljeni liberalizem. Njegov realizem v odnosu do politike (von Rochau velja za iznajditelja pojma *Realpolitik*) pa ni imel dopolnila v kritičnem razumevanju ekonomske moči. Ekonomska moč se je izmaknila tako politični refleksiji kot kontroli.

* Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia
tomaz.mastnak@guest.arnes.si



Economic power is an established mode of social action whose structural elements correspond to the definition of an institution in the social sciences, yet it is as a rule not defined as an institution. In the social sciences, institutions are of prime concern. With reference to Paul Fauconnet and Marcel Mauss, Émile Durkheim famously defined sociology as “the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning.”¹ I will here presuppose an elemental definition of institution as a social structure, organization, or system of rules, norms, and beliefs that regulate (shape, direct, constrain, manage, control, etc.) social behavior, and is in turn itself based on and regulated by its own rules, norms, and beliefs, as well as by public law, and will ask the question why economic power is generally not dealt with as an institution. This, in my view, is an important theoretical question, but also one that has huge practical implications.

Introduction

In order to outline the problem, I will begin by touching upon a relatively recent debate that addressed the question of economic power, and note that such debates are actually rare. In one of his last publications, Lapo Berti called for limiting economic power. He characterized “excessive wealth and economic power in private hands, which produces and presupposes excessive wealth,” as a problem that afflicts contemporary democratic regimes, yet is not taken issue with, or confronted, and, moreover, is not even named. He also reminded the reader that constitutions, which from the beginning of modernity regulate the life of our type of societies and enshrine the social pact, do not deal with economic power. “Among the powers, which [our constitutions] are trying to temper and control, economic power does not figure.”²

Berti belonged to the Italian *operaista* collective that launched the journal *Primo Maggio* in 1973, and more specifically to the “working group on money” as-

¹ Émile Durkheim, “Préface de la seconde édition,” in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), xxii; all translations of non-English works are my own.

² Lapo Berti, “Mettere un limite al potere economico,” CivicoLab, December 11, 2017, <https://www.civicolab.it/mettere-un-limite-al-potere-economico/>.

sociated with the journal.³ In retrospect, that was one of the last productive attempts to retool and revitalize Marxist theory so that it would be able to engage with contemporary capitalism. What in the early 1970s determined contemporary capitalism was the world economic crisis that was building up, and capital's response to it. Characteristic of the crisis was an enormous expansion of the boundaries of monetary policy. Along with it grew the space "to maneuver and manipulate money for political ends." As Berti later observed: "Money had become an institution with a high political value. After effectively being transformed into an instrument of government, it was thus inevitable for monetary policy to directly intervene in the power struggle between social classes." At the center of the working group on money's analysis was the insight that "money is an institution which is part of the governance of society."⁴

The analyses of the working group on money were initiated and given direction by Sergio Bologna's rereading of Marx's articles on *Crédit Mobilier*, published during the world economic crisis of the mid-1850s. Bologna argued that those forgotten or neglected articles represented an important shift in Marx's theoretical development. In them, Marx turned his attention to the "money form." The "institutional organization of the money form, the bank, becomes the point of departure for Marx's analysis of the whole of the bourgeoisie, of capital in its entirety."⁵

Crédit Mobilier was "the first appearance of investment banking in the nascent European capitalism."⁶ The celebrated Italian economist Piero Sraffa in his lectures at Cambridge in 1929–30, for example, presented it as "an antecedent of industrial banking, and industrial banking as a type (or ideal-type) of a conti-

³ See Stefano Lucarelli, "The 1973–1978 Workgroup on Money of the Journal *Primo Maggio*: An Example of a Pluralist Critique of Political Economy," *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* 4, no. 1 (2013): 30–50, <http://doi.org/10.1504/ijpee.2013.053585>.

⁴ Lapo Berti, "Interview: Marx, Money and Capital," interview by Paolo Davoli and Letizia Rustichelli, trans. Ettore Lancellotti and Letizia Rustichelli (n.p.: Rhizosfera, 2016) 16–17, 19, 23, https://monoskop.org/images/1/1a/Marx%2C_Money_and_Capital._An_Interview_with_Lapo_Berti.pdf.

⁵ Sergio Bologna, "Moneta e crisi: Marx corrispondente della 'New York Daily Tribune,'" *Primo Maggio: Saggi e documenti per una storia di classe* 1, no. 1 (June–September 1973): 3.

⁶ Joseph Ricciardi, "Marx on Financial Intermediation: Lessons of the French *Crédit Mobilier* in the *New York Daily Tribune*," *Science and Society* 79, no. 4 (October 2015): 498, <http://doi.org/10.1521/isis.2015.79.4.497>.

mental banking system differing from the English system.” *Crédit Mobilier* was an institutional innovation that answered the problem of financing industry.⁷ From a different perspective, *Crédit Mobilier* was a key institution of the new Bonapartist regime, which Louis Bonaparte established in France after his *coup d'état* in December 1851. Marx's articles on *Crédit Mobilier* represent an important advance in his understanding and critique of Bonapartism as first laid out in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, as well as in his understanding of capitalism.⁸

It is easy to observe a cross-fertilization between the Italian operaists' analysis of the 1970s economic crisis and their reading of Marx's articles on *Crédit Mobilier*. With the new understanding of how the advanced capitalist system worked, it was possible to detect in Bonapartism or, to be precise, in the economic revolution under the wing of the Bonapartist counter-revolutionary political dictatorship, elements, or beginnings, of the institutionalization of monetary power and of financial policies as an instrument of government. As Sergio Bologna wrote, Marx in his articles on *Crédit Mobilier* (preceding his work on the manuscript we know as the *Grundrisse*) confronted the Bonapartist regime as “the first accomplished form of the *modern state*, as the rule of social capital [. . .] as the first accomplished form of the modern monetary system.”⁹

Bologna here projected too much on Marx's articles. Marx only came to understand Bonapartism as the modern form of the state, or as the modern state, fifteen years later in his writings on the Paris Commune. Drafting his well-known *Civil War in France*, Marx characterized Louis Bonaparte's rule as the “ultimate political form” of “bourgeois society,” as “*the statepower of modern classrule*.”¹⁰ Such appreciation of Bonapartism was not unique. For Friedrich Engels, too, Bonapartism was “a modern form of the state,”¹¹ as it was earlier, for example,

122

⁷ Michel Bellet and Adrien Lutz, “Piero Sraffa and the Project to Publish Saint-Simon's Works,” *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)* (2019): 10, 14, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3312188>.

⁸ I discuss this in Tomaž Mastnak, *Bonapartizem: Prolegomena za študij fašizma* (Ljubljana: Založba / *cf., 2021), chap. 10.

⁹ Bologna, “Moneta e crisi,” 5.

¹⁰ Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France (Second Draft),” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, pt. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–), 22:117.

¹¹ Friedrich Engels, “Ergänzung der Vorbemerkung von 1870 zu ‘Der deutsche Bauernkrieg,’” in *Marx-Engels-Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957–68), 18:513.

for Theodor Mundt¹² and Bruno Bauer (who considered Louis Bonaparte's empire a "modern empire").¹³

What is important for my argument is that we find here an initial analysis of economic power as an institution in Marx, which is intertwined with his analysis of the modern state. We are in the 1850s, at the junction in history that witnessed crucially important developments of both political and economic power. One might say that we are at a decisive or formative moment in the historical formation of modern political and economic power.

Just as the formation of modern political and economic power took place simultaneously, and the two were interlinked, so did the beginnings of their analytical and conceptual understanding. The times when political thinkers could write their treatises as if the economy had not existed¹⁴ were definitively over. However, and this is the paradox I want to highlight, whereas political power was widely discussed, the elements for a conceptualization of economic power do not seem to have been taken up and systematically developed—at least not with the same intensity and to the same extent as discussions of political power. And, as Berti pointed out, whatever understanding of economic power there existed, it was not—in contrast to political power—translated into institutional policies and constitutional arrangements.

Economic power would become a practical issue, for example, in the United States with the antitrust Sherman Act of 1890, or with the suspension of the Act during the World War II industrial mobilization, and it was theoretically addressed in the work of Thorstein Veblen, the British New Liberals (J. A. Hobson in the first place), and the German Ordoliberalists (especially Franz Böhm and Walter Eucken, but also Hans Grossmann-Doerth).¹⁵ But the volume of these writings

¹² Theodor Mundt, *Paris und Louis Napoleon: Neue Skizzen aus dem französischen Kaiserreich* (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1858), 2:175.

¹³ Bruno Bauer, *Russland und das Germanenthum* (Charlottenburg: Verlag von Egbert Bauer, 1853), 75.

¹⁴ See István Hont, introduction to *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 1–156.

¹⁵ More on this in Tomaž Mastnak, *Črna internacionala: Vojna, veliki biznis in vpeljava neoliberalizma* (Ljubljana: Založba / *cf., 2019), chap. 1, 2, 5.

seems negligible in comparison with all that has been and continues to be written and talked about political power, and today hardly anyone discusses them.

A history of the sporadic and fragmented thinking about economic power is a desideratum. Here, however, I aim to elucidate the absence of such thinking at a point in political and intellectual history, where one would, by the “logic of things,” expect it to occur. I will de-center my discussion from the already mentioned “English model,” which has decisively shaped and dominated our views on modern political-economic history as well as on the societies we live in, and blinded us to the issue of economic power, while at the same time glorifying it. I will turn instead to the developments in continental Europe. I will focus on August Ludwig von Rochau’s book *The Principles of Realpolitik*.

Published in 1853, von Rochau’s book redefined liberal politics and policies after the defeat of the progressive forces in the 1848–49 revolution, and was widely read and influential in Germany in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The book was polemical, a *Streitschrift*, yet it also brought about a shift in theoretical perspectives on politics. As such, von Rochau has earned his characterization as one of the most interesting German political writers of the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

While the book was an intervention into German political life, it was not provincial. At the core of von Rochau’s theoretical innovations were reflections upon Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état* in France and upon the Bonapartist system that the violent seizure of power had inaugurated. The Italian historian Trocini has recently credited von Rochau with discovering the “law of power.”¹⁸ Since this term refers to political power, I take von Rochau and his *Principles of Realpolitik* to be a perfect case for asking the question of why this discovery of the “law of power,” that is, these new reflections on power, did not encompass economic power.

124

¹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze der Realpolitik: Angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands*, by Ludwig August von Rochau, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1972), 7–21.

¹⁷ Federico Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik” e la scoperta della “legge del potere”: August Ludwig von Rochau tra radicalismo e nazional-liberalismo* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2009), 15.

¹⁸ Trocini.

I will first say a few things about von Rochau. I will then present his ideas about a realistic approach to politics and the introduction of the concept of *Realpolitik*.¹⁹ This will be followed by addressing the question of how to understand von Rochau's redefinition of liberalism, which will include a discussion of Bonapartism, of the defeat of the 1848 revolution, and of contemporary critiques of liberalism. I will conclude by exploring the limits of *Realpolitik*, that is, von Rochau's failure to take issue with economic power.

August Ludwig von Rochau

August Ludwig von Rochau was born in 1810 in Prussia. During his student years, in the early 1830s, he was heavily involved with *Burschenschaften*, student associations or fraternities. In order to escape imprisonment for his radical activities—a court in Frankfurt had sentenced him to life—he fled to France in 1836. From Paris, where he became acquainted with other German exiles and developed an interest in Fourierism, he worked as a translator and wrote as a correspondent for a number of German liberal newspapers. In 1840, he published a book on Charles Fourier's "social theory" and seven years later another one on his travels in southern France and Spain.

In 1846, von Rochau returned to Germany and worked as an editor in Heidelberg. After the general amnesty of March 1848, he took part in the *Vorparlament* in Frankfurt and was active as a journalist. On the liberal left himself, he soon began to criticize the impotence of German liberals—their lack of "moral and material strength"—as well as the "eccentricities of the extreme left" and

¹⁹ Whether the concept of *Realpolitik* was indeed invented by von Rochau is of secondary importance. The point is that he introduced the concept into wide public usage. See Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*, 7. Duncan Kelley calls von Rochau "the most important developer of the concept." Duncan Kelley, "August Ludwig von Rochau and Realpolitik as Historical Political Theory," *Global Intellectual History* 3, no. 3 (2018): 302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2017.1387331>. See also John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chap. 1. According to Trocini (*L'invenzione della "Realpolitik"*, 8), von Rochau also introduced to the German political language the term "socialism" (*Socialismus*). His reference seems to be to von Rochau's early publication on Fourier's "social theory." However, the term does not appear in that text, in which von Rochau in fact used the term "socialist." See the use of the term *Socialisten* in Rochau's book, written under the pseudonym A. L. Churoa, *Kritische Darstellung der Socialtheorie Fourier's*, ed. Gustav Bacherer (Braunschweig: G. C. F. Meyer sen., 1840), 67.

the “arrogance of the conservatives.”²⁰ Soon after the defeat of the revolution, he emigrated again, this time to Switzerland, travelled through Italy, and published a book about the travels. In 1852 he took residence in Heidelberg and dedicated himself to writing. He published books on Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état* and on the Moriscos in Spain, the *Principles of Realpolitik*, and later in the 1850s a history of France in two volumes, and a new edition of the *Principles of Realpolitik*.

That second edition of the *Principles of Realpolitik* impacted the younger generation of German liberals like a “bolt of lightning,” as von Rochau’s younger contemporary, the historian and liberal politician Heinrich von Treitschke was to say in his obituary for von Rochau.²¹ In the late 1850s, von Rochau entered politics and as one of the leaders of the liberal *Nationalverein* and worked for the unification of Germany. This finally brought him to supporting Prussia and its Minister-President Otto von Bismarck for their leading role in the state unification process. Von Bismarck, as we know, was and remains something of a symbol of anti-liberalism, and von Rochau had a clash with him in 1850, which cost him his journalistic license. Up to 1866, von Rochau regarded von Bismarck as the “Messiah of feudal aristocracy.”²² But the war in 1866, in which Prussia defeated Austria and established itself as the leading German state and the undisputed bearer of national unification, changed the political calculus—not only for the liberals, but also for the socialist labor movement as well.²³

Soon after von Rochau the politician had made his nod to von Bismarck’s political success, to what he regarded as *Erfolgspolitik*, he offered a theoretical justification as well. In 1869, he published the second part of the *Principles of Realpolitik*. The first volume in 1853 had appeared anonymously and prompted guesses about the authorship. Some, for example, attributed the work to Arnold Ruge. I find this an interesting choice because, on the eve of the 1848 revolution, Ruge

²⁰ For these citations, see Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 32.

²¹ Quoted in Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 35. For a more cautious view, cf. Natascha Doll, *Recht, Politik und “Realpolitik” bei August Ludwig von Rochau (1810–1873)* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005).

²² Quoted in Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 36.

²³ See Cora Stephan, “*Genossen, wir dürfen uns nicht von der Geduld hinreißen lassen!*” *Zur Theoriebildung in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1862–1878* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981), chap. 2, 3.

(an erstwhile close associate of Marx) published a “self-critique of liberalism,” in which he called on his fellow radical democrats to make the transition from liberalism to “*democratism*.”²⁴ The second volume of the *Principles of Realpolitik*, too, was printed without von Rochau’s name on the title page, yet this time the authorship was not kept a secret. In the eyes of some scholars, the book established von Rochau as a literary precursor of Bismarckian politics, and von Bismarck himself now on some occasions passed flattering judgement on him.²⁵ Von Rochau died in 1873 as a member of the German Reichstag.

Realpolitik, Constitutional Politics, Force

In his *Principles of Realpolitik*, von Rochau goes *in medias res*. His starting point is the state, and his objective is to define “the dynamic basic law of the state [*Staatswesen*].” The state is “the political organism of human society,” whose existence is “based on natural necessity.”²⁶ This “natural” necessity is understood historically: in a historically given state, it is fulfilled through the interaction of manifold forces, whose composition, measure, and results endlessly change with time and place. “The starting point of all political understanding is the study of the forces that shape, maintain, and transform the state, and its first step leads to the following insight: that the *law of strength* [*Stärke*] dominates the life of the state in a similar way that the *law of gravitation* dominates the material world.”²⁷

Whereas the old *Staatswissenschaft* fully understood that “truth,” it drew from it a “false and baleful” conclusion: “the *right* of the stronger.” In modern times, this “unethical erroneous conclusion” (that the stronger has the *right*) was corrected, yet at the same time something important was lost from sight: “the real power [*Macht*] of the stronger,” whose importance in and for the state necessari-

127

²⁴ Arnold Ruge, “Selbstkritik des Liberalismus,” in *Arnold Ruge’s sämtliche Werke*, 2nd ed. (Mannheim: J. P. Grohe, 1847–48), 4:116. On attribution, see Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 13n10.

²⁵ See Trocini, 39, 47, 228.

²⁶ On the “organism” metaphor, see Lynn K. Nyhart, “The Political Organism: Karl Vogt on Animals and States in the 1840s and ’50s,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 47, no. 5 (November 2017): 602–28, <https://doi.org/10.1525/hsns.2017.47.5.602>.

²⁷ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1853), 1. I will refer to this work as *Grundsätze* (1853).

ly needed to be recognized. “This error is the cause of the grossest blunders and heaviest defeats of the constitutional politics [*Verfassungspolitik*], committed and suffered in European states for some generations.”²⁸

There is a lot to unpack here, but let us just note first that the formulations of von Rochau that I cited belie the criticism that his was a “social Darwinism avant la lettre,”²⁹ and turn to the core of his argument, to his critique of constitutional politics. Whereas his view of politics was definitively state-centered, his view of the state was just as clearly not constitution-centered.

The examination of the question of who *ought to* govern, whether the right, wisdom, [or] virtue, whether one, or few, or many—this question belongs to the realm of philosophical speculation; the practical politics first has to deal with the simple fact only power alone is that which *can* govern. To govern means exercising power, and solely he who has power can exercise power. This direct connection between power and governing is the basic truth of all politics and the key to the entire history.³⁰

As we see, von Rochau blamed political blunders and defeats of the recent past—which included the 1848 revolution—on the preoccupation with constitutional politics, that is, with the form of government. This is how he interpreted the recent and lived history. Early in the twentieth century, the great liberal historian Guido de Ruggiero offered a very similar interpretation, describing two of the three main proposals put forward by German liberals in 1848 as “to obtain, especially in Prussia, genuinely modern constitutions in place of the old feudal diets; and to make these constitutions a bond of political union for the whole German people.”³¹

128

There was a theoretical dimension to von Rochau’s interpretation. His decentering of the state from the question of the constitution was very much an expression of the *Zeitgeist*. In the aftermath of the 1789 French Revolution, the more perceptive political thinkers of the time tended to turn their attention away from

²⁸ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 1–2.

²⁹ Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*, 11.

³⁰ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 2.

³¹ Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 248.

the constitution and progressively ceased to rely on the classical political language of the forms of government. Such was the case with Benjamin Constant, who was among the leading thinkers seeking to reformulate or reconstruct the post-revolutionary political theory and rehabilitate political language, and who observed that “the study of the constitutional organisation of government [. . .] had generally fallen into disgrace.”³² Refusing to differentiate between the forms of government, he in his *Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation*, instead introduced the distinction between “regular government and that which is not [regular],” and the concept of usurpation, which applied to the latter.³³

As another example of turning away from the question of constitution as the central political question, I will cite Lorenz Stein (later in life: von Stein). Stein was von Rochau’s contemporary and even lived in Paris when von Rochau, too, was there. And like the latter, he studied the contemporary French socialism and communism, and French political developments in general. I have seen no mention of their ever meeting, but Stein cited von Rochau’s pseudonymous book on Fourier in his own account of “socialism and communism in today’s France.”³⁴ In a later work, analyzing contemporary French political struggles, Stein detected the shift from *Verfassung* to *Verwaltung*, that is, from constitution, or the form of government, to administration (or management). For Stein, administration was the application, or the use, of state power.³⁵ The question was who uses state power and for what purposes.

Stein linked that shift to the emergence of “social democracy” as a fusion of the radical democratic republican “political movement” with the socialist “social

³² Biancamaria Fontana, *Benjamin Constant and the Post-Revolutionary Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 18; see also 13, 15, 27.

³³ Benjamin Constant, “De l’esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation dans les rapports avec la civilisation européenne,” in *Écrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 181, 184.

³⁴ Lorenz Stein, *Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs: Ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1842), 263, 278.

³⁵ Lorenz Stein, *Das Königthum, die Republik und die Souveränität der französischen Gesellschaft seit der Februarrevolution 1848*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1855), 216. In his voluminous later work on the science of administration, or management, he defined administration as the “concrete realization of the will or essence of the state.” Lorenz Stein, *Die Verwaltungslehre: Erster Theil* (Stuttgart: Verlag der J. G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung, 1865), 9.

movement.” In his interpretation, the key importance of the administration of the state was recognized precisely by the labor movement. As long as the propertied class, which had state power in its hands, did not use it in the interest of the propertyless class, the latter had to fight to take over the administration of the state. Then it could use “all the means of state power to promote the laboring class with regard to its most essential interest.” The administration of the state by the working class meant the “*administration of social reform*.”³⁶ Von Rochau himself wrote about the “struggle for the possession of public authority [*öffentliche Gewalt*]” between the governed and the governing, which had run through the “whole of European history” and had been the moving force “in the present century more than in any preceding.”³⁷

The final discredit of the forms of government approach to politics and the state was brought about by Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état*. On the one hand, Louis Bonaparte’s seizure of power dispensed with constitutional niceties and was an apotheosis of the politics of force that sent waves of admiration (among the ruling classes) and horror (among those with democratic leanings) across Europe. On the other hand, the fact of the successful *coup* and the system of power it inaugurated, the so-called Bonapartism (or Caesarism), posed a problem to apologists and critics alike: its nature could not be explained in the existing (traditional) language of politics and in particular could not be captured with the categories of the forms of government.³⁸

When von Rochau relegated reflections on politics in terms of forms of government to “philosophical speculation,” he put at the center of thinking about practical politics—for practical, or real, politics was what he was interested in—the “fact” (*Tatsache*) of strength, force, and power. In this regard, too, he was very much expressing the spirit of the age. A good example of how “force” began to be considered of central importance is von Rochau’s French contemporary Auguste Romieu. Even before Louis Bonaparte seized power, Romieu wrote of “Caesarism” as a new political phenomenon. Writing about new political phenomena as a rule goes together with new ways of looking at politics, as well as with realizing that the old concepts have lost their explanatory power. In this

³⁶ Stein, *Das Königthum*, 217–18.

³⁷ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 41.

³⁸ I quote the textual evidence in Mastnak, *Bonapartizem*, chap. 1–2.

sense Romieu wrote, for example, that the emerging Caesarism “signifies neither royalty, nor empire, nor despotism, nor tyranny.”³⁹

Romieu connected the advent of Caesarism with the decline of monarchies. Napoleon may have wanted to restore “monarchical foundations” for his rule, but could not succeed in that intention. Monarchy rested on faith and the hereditary principle, but the era of faith had been succeeded by the age of reason. Consequently, Caesarism could not be “founded,” like monarchy had been, but had to be “established.” To be precise: it had to “establish” itself. It could only rely on itself, and that ultimately meant relying on force.⁴⁰ With the sacred gone under the new reign of reason, only force had remained. Force was a “FACT,” it was at the bottom of all human institutions, even those believed to have been born “in the name of liberty.”⁴¹

Bonapartism and *Realpolitik*

Bonapartism made a big impact on von Rochau’s understanding of politics. It was a revealing moment. Von Rochau was quick to describe the *coup d’état* in great detail. He published a booklet in which he explained how Louis Bonaparte had “seized absolute power [*Alleinherrschaft*] with violence” and had his autocracy legitimized both democratically, through a plebiscitary vote of the people, and priestly, by the Church, which “with a *Te Deum* declared God the originator of the *coup d’état*.”⁴² In his *History of France*, he again narrated the preparations for and the execution of the *coup*, and the political changes it introduced. That narration made it clear how easily Louis Bonaparte repeatedly dispensed with the existing constitution and the law, and how he, relying on force and power, shaped the new constitution according to his will.⁴³ In his booklet on Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’état*, von Rochau cited Auguste Thiers, who had allegedly retorted to the police officer who came to arrest him “in the name of law,” that

³⁹ Auguste Romieu, *L’ère des césars*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ledoyen, 1850), 30.

⁴⁰ Romieu, 194–95, 197.

⁴¹ Romieu, 200–3.

⁴² August Ludwig von Rochau, *Vier Wochen französischer Geschichte: 1. December 1851–1. Januar 1852* (Leipzig: Avenarius & Mendelssohn, 1852), 139, 161.

⁴³ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Geschichte Frankreichs vom Sturze Napoleon bis zur Wiederherstellung des Kaiserthumes, 1814–1852* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1858), 2:314–30.

the arrest was made “in the name of violence.”⁴⁴ In the *History of France*, the dimension of violence and force is even more pronounced.

In the *Principles of Realpolitik*, however, von Rochau delivered a categorical judgment of Louis Bonaparte’s *coup*. He characterized it as an epochal moment in modern political history (*eine große Epoche in der politischen Geschichte der Neuzeit*). He confronted his reader with the following shocking fact (*Tatsache*):

The people that have for two generations stood at the helm of the European movement, that have in the name of civic freedom gone through a string of most difficult trials and withstood them, that after the fall of Napoleonic domination seem to have made themselves completely at home in the parliamentary system, these people have overnight lapsed back into an absolutism, which on this side of the Russian border does not have an equal any longer.⁴⁵

How was one to understand the fact that “the highest official of the French people overthrew the constitution and the law [*Gesetz*], private and public law [*Recht*] of the country, and seized for himself a plenitude of power, thanks to which he can with unlimited arbitrariness command not only over the state institutions but also over the life, freedom, and property of citizens”?⁴⁶ Von Rochau had an answer:

These events hold one of the biggest political lessons that history has ever taught. What emerges from them in the first place, and with an unprecedented clarity, is the incurable nothingness of constitutions, which seek to separate public law from public power, that confront the armed power with unarmed right. *The politics of facts* overthrows governments and creates governments; the *constitutive constitutional politics* on the contrary has essentially nothing else to do but to recognize the existing powers and consecrate them with the written law.⁴⁷

Some historians of political thought hold the view that Bonapartism entered von Rochau’s thinking in the first place as regarding international relations.⁴⁸ I

⁴⁴ Rochau, *Vier Wochen französischer Geschichte*, 18.

⁴⁵ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 207.

⁴⁶ Rochau, 207–8.

⁴⁷ Rochau, 208.

⁴⁸ See Kelley, “August Ludwig von Rochau,” 312 et passim.

do not think so. France under Emperor Bonaparte—whom von Rochau, just like, for example, his contemporaries Stein and Mundt, saw as being bent on war⁴⁹—was of course a big issue for German foreign policy. But an effective foreign policy clearly demanded building up German unity, that is, it was reflected on the internal political changes.

Bonapartism (and French contemporary politics in general) had a formative impact on von Rochau's thinking about the *nature of politics*. I do not think that that impact can properly be explained as his—or Stein's—"nationalizing in German form the social diagnoses of French political theory."⁵⁰ Rather, both von Rochau and Stein were following and reflecting upon the "raw" politics and social movements in the neighboring country and, based on their observations and analyses, formulated their own theories. Stein, studying French political developments, hammered out a "theory of society," or social theory.⁵¹ Von Rochau, himself stimulated by French political developments but primarily concerned with the state of the fragmented German nation, worked out a theory of politics in a realistic key.

"Realism" was a philosophical concept. In Ludwig Feuerbach's influential statement, which reverberated especially on the Hegelian left, *Realismus* represented the spirit of the time or of the future.⁵² It was opposed to "theology," and "the negation of theology" was "the *essence of the modern time* [*Wesen der neuern Zeit*]." If in Feuerbach's critique, realism was the opposite of "refined illusions and unbecoming [*vettelhaft*] prejudices,"⁵³ in von Rochau's polemics it was pitted against abstraction, speculation, chimeras, dogmatism, doctrinairism, castles in the air, the autonomous power of ideas and principles, and "creatures

⁴⁹ For Rochau, see the 1859 edition of *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die statlichen Zustände Deutschlands: Neue, mit einer Einleitung vermehrte Ausgabe* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1859), iii.

⁵⁰ See Kelley, "August Ludwig von Rochau," 311.

⁵¹ See Lorenz Stein, *Der Begriff der Gesellschaft und die sociale Geschichte der französischen Revolution bis zum Jahre 1830*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1855), especially the long introduction.

⁵² Quoted in Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*, 7, and Trocini, *L'invenzione della "Realpolitik"*, 13.

⁵³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (Zürich: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1843), iii, 23.

of ideas.”⁵⁴ The same applies to repeated references to “facts.” These references were an expression of the rise and growing prestige of the natural sciences, which Feuerbach counted among “the so-called real sciences [*reale Wissenschaften*]” as prime examples of “empiricism or realism.”⁵⁵

Just like Stein, who was well acquainted with Hegelian philosophy, turned to class struggles, von Rochau turned to social struggles or, to use a more cautious formulation, social dynamics. He postulated the importance of studying social forces (*gesellschaftliche Kräfte*) “that shape, maintain, and transform the state.” (If this formulation sounds rather Machivellian, it is because it probably was: Machiavelli was at the time an important presence in German thinking about French politics.)⁵⁶ In von Rochau’s view, the constitution of a state was “determined by reciprocal relations among the forces that are either active or resting within that state. Each social force [*gesellschaftliche Kraft*] claims a standing within the state that corresponds to its magnitude, and the state power [*Staatskraft*] itself is solely the sum of the social forces that the state has integrated into itself.”⁵⁷

In his analysis of the active and passive social forces in Germany, and pondering their intellectual and monetary power—he spoke of *Geistes- und Geldkräfte der Gesellschaft*⁵⁸—von Rochau privileged the historical position and role of the rising middle classes, of the “middle estate.” That *Mittelstand* possessed in the greatest measure “wealth, opinion, and intelligence,” the “main social forces,” the “three factors” that had to be reflected in the representative system.⁵⁹ This social analysis was clearly pregnant with a political program. It postulated the need to adjust the political system to the social transformation, which meant the necessity of the state integrating the advancing social forces, as well as mirroring the waning strength of the old social forces.

⁵⁴ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 2, 3, 23, 32, 91, 106, 131, 153, 165, 212.

⁵⁵ Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie*, 23. Nyhart writes that “the natural world and its sciences” provided “a source of legitimation for politics, especially liberal politics.” Nyhart, “Political Organism,” 32.

⁵⁶ Theodor Mundt, for example, published three editions of his book on Machiavelli between 1851 and 1861 (I cite the first and the third enlarged edition in notes 72 and 82). See also Jacob Venedey, *Machiavel, Montesquieu, Rousseau* (Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1850). Von Rochau was close with Venedey during his French exile.

⁵⁷ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 4.

⁵⁸ Rochau, 9.

⁵⁹ Rochau, 24.

Following such “historical-sociological” approach, however, would lead us away from the main concern of this paper, which is not so much the social transformation as the political transformation. I differentiate between them for the sake of argument, and want to further specify that the political transformation I am primarily interested in here is that which concerns political ideology and theory. And of special interest to me in this regard are the fortunes of liberalism.

Was the Revolution Defeated?

The few scholars who have studied von Rochau agree that his *Principles of Realpolitik* was a book that crucially contributed to the reformulation of German liberalism.⁶⁰ These appreciations of von Rochau’s work turn on the question of the failure of the 1848 revolution. The reformulation of liberal theory, ideology, and politics appears to have been prompted by the experience of defeat. But let us first ask: Was the revolution really defeated? This question contains two sub-questions: Which revolution? Whose revolution?

The question of the defeat of the 1848 revolution was a moot question already for contemporaries. Karl Marx famously wrote that, “with the exception of only a few chapters, every major section of the annals of the revolution of 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: *Defeat of the revolution!*”⁶¹ The German historian Johann Gustav Droysen had a more nuanced view. He wrote that Louis Bonaparte’s regime rested “on the European movement of 1848” and was “its ripe fruit.” He explained: “Everywhere else the big European reaction has won, only in France did the wild movement coalesce into a new positive foundation.”⁶²

Considering Bonapartism the fruit of the 1848 revolution may be confusing. To untangle the confusion, Droysen referred to the conservative legal scholar Friedrich Julius Stahl and his “confreres,” who had commented that “the street tumult, barricades, the revolts, etc.,” as such were not to be understood as revo-

⁶⁰ I cannot enter into a discussion of this literature here. For an exhaustive list of sources, see Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, and Kelley, “August Ludwig von Rochau”; see also Wehler, introduction to *Grundsätze*.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, “Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1849,” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 10:119.

⁶² Johann Gustav Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik der europäischen Krisis,” in *Politische Schriften*, ed. Felix Gilbert, (Munich: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1933), 310.

lution.⁶³ Droysen added that it was “also certain that [revolution] was not ended in the moment when it stabilized itself in a monarchistic form.”⁶⁴ (That was also Stahl’s view: that Bonapartism, characterized by “mechanical violence,” was not “the closing of the revolution but its consolidation.”)⁶⁵ For beyond the “street tumult,” momentous changes were taking place in nineteenth century Europe, of which the year 1848 was only one moment: “All the basics and conditions of European life, all social and state forces, all mental and material factors have changed.”⁶⁶ Droysen’s description of those changes was not unlike the picture Marx and Engels drew in the *Communist Manifesto*.⁶⁷ Only that Droysen seems not to have found much to celebrate in “the destruction of the old,” which progressed with an “insuperable force.”⁶⁸

Unlike von Rochau, who portrayed the growing importance and strength of the middle classes, Droysen saw them already helplessly falling victim to the *Verpöbelung* generated by the economic changes that the *Communist Manifesto* portrayed as the revolutionary work of the liberal bourgeoisie: just like the “lower strata,” the “middle strata” were being “reduced to mob.”⁶⁹ But like von Ro-

⁶³ Droysen, 310. Droysen referred to Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution? Ein Vortrag, auf Veranstaltung des Evangelischen Vereins für kirchliche Zwecke am 8. März 1852 gehalten*, 3rd ed., with an addendum *Die Reformation und die Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Schultze, 1852), 8–9.

⁶⁴ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 310.

⁶⁵ Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution?*, 13. Constantin Frantz saw “mechanic coercive power [*mechanische Zwangsgewalt*]” as characteristic of liberalism. Constantin Frantz, *Vorschule zur Physiologie der Staaten* (Berlin: Ferdinand Schneider, 1857), 290.

⁶⁶ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 322. Here, too, Stahl held a similar view: “Revolution is not a one-off act; it is a continued condition, a new order of things,” brought about by turning the world upside down, by an *Umwälzung*. Stahl, *Was ist die Revolution?*, 4, 8. Von Rochau, for his part, held a negative view of the historical school of law, to which Stahl belonged. See Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 93–95.

⁶⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 4:459–93, especially pt. I.

⁶⁸ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 324.

⁶⁹ Droysen, 324. A few decades later, Wilhelm Roscher made a similar point, writing about the middle estate melting away at both the top and at bottom and the people splitting “into the opposition of the over-rich capitalists and the wholly propertyless workers.” He called the emerging system plutocracy, giving rise to “Caesarism.” See Wilhelm Roscher, “Umrisse zur Naturlehre des Cäsarismus,” in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1888), 10:641–42. An earlier “Naturlehre” of Caesarism can be found in Constantin Frantz,

chau, Droysen detected the change in the nature of political power, at the core of which was the expansion of “power” and of its importance. The key change was not that power simply expanded, grew, but that it now began to generate itself. The state became an “institution” that was “*engendering* [*erzeugen*: producing, generating] *power and exercising it.*”⁷⁰

Droysen compared this new type of institutionalized power to that “insuperable force” with which the economic changes asserted themselves. He described the state as similar to the “big mechanized [or: machine-based] industry.” This state machine, absorbing the power of the “artisanal” type and eating up the “autonomy of all the lower circles,” became omnipotent. It “needed and demanded omnipotence” in order to have everyone and everything at its disposal at any given time, to use for its own purposes, to determine, and to mobilize.⁷¹ Whereas von Rochau used the medieval legal term plenitude (or fullness) of power (*plenitudo potestatis*) to describe the post-revolutionary French state, Droysen described it as omnipotent. In contrast to the static state of the preceding period, which had summed up in itself the existing stable relations of power, the omnipotent new state was producing power: its own power. It became a productive force on the industrial model.

If we understand revolution in the modern sense as a radical change (and not in the traditional meaning of a circular motion), the transformation of political power Droysen described was revolutionary. However, the omnipotent state machine he depicted was the Caesarist, or Bonapartist, state of France, and it was an exception. (Only in retrospect does it appear as a political vanguard, the harbinger of “the new normal.”) Elsewhere in Europe, as Droysen wrote, reaction had won. And even if we consider the Bonapartist type of power to have been the fruit of revolution, that does not mean that it was a revolutionary type of power. In fact, that was a reactionary, or counter-revolutionary, regime.

Theodore Mundt captured the paradox when he characterized Bonapartism (he called it Napoleonism) as “the true system of revolutionary reaction in modern

Naturlehre des Staates als Grundlage aller Staatswissenschaft (Leipzig: C. F. Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1870), especially 173–74 et passim, and even earlier in Constantin Frantz, *Vorschule zur Physiologie*, passim.

⁷⁰ Droysen, “Zur Charakteristik,” 323.

⁷¹ Droysen, 323.

Europe.”⁷² Already in 1849, Alfred Meißner, a German writer of democratic leanings (whom Marx and Engels ridiculed as a “true socialist”), wrote of the “work of the counterrevolution,” that is, of the counterrevolution at work within the French Revolution.⁷³ In that context he described the plans of Louis Bonaparte and his “Napoleonic party” as part of the “plans of the counterrevolution” and as a “parody of the eighteenth Brumaire.”⁷⁴ Meißner’s descriptions and insights are interesting, yet to the best of my knowledge Karl Korsch—reflecting on the victorious fascist counterrevolution in Europe on the eve of World War II—was the first to clearly point out that no one, neither Marx and Marxists nor liberals, had had a theory of counterrevolution. That amounted to saying that they were unable to think of counterrevolution as a productive force of history and as a phase of social development. Instead, they regarded it as an “abnormal interruption” or a “temporary disturbance of a normally progressive development.”⁷⁵ Yet counterrevolution could generate new realities and revolutionary changes, and in that sense it was a revolutionary force. Bonapartism was a case in point.

Political and Economic Revolution, Critiques of Liberalism

All this means that there is not one single, and straightforward, answer to the question of whether the 1848 revolution was defeated. The basic distinction that emerged in the aftermath of the revolution, reflecting what had taken place, was between political and economic revolution. Contemporaries came to the realiza-

⁷² Theodor Mundt, *Niccolò Machiavelli und das System der modernen Politik*, 3rd edition (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1861), 307–8.

⁷³ Alfred Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris (1849)* (Frankfurt: Literarische Anstalt, 1849), 1:107. According to a biographical sketch in the series on German “moderne Klassiker,” Meißner moved to Paris in the winter of 1849, because he could not stand seeing the streets of his native Prague flooded with “foreign agitators from all the Slavic regions,” who had gathered there for the revolutionary “Slavic *Vorparlament*.” During his sojourn in Paris he then wrote the work I cite. See *Alfred Meißner* (Cassel: Ernst Balde, 1854), 15. Neither did von Rochau show much understanding, not to speak of sympathies, for the Slavic peoples in his reflections on German politics. On the “true socialism,” see Friedrich Engels, “Die wahren Sozialisten,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 4:248–90, especially 270–78.

⁷⁴ Alfred Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris*, 1:209, 218; see also 164, where Meißner said that the “fool” Louis Napoleon conceived of “an imitation of the 18th Brumaire.”

⁷⁵ Karl Korsch, “The Fascist Counter-revolution,” *Living Marxism* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1940): 29–37, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1940/fascist-counterrevolution.htm>; see also Karl Korsch, “State and Counter-Revolution,” *The Modern Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1939): <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1939/state-counterrevolution.htm>.

tion that the two did not coincide, and tended to agree that whereas the political revolution was defeated, the economic revolution gained momentum. Mundt's youthful friend Ferdinand Kühne, for example, in his review of Alfred Meißner's *Parisian Revolutionary Studies* cited above, wrote that "the political revolution in France has failed."⁷⁶ Marx and Engels, on the other hand, observed that the defeated proletarian revolution was succeeded by "economic revolution."⁷⁷

But if political revolution was, or may have been, defeated, who exactly was defeated? Whose revolution? Who experienced a political defeat? For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, it was the proletarian revolution. This view became more concise as the years went by.⁷⁸ The German philosopher, political writer, and politician Constantin Frantz, whose political position is more difficult to define than Marx and Engels's, also wrote of the "victory over the proletarians."⁷⁹ Alfred Meißner delineated the defeat of democratic forces. Two years ahead of Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état*, he depicted the "*de-democratization* [*Entdemokratisierung*] of France."⁸⁰ Since republic was the "form" in which democracy was "organized and strengthened," moreover, since republic was "the only" political form "in which democracy can appear," the defeat of democratic forces coincided with the defeat of republicanism.⁸¹ For Theodor Mundt, what happened all across Europe was a defeat of the people, of popular politics. He detected the same "fatal turning of popular politics [*Volkspolitik*] into cabinet

⁷⁶ Ferdinand Gustav Kühne, "Alfred Meißner's revolutionäre Studien aus Paris," in *Mein Tagebuch in bewegter Zeit* (Leipzig: L. Denicke, 1863), 682.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Friedrich Engels, "Einleitung zu Karl Marx's 'Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850,'" in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 32:337–38.

⁷⁸ See Engels, 337–38.

⁷⁹ Constantin Frantz, *Louis Napoleon*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Schneider & Comp., 1852), 6. For Frantz, see the entry Erich Wittenberg, "Frantz, Gustav Adolph Constantin," *Deutsche Biographie*, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118534939.html>; for a balanced recent assessment see Iain McDaniel, "Constantin Frantz and the Intellectual History of Bonapartism and Caesarism: A Reassessment," *Intellectual History Review* 28, no. 2 (2018): 317–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2017.1361218>. Von Rochau called Frantz "a man of conservatism," while "conservative" in his view was a self-description of the "old liberalism that has become unfit to do anything." Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 125, 128.

⁸⁰ Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris*, 1:105.

⁸¹ Meißner, 1:109.

politics [*Cabinetspolitik*]” that Machiavelli had identified in the Florentine politics of his own time.⁸²

All these descriptions point to the popular masses, to the underlying classes (to use Veblen’s term) as the loser. But what about liberals? Were they among the defeated? And if that was the case, how did they relate to the other defeated social or political forces, and how did these other defeated forces relate to them? Let us start with the French writer and politician Victor Hugo, whom we may see, as some contemporaries did, as an icon of liberalism.

After the *coup d’état*, in exile, Hugo wrote an invective against Louis Bonaparte, whom he had earlier supported. Meißner portrayed him as “shallow and puffed up as always,” giving a bland speech of no purpose in the National Assembly in early 1849, finding fault with the legislative body for “not being Napoleonic.” The speech was interrupted by the laughter of the Left.⁸³ Bruno Bauer mocked his bemoaning the Bonapartist suppression of “the tribune, the press, the intelligence, the word, the thought, all that used to be freedom.” Hugo compared “the French tribune” with the “open mouth of human spirit.”⁸⁴ Bauer brushed off this comparison as pathetic. He asked rhetorically: “Toward what barbarism would mankind be heading should it really learn only from the bickering of parliamentary factions, from the trivial quarrels between the right-center and left-center, for example, what intelligence, word, thought are capable of achieving?”⁸⁵ Karl Marx later remarked that Hugo actually made “Napoleon the Little” big because he ascribed to him a “personal power of initiative, which was without parallel in world history,” that is, because he did not understand that the *coup* was a result of historical social and political struggles, in a word: because he did not understand history.⁸⁶

140

These remarks *ad personam* may give a glimpse of the low esteem in which radicals on the political left held the liberals. A heavier blow against liberalism

⁸² Theodor Mundt, *Machiavelli und der Gang der europäischen Politik* (Leipzig: Dyk’sche Buchhandlung, 1851), iii.

⁸³ Meißner, *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris*, 1:216.

⁸⁴ Victor Hugo, *Napoléon le Petit* (London: Jeffs, 1852), 19, 145.

⁸⁵ Bauer, *Russland und das Germanenthum*, 81.

⁸⁶ Karl Marx, “Vorwort zur zweiten Ausgabe von ‘Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,’” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 21:130–31.

came from the political right. It was dealt by Auguste Romieu, whose thoughts on the role of force in the contemporary politics I cited above. Describing the political situation in France, Romieu located the main threat of violence in the popular “masses” or “proletarians,” whom he depicted as being “in organized uprising.”⁸⁷ He admitted that he was “horrified” by “the poor, set up to envy, hate, thirst for pillage, ready to ravage by a million hands the castles, luxurious apartments.”⁸⁸ Yet his accusing finger pointed at the liberals. He characterized liberalism as both deadly and dead, as destructive and self-destructive.

“I’m telling you, O bourgeois! that your role is finished,” Romieu theatrically turned to the liberal. On the one hand, the bourgeois revolution was a charade. What had taken place in France was a foolishly and hastily played comedy in which the bourgeois had changed too many costumes and had been too quick in picking up the ermine coats thrown out the windows of the aristocracy. The bourgeois remade for their own use all that which they had destroyed with the punches of their words, all that which the theater, the printing press, the chanson, and the tribune had helped them demolish.⁸⁹

On the other hand, the liberals could not realize their own ideas or, rather, the realization of their ideas was destructive of liberalism itself. That was fateful. The society they had made was incapable of living. “It is that the society, such as that made by the bourgeoisie, is not capable of anything more. That society has to die.” The illegitimate, “bastard” order, *l’ordre bâtard*, established by the “sophists” (that is, the Enlightenment philosophers and their descendants), could not be maintained and preserved. The bourgeois was no longer fit to rule: “No, bourgeois, you are not going to rule any longer!”⁹⁰ What the bourgeois had sown, they were now going to reap. “You had, O bourgeois, soiled the beginning of your work with blood.” Robespierre and Danton, their advocates, had taught people to murder, their successors had continued that teaching, and the people had learned it in their own way. The spilling of blood was returning with the “tom-tom of the revolt of the poor.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Romieu, *L’ère des césars*, 77, 92, 169, 203.

⁸⁸ Auguste Romieu, *Le spectre rouge de 1852* (Paris: Ledoyen, 1851), 47.

⁸⁹ Romieu, 62–63.

⁹⁰ Romieu, 66.

⁹¹ Romieu, 67.

The liberal idea had arrived at the point of its accomplishment. It had ended up in the hands of the poor in revolt and turned against the bourgeoisie. That was the point at which “the liberal idea accomplishes its last ravage,” Romieu wrote. “In my reflections on that which is wrong with the liberal ideas, nothing has struck me more than this extreme result of their application.” And that result was inevitable.⁹²

Romieu, as we see, regarded the revolt of the popular masses as the logical outcome, or a consequence, of liberalism, which was destructive of liberalism itself. He was scared of the *spectre rouge*, of the “red specter” of socialism and communism. The realization of the liberal idea by socialist hands, in socialism, meant the end of liberal society and liberalism. Liberals themselves became scared of socialism and afraid of the historical dialectics they had set in motion and that was now turning against them. Once socialism appeared to them as if it were a logical consequence, or development, of liberalism, the liberals had to block that development so it would not empower social and political forces opposed to liberalism, but by doing so they themselves paralyzed liberalism.

This dialectics of the self-paralysis of liberalism was well captured by Karl Marx in his first critique of Bonapartism. He depicted how the liberals began to be afraid of their own ideas, ideals, and principles as “socialistic,” and distanced themselves from them.⁹³ He observed that the

bourgeoisie had the correct insight that all the weapons it had forged against feudalism turned their points against itself, that all the means of education it had produced rebelled against its own civilization, that all the gods it had created fell away from it. It grasped that all the so-called civil liberties and progressive organs attacked and threatened its class domination concurrently at its social foundation and its political top, and had therefore become “*socialistic*.”⁹⁴

According to Marx’s critical analysis, what the bourgeoisie had “earlier celebrated as ‘*liberal*,’ it now denounced as ‘*socialistic*.’”⁹⁵ But that meant denouncing

⁹² Romieu, 91, 99.

⁹³ Karl Marx, “Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 11:106, 134–35.

⁹⁴ Marx, 135.

⁹⁵ Marx, 136.

liberalism. When the liberal bourgeoisie, in order to defend itself, attacked socialism, it had to curtail civil liberties and thus thwart liberal ideas and principles. In order to protect itself from being negated by socialism, liberalism negated itself. And in negating itself, and its principles and ideas, the liberal bourgeoisie itself both reached for repression and made the way for a repressive, dictatorial Bonapartist regime to step in.

The function of that repressive political regime was to keep the underlying classes in place and thus to ensure that the bourgeoisie could exercise its economic power freely, unimpeded. Marx did not use the concept of economic power. He argued that the bourgeoisie renounced its political power, or accepted that “its political power be broken,” in order to “maintain its social power unscathed.” In order to be able to exploit other classes, the “private bourgeois” acquiesced to their class being reduced to the same “political nothingness” as all other classes.⁹⁶ But was that really the case?

It seems to me that rather than being reduced to political nothingness, the liberal bourgeoisie gave up the burden and responsibility of holding political power, and opted (as Stein observed) to hold the state power “through the person of Louis Napoleon.”⁹⁷ In this way, it could more effectively and safely exercise and increase its economic power. Under Louis Bonaparte, its ability to subject and exploit the underlying classes, to enrich itself, and enjoy its privileges only increased. In Engels’s vivid description, Louis Bonaparte’s rule gave impetus to industrial development and trade, to speculation and stock market swindles, to corruption and massive stealing. The whole bourgeoisie had enriched itself to a hitherto unheard of extent, while Bonaparte’s court extracted a hefty percentage from this enrichment.⁹⁸ The factional struggles within the ruling classes, between Louis Bonaparte and the liberal bourgeoisie, led to a re-articulation of the relationship between economic and political power, which overcame the vulnerability and instability of liberal class rule. The shift of power in the illiberal direction, rather than endangering the class rule of the liberal bourgeoisie,

⁹⁶ Marx, 135–36.

⁹⁷ Stein, *Das Königthum*, 421.

⁹⁸ See Friedrich Engels, “Einleitung zur dritten deutschen Auflage von Karl Marx’ ‘Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich,’” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 32:8; Friedrich Engels, “Entwurf des Kapitels IV der Broschüre ‘Die Rolle der Gewalt in der Geschichte,’” in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 31:72.

strengthened it and made it possible for the consolidated ruling class to more efficiently, and without being accountable, govern and control the underlying population.

Von Rochau's Reformulation of Liberalism

I am aware that, in the preceding pages, I was describing the French political situation at greater length than the German. I claim, however, that this background is relevant, even indispensable, for judging von Rochau's reformulation of liberalism. First, let me repeat, Bonapartism had a big, formative impact on von Rochau's political thinking. And second, Bonapartism loomed large not only beyond the German border and unavoidably entered foreign policy calculations. With Bismarck's presidency, Bonapartism also came to Germany. At least that was the perception of many a contemporary.⁹⁹ As Marx wrote in the name of the First International, the Bonapartist regime "got its counterfeit" on the other side of the Rhine, in Bismarck's regime.¹⁰⁰ It is not only that Bonapartism represented "the first accomplished form of the *modern state*,"¹⁰¹ or that, as Engels observed, the "Bonapartist half-dictatorship" was "the normal form" of "managing the state and society in the interest of the bourgeoisie,"¹⁰² but also that Prussia accomplished its bourgeois revolution "in the delightful form of Bonapartism."¹⁰³ So how does all this relate to von Rochau's *Realpolitik*?

If I may simplify, von Rochau's reformulation of the liberal view of politics and of liberal politics tends to be explained in two main ways. The first is not really flattering and can basically be reduced to the charge of opportunism.¹⁰⁴ The disillusionment caused by the defeat of the political revolution led to the acceptance of the political realities, to the abandonment of the ideals and principles of the revolutionary years, and to conformity with "power politics" (*Machtpolitik*),

144

⁹⁹ See Iain McDaniel, "Constantin Frantz."

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx, "The General Council of the International Workingmen's Association ON THE WAR. To the Members of the International Workingmen's Association in Europe and the United States," in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, pt. 1, 21:247.

¹⁰¹ Bologna, "Moneta e crisi," 5.

¹⁰² Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, April 13, 1866, in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 31:208.

¹⁰³ Engels, "Ergänzung der Vorbemerkung," 513.

¹⁰⁴ See Trocini, *L'invenzione della "Realpolitik"*, 15, 44, 210, 222.

that is, to the politics that now had revealed its real nature as being determined by those who possessed social power and means of violence.

The other explanation seems to have the unspoken intention of preserving the idea of the continued progress of liberalism. In a sophisticated and well-informed version of this view, “initially radical ideas and ideals” had not been “destroyed through failure in 1848,” but were rather “repackaged and re-described by Rochau, both as part of the social fabric of contemporary politics, and as being natural or inevitable in the present.” Accordingly, what von Rochau produced was “a post-revolutionary political theory that re-described liberal ‘idealism’ around 1848 as political ‘realism’ in the 1850s and 1860s, in order to show that the untimeliness of those early demands had nevertheless become timely now, making their adaptation an obligatory part of a newly realistic account of contemporary politics.”¹⁰⁵

To me, this sounds dangerously like projecting the dominant twenty-first-century Western politics—politics as the ever more consummate art of presentation—back onto the 1850s. The problem is that this—“our”—kind of politics is increasingly being freed from facts and reality, whereas back then political thinkers like von Rochau claimed they were trying to do precisely the opposite: to tie the understanding of politics to “facts,” *Tatsachen*, and reality. One might say that von Rochau was inventing new politics according to reality, whereas today politicians are inventing reality. But let us not wade into discussing today’s politics.

One problem I find with this second explanation is the idea of “untimeliness” applied to political demands (which then in unexplained ways turn “timely”). One can find this logic at work in Marx and Engels’s attempts at putting a brave face on the defeat of the proletarian revolution. The time for the proletarian revolution had not been ripe, yet the progress of history was going to eventually create the material conditions for the proletarian victory. In the explanation of von Rochau’s reinvention of liberalism I referred to above, “the apparent failures of 1848” were due to the fact that “the constitutions then outlined had failed,” because the political situation was not ripe (yet).¹⁰⁶ Based on what I said earli-

¹⁰⁵ This is how Kelley (“August Ludwig von Rochau,” 306, 309) refers to Natascha Doll’s thesis in Doll, *Recht, Politik und “Realpolitik”*.

¹⁰⁶ See Kelley, “August Ludwig von Rochau,” 311.

er in this article on the waning importance of the constitution-centered view of politics in the first half of the nineteenth century, I want to argue that von Rochau's realistic turn did not lie in recognizing the untimeliness of the "outlined constitutions" but in recognizing the futility of concentrating politics on outlining constitutions. The problem was not that those constitutions were not timely. The (liberal) political focus on outlining constitutions was a wrong approach.

The other problem with the discussed explanation lies in weaving the tale of liberalism's progress into the long-term development tendencies that led to the Prussian hegemony and toward the unification of Germany. Duncan Kelley cited Hermann Baumgarten's "self-critique" of liberalism as a typical—and influential—case of how "the history of Germany into the 1860s became a myriad tale of political and cultural development since the Reformation culminating in Prussian-led claims for unification."¹⁰⁷ From this perspective, if liberalism was to have, or be seen as having, a continuous life, it had to be part of that story, and *Realpolitik* meant adjusting to, or rather adopting, Prussian hegemony. Yet Baumgarten himself wrote that, before the Prussian military victory over Austria in 1866, which consolidated Prussia's leading role in German politics, even "those friends of Prussia who had most believed in it," found it "hardly believable" that the political struggles would turn out the way they did.¹⁰⁸

I do not think von Rochau's *Principles of Realpolitik* can really be judged a "self-critique" of liberalism, like Ruge's in the late 1840s or Baumgarten's a good twenty years later. Von Rochau's book was, rather, a critique of the politics of the era of revolution, especially of the politics on the revolutionary side of social and political struggles, and it was a critique of political forces and their policies in the aftermath of the revolution. Even if written by an ex-left liberal, it was a critique of politics in general, rather than a specific critique—or self-critique—of liberalism. Or to put it differently: the critique of liberalism was part of a wider critique of contemporary politics. It was general reflections on politics that had implications for, and an impact on, conceiving liberal politics, on figuring out what liberal politics for the post-revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary, era

146

¹⁰⁷ Kelley, 310.

¹⁰⁸ Hermann Baumgarten, *Der deutsche Liberalismus: Eine Selbstkritik. Abdruck aus dem achtzehnten Bande der Preußischen Jahrbücher* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1866), 108.

might be like. It would be misplaced to look for the continuity of liberal ideas, because the view of politics had changed. To be more precise, whatever continuity of liberal political ideas there might have been, it was criss-crossed by new ways of looking at politics.

The new politics was not about “repackaging” old radical ideas but about thinking about politics in a radically different way. That is why none of the two main explanations of what von Rochau’s work had done does justice to his work, yet taken together they come close to opening a productive perspective on it: the continuity of liberalism lay precisely in abandoning its ideas, ideals, and principles (under today’s “dictatorship of values,” one would, of course, say “values”) in order to keep economic power untouched and untouchable. Liberalism sloughed off its political skin in order to grow its economic power, and thus depoliticized economic power. With Bonapartism, periodic political discontinuities became the condition for the continuity of economic liberalism. The continuity of liberalism is the continuity of economic liberalism. The distinction between political and economic revolution that emerged with the defeat of the 1848 revolutions is complemented by the distinction between political and economic liberalism, and both are crucial for understanding the post-revolutionary reformulation of liberalism and its subsequent history.¹⁰⁹

The Economic Limits to Realpolitik: Economic Power without Political Limits

Without entering into a discussion of von Rochau’s concrete political views and analyses, there is not much more to be said about the leading principles of his realistic view of politics than has already been said. But before proceeding further, I want to add that those concrete political views and analyses are not something accidental. One may disregard them only at the cost of fully understanding von Rochau’s *Realpolitik*. They are integral to his political thought: a mode of thinking.

The distinction of von Rochau’s realistic political thinking is his thinking about politics concretely. Concrete political thinking meant looking at “the real social

¹⁰⁹ See Ishay Landa, *The Apprentice’s Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

conditions and their development” instead of being fixated on “state forms”: analyzing the manifold social forces, whose interaction shapes, maintains, and transforms a historically given state, and which—just like their interactions and the results of their interactions—change endlessly according to time and space, “*nach Raum und Zeit*.”¹¹⁰ And the social forces shaping, maintaining, and transforming the state were not only “wealth, opinion, and intelligence,”¹¹¹ not only “the new factors of social life” such as the “civic consciousness, the idea of freedom, national spirit, the idea of human equality, the political factionalism of the parties, the press,” and “public opinion,”¹¹² but also “stupidity,” “lies or any other immorality,” and “even crime.”¹¹³ Early in the twentieth century, Vladimir Ilich Lenin on the left and Carl Schmitt on the right stand out as model representatives of this way of thinking politically.

Limiting my discussion to a more abstract level, and seeing von Rochau’s *realpolitisch* views as resting on his formulation of the “law of power,” I will conclude this paper by looking at the limitations of that “law of power.”¹¹⁴ The law of power, according to von Rochau, “dominates the life of the state.” Among the forces that “shape, maintain, and transform the state,” the stronger prevail: “Power responds [*gehört*: obeys] only to the bigger power, and the strong cannot allow themselves to be swayed [*sich beherrschen lassen*: dominated] by the weak.”¹¹⁵ A realistic view of politics needs to recognize the “real power of the stronger” and realize the standing and importance “the stronger” by “necessity” have to have in the state. For power alone “can govern.” As von Rochau put

¹¹⁰ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 1, 8.

¹¹¹ Rochau, 24; see also 24n60.

¹¹² Rochau, 11.

¹¹³ Rochau, 9.

¹¹⁴ Von Rochau used the term “*das Gesetz der Stärke*.” *Stärke* has multiple meanings, including “strength,” “force,” and “power.” English and Italian translations of von Rochau often render it as “power,” or “*potere*”—hence the “law of power,” or “*legge del potere*,” respectively. Von Rochau used distinct terms for “force” (*Kraft*, e.g., “*gesellschaftliche Kräfte*” for “social forces”) and “power” (*Macht*, especially in connection with politics, e.g., “*politische Macht*” for “political power”). Some of his contemporaries, e.g. Treitschke, used the term *Machtpolitik* (politics of power) as roughly equivalent to von Rochau’s *Realpolitik*. See Trocini, *L’invenzione della “Realpolitik”*, 44, 149–50n34, 232. I think a more precise translation would be “the law of strength” (especially because von Rochau writes, for example, of the “power of the strong,” “*Macht des Stärken*”). But with these explanations, I may as well use “the law of power.”

¹¹⁵ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 3.

it: “To govern means exercising power, and solely he who has power can exercise power.”¹¹⁶

This language of power, however, fell silent when it came to the economy. Not only did von Rochau himself abstain from using the language of power when discussing the economic life of society. He polemicized against those who did use it. He accused, for example, the Berlin press that was sympathetic to socialism of using “the language of toxic demagogy” against “the ‘bourgeoisie,’ against the ‘monopoly of capital,’ against the ‘exploitation of the worker’ by the entrepreneur, yes, even against the machinery.” Arguing, as the pro-socialist press did, that “the existing national-economic [*volkswirtschaftliche*] system” originates “only in the selfishness and greed of money-men” and, as such, had to be “transformed from the bottom up for the benefit of the laboring classes,” was for von Rochau nothing short of “incitement.”¹¹⁷

It is interesting and telling that most of what von Rochau had to say about the economy was said in the context of polemics against socialism and “the masses.” “The masses” was a new term for a new social phenomenon. They became a political factor that could not be ignored—as Louis Bonaparte was quick to comprehend and skillfully use to his advantage.¹¹⁸ Von Rochau had a haughty and dismissive attitude toward the masses. They were unworthy of polemics. Socialism was a different matter, even though the masses were sometimes drawn to socialism. Socialism’s distinction was that it had a theoretical and political answer to the social evils produced by the new “industrial system.”

¹¹⁶ Rochau, 1–2.

¹¹⁷ August Ludwig von Rochau, *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatliche Zustände Deutschlands: Zweiter Theil* (Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagshandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, 1869), 138.

¹¹⁸ Louis Bonaparte represented himself as the “instrument, the creation of the masses.” See Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie: Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens* (Leipzig: Verlag von Dr. Werner Klinkhardt, 1911), 204. In his time, Louis Bonaparte explained, “one can only govern with the masses; therefore, they have to be organized in order that they could formulate their will, and disciplined in order that they could be steered toward and enlightened about their proper interests.” Napoleon-Louis Bonaparte, *Extinction du pauperisme*, 5th ed. (Paris: Pagnerre, 1844), 17.

Von Rochau admitted that “the transformation of crafts into the factory system has its serious wrongs [*Uebelstände*].” However, he was sure that “there is no power in this world that is able to prevent that transformation or even undo it.” Any attempt to make things better must start from this understanding.¹¹⁹ Once the transformation is regarded as given and necessary, and property—which von Rochau, unlike for example Stein, did not see as a social relation of domination and subjection (and resistance), that is, as a power relation—as untouchable, those wrongs or evils appear as a necessary evil. And yet von Rochau agreed that “the economic condition of the poorest popular classes” had to be bettered—but only within certain limits.¹²⁰ Such prudent limited improvement might be called “*social reform*,” whereas the socialists called for “*social revolution*.” The latter, a “violent act of politics,” was a “chimera [*Hirngespinnst*].”¹²¹

Von Rochau called those who spoke for revolutionary socialism “fanatics of theory.”¹²² As their opposite, *Realpolitik* in this context surprisingly turned into a rejection of the politics of force. Von Rochau dismissed social revolution as a “violent and radical change of property,” for which one needed only a “sufficient number of fists.”¹²³ Here, a big enough force to be politically effective did not count as an argument. *Realpolitik* also became concerned with limiting power. For social reform, acting within certain limits when attempting to better the miserable conditions of the laboring poor was about putting limits on state action. Defining the limits of state action was Wilhelm von Humboldt’s aim in an essay he wrote at the time of the French Revolution, but which was only published in 1851—and was adopted by liberals as their own classic text.¹²⁴ In von Rochau’s book, however, whose declared realism lay in recognizing and accepting the role of power in politics and in defining the state by the law of power, speaking about limits on the tasks of the state appears somewhat incongruous.

150

Just as it was “self-evident” that one should find a “remedy” for the “economic suffering” of those times, moreover, that that was an “urgent need,” it appears

¹¹⁹ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 98.

¹²⁰ Rochau, 163.

¹²¹ Rochau, 163, 165.

¹²² Rochau, 165.

¹²³ Rochau, 165.

¹²⁴ Alexander von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen* (Breslau: Verlag von Eduard Trewend, 1851).

that it was also evident that such a remedy meant, or involved, state intervention. The question was: How big a room for action should the state be given? Von Rochau gave his answer as soon as he asked that question: “However big a room for action is given to state measures for this purpose, they meet their limit in property rights.” Whereas remedying “economic suffering” was the “economic task of the state,” that task had to be fulfilled “within those limits.”¹²⁵ It was not the state power that defined the scope of the state’s action, or its limits. The power that imposed limits on the state was economic.

Von Rochau’s preferred “big means of social reform” were two: reducing the costs of running the state (*Ersparnis im Staatshaushalt*), that is, cutting the budget, and the “freedom of exercising economic force” (*Freiheit der wirtschaftlichen Kraftübung*). The perception of wrongs and evils shifted from the “economic suffering” of the “poorest popular classes” to state spending and impediments to economic freedom: “The oversized budgets and the laws that under different pretexts impede the freedom of economic movements—these are the two and sole biggest evils in the economic realm.” What one might expect from politics was the removal of those two evils. The rest of the wrongs would be taken care of by “slow organic development” by the “development of the economic strength of the people [*wirtschaftliche Volkskräfte*], in which politics [. . .] has solely the task of warding off external interference.”¹²⁶

While von Rochau defined state action negatively, by limiting it he ascribed a positive role to the economy: “The positive part of the task falls to the national economy [*Volkswirtschaft*] itself, and it will, and can be, accomplished only in measure to which *production increases*.”¹²⁷ The “*increase of production*” was first an argument against the lingering remnants of the guild system, or artisanal production. The “economic interest of society” or, more emphatically, the

first, the most urgent, and the most irrefutable demand of the economic interest is the following: that each economic force be realized [*verwerthet*: utilized or exploited to produce value] as much as possible. The economic interest of society does not ask for a certificate of apprenticeship or for a masterpiece, but for the

¹²⁵ Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 163.

¹²⁶ Rochau, 164–65.

¹²⁷ Rochau, 165.

ability to produce as much as possible [*Leistungsfähigkeit*], regardless of how and where it is acquired.¹²⁸

The answer for Germany was “economic freedom” (*Gewerbefreiheit*), such as it existed in the countries which stood “at the forefront of world industry.”¹²⁹

The same argument was then used against socialism, because, as von Rochau asserted, the social revolution, with entails the violent transformation of property, could not “increase social production” and “augment public wealth.”¹³⁰ By the time von Rochau wrote his *Principles of Realpolitik*, economic science had made enough progress to relegate into oblivion the sober—one may say realistic—view that increased production, while it might multiply individual riches, did not necessarily increase public wealth (rather the opposite was often the case).¹³¹ Since, as von Rochau contended, a “new economic system,” such as imagined by the socialists, was simply a “folly”¹³²—that is, since liberalism already in its first reformulation adopted the position that “there is no alternative”—the most logical solution for getting out of the crisis and going forward was indeed an increase in productivity. The sum total of what the labor of the whole society yielded was insufficient to cover the existing needs, and a different distribution of the fruits of labor would achieve “little or nothing,” unless production was increased. “But the increase in production is not a matter of politics, and politics can basically do nothing to support it except for removing the impediments.”¹³³

This applied also to the proletariat. An honest and smart thing to do would be to “bluntly tell the proletariat that by and large one cannot help them in any other way but by creating the legal possibility that they can help themselves.” Von Rochau not only reminded his reader of the German folk wisdom “Help yourself, and God will help you,” but also brought up the “motto of the North American entrepreneurial spirit and of the North American labor force,” which was: “Help

152

¹²⁸ Rochau, 97.

¹²⁹ Rochau, 99.

¹³⁰ Rochau, 165.

¹³¹ See especially James Maitland, The Earl of Lauderdale, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth, and into the Means and Causes of Its Increase* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1804).

¹³² Rochau, *Grundsätze* (1853), 165.

¹³³ Rochau, 165.

yourself.” That was the “magic formula” which in two generations made America a “first class economic power” and created a general welfare such as had not been seen in the whole of history.¹³⁴

In this context, von Rochau found it worth repeating that “the big means of social reform, which stands at offer to German national politics, is the freedom of economic movement.” Only under the conditions of economic freedom could “each economic force be exercised” and yield the most it could, and “the highest increase in economic production” be achieved. That would also benefit “the so-called workingmen’s estate.” Consequently, that is what the workers could demand from the state: “The free use of their economic force is the most rightful, the most irrefutable, demand that the proletariat can make of the state.”¹³⁵

All of this could be described as a staple *laissez-faire*. The irony of it would be that von Rochau, in his turning away from philosophy and his realistic commitment to “facts,” ended up with him embracing a philosophy—for, as Keynes was to say, that is what *laissez-faire* actually was.¹³⁶ If *laissez-faire* had been economic science, one could say that von Rochau was actually consistent with his political realism project. But one would have to understand economic science like von Rochau’s contemporary Frantz did: as a science insisting on observing “what is going on and how is it going on,” instead of developing a doctrine “scholastically”—which was characteristic of the theoretical doctrine of the state, *Staatslehre*—i.e., proceeding from a general idea.¹³⁷ Understood in this way, economic science offered “something real,” and because it was in this sense superior to state doctrine, the latter “struck sail” in front of it and “made economy the organon of all political thinking.” Consequently, the state would become simply “an economic institution.”¹³⁸

153

This is not what von Rochau’s embracing *laissez-faire* was. If anything, he made the state a handmaiden of economy, of the existing “economic system.” But with regard to his political-theoretical project, the embrace of *laissez-faire* philosophy was a failure. Instead of sticking to the “facts,” a set of facts was kept be-

¹³⁴ Rochau, 168.

¹³⁵ Rochau, 169, 170–71.

¹³⁶ John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926).

¹³⁷ Frantz, *Naturlehre des Staates*, 71.

¹³⁸ Frantz, 74.

yond questioning. Even more seriously, those were the facts that involved power, more precisely: the exercise of power. The exercise of power within the economic realm was closed to political thinking, while the state was locked into protecting and maintaining, one may say serving, that exercise of power. Instead of analyzing the exercise of economic power, von Rochau spoke of the development of economic forces—he consistently uses the term *Kraft* in this context, never *Macht*—i.e., an increase in economic productivity, efficiency, and freedom.¹³⁹ While those who wielded economic power were free from state interference, but were shielded by the state from “external” “impediments,” the proletarians were given the freedom to be proletarians. That was the help they could hope for by the state. The state power was limited by economic power, while economic power was kept politically unlimited. The law of power did not extend into the realm of the economy. It was limited to reflections on the state and politics, while economic power, never named, was a law unto itself, *legibus solutus*. As such, it was in no conceivable sense an institution.

Discussing the crisis of liberalism early in the twentieth century, John Hobson wrote of “the shipwreck which Continental Liberalism has suffered when it was driven on the submerged reefs of the economic problem in politics.”¹⁴⁰ One may say that von Rochau’s *Realpolitik* was shipwrecked on economic power, which he himself turned into a submerged reef. But the failure of his *realpolitisch* project did not impact his reformulation of liberalism. In that very failure lay a successful reformulation of liberalism: the exemption of economic power from political reflection and control.

References

154

Anonymous. *Alfred Meißner*. Cassel: Ernst Balde, 1854.

Bauer, Bruno. *Russland und das Germanenthum*. Charlottenburg: Verlag von Egbert Bauer, 1853.

¹³⁹ Regarding “freedom,” too, Frantz was much more realistic than von Rochau. “The liberation of man, which liberalism proclaimed, has in the economic realm totally failed.” Frantz, *Vorschule zur Physiologie*, 291. Unlike von Rochau, Frantz was a perceptive critic of liberalism.

¹⁴⁰ J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1909), xii-xiii.

- Baumgarten, Hermann. *Der deutsche Liberalismus: Eine Selbstkritik. Abdruck aus dem achtzehnten Bande der Preußischen Jahrbücher*. Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1866.
- Bellet, Michel, and Adrien Lutz. "Piero Sraffa and the Project to Publish Saint-Simon's Works." *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)* (2019): 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3312188>.
- Berti, Lapo. "Interview: Marx, Money and Capital." Interview by Paolo Davoli and Letizia Rustichelli. Translated by Ettore Lancellotti and Letizia Rustichelli. n.p.: Rhizosfera, 2016. https://monoskop.org/images/1/1a/Marx%2C_Money_and_Capital._An_Interview_with_Lapo_Berti.pdf.
- . "Mettere un limite al potere economico." *CivicoLab*, December 11, 2017. <https://www.civicolab.it/mettere-un-limite-al-potere-economico/>.
- Bew, John. *Realpolitik: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Bologna, Sergio. "Moneta e crisi: Marx corrispondente della 'New York Daily Tribune.'" *Primo Maggio: Saggi e documenti per una storia di classe* 1, no. 1 (June–September 1973): 1–16.
- Bonaparte, Napoleon-Louis. *Extinction du pauperisme*. 5th ed. Paris: Pagnerre, 1844.
- Churoa, A. L. See Rochau, August Ludwig von.
- Constant, Benjamin. "De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation dans les rapports avec la civilisation européenne." In *Écrits politiques*, edited by Marcel Gauchet. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- Doll, Natascha. *Recht, Politik und "Realpolitik" bei August Ludwig von Rochau (1810–1873)*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005.
- Droysen, Johann Gustav. "Zur Charakteristik der europäischen Krisis." In *Politische Schriften*, edited by Felix Gilbert. Munich: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1933.
- Durkheim, Émile. "Preface de la seconde edition." In *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, xi–xxiv. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.
- Engels, Friedrich. "Die wahren Sozialisten." In *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Mai 1846–März 1848*, edited by Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED, 248–90. Vol. 4 of *Marx-Engels-Werke*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957–68.
- . "Einleitung zur dritten deutschen Auflage von Karl Marx' 'Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich.'" In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: März 1891 bis August 1895*, edited by Peer Kösling et al., 3–16. Pt. 1, vol. 32 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- . "Einleitung zu Karl Marx's 'Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850.'" In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: März 1891 bis August 1895*, edited by Peer Kösling et al., 330–51. Pt. 1, vol. 32 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- . Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, April 13, 1866. In *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Briefe, Oktober 1864–Dezember 1867*, edited by Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus

beim Zentralkomitee der SED, 208–9. Vol. 31 of *Marx-Engels-Werke*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957–68.

———. “Entwurf des Kapitels IV der Broschüre ‘Die Rolle der Gewalt in der Geschichte.’” In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: Oktober 1886 bis Februar 1891*, edited by Renate Merkel-Melis et al., 66–116. Pt. 1, vol. 31 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.

———. “Ergänzung der Vorbemerkung von 1870 zu ‘Der deutsche Bauernkrieg.’” In *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: März 1872–Mai 1875*, edited by Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED, 512–17. Vol. 18 of *Marx-Engels-Werke*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957–68.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*. Zürich: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1843.

Fontana, Biancamaria. *Benjamin Constant and the Post-Revolutionary Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Frantz, Constantin. *Naturlehre des Staates als Grundlage aller Staatswissenschaft*. Leipzig: C. F. Winter’sche Verlagshandlung, 1870.

———. *Vorschule zur Physiologie der Staaten*. Berlin: Ferdinand Schneider, 1857.

———. *Louis Napoleon*. 2nd ed. Berlin: Schneider & Comp., 1852.

Hobson, J. A. *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy*. London: P.S. King & Son, 1909.

Hont, István. *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005.

Hugo, Victor. *Napoléon le Petit*. London: Jeffs, 1852.

Humboldt, Alexander von. *Ideen zu einem Veruch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen*. Breslau: Verlag von Eduard Trewend, 1851.

Kelley, Duncan. “August Ludwig von Rochau and Realpolitik as Historical Political Theory.” *Global Intellectual History* 3, no. 3 (2018): 302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2017.1387331>.

Keynes, John Maynard. *The End of Laissez-Faire*. London: Hogarth Press, 1926.

156 Korsch, Karl. “State and Counter-Revolution.” *The Modern Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1939). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1939/state-counterrevolution.htm>.

———. “The Fascist Counter-revolution.” *Living Marxism* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1940): 29–37. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1940/fascist-counterrevolution.htm>.

Kühne, Ferdinand Gustav. “Alfred Meißner’s revolutionäre Studien aus Paris.” In *Mein Tagebuch in bewegter Zeit*. Leipzig: L. Denicke, 1863.

Landa, Ishay. *The Apprentice’s Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Lucarelli, Stefano. “The 1973–1978 Workgroup on Money of the Journal *Primo Maggio*: An Example of a Pluralist Critique of Political Economy.” *International Journal of*

- Pluralism and Economics Education* 4, no. 1 (2013): 30–50. <http://doi.org/10.1504/ijpee.2013.053585>.
- Marx, Karl. “Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte.” In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: Juli 1851 bis Dezember 1852*, edited by Martin Hundt et al., 96–189. Pt. 1, vol. 11 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- . “The Civil War in France (Second Draft).” In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: März bis November 1871*, edited by Hans-Dieter Krause et al., 38–117. Pt. 1, vol. 22 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- . “The General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association on the War. To the Members of the International Workingmen’s Association in Europe and the United States.” In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: September 1867 bis März 1871*, edited by Jürgen Herres et al., 245–49. Pt. 1, vol. 21 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- . “Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1849.” In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: Juli 1849 bis Juni 1851*, edited by Martin Hundt et al., 119–96. Pt. 1, vol. 10 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- . “Vorwort zur zweiten Ausgabe von ‘Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte.’” In *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe: September 1867 bis März 1871*, edited by Jürgen Herres et al., 130–31. Pt. 1, vol. 21 of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, Akademie Verlag, and De Gruyter, 1972–.
- , and Friedrich Engels. “Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei.” In *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Mai 1846–März 1848*, edited by Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED, 459–93. Vol. 4 of *Marx-Engels-Werke*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957–68.
- Mastnak, Tomaž. *Bonapartizem: Prolegomena za študij fašizma*. Ljubljana: Založba /*cf., 2021.
- . *Črna internacionala: Vojna, veliki biznis in vpeljava neoliberalizma*. Ljubljana: Založba /*cf., 2019.
- Maitland, James, The Earl of Lauderdale. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth, and into the Means and Causes of Its Increase*. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1804.
- McDaniel, Iain. “Constantin Frantz and the Intellectual History of Bonapartism and Caesarism: A Reassessment.” *Intellectual History Review* 28, no. 2 (2018): 317–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2017.1361218>.
- Meißner, Alfred. *Revolutionäre Studien aus Paris (1849)*. 2 vols. Frankfurt: Literarische Anstalt, 1849.
- Michels, Robert. *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie: Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens*. Leipzig: Verlag von Dr. Werner Klinkhardt, 1911.

- Mundt, Theodor. *Niccolò Machiavelli und das System der modernen Politik*. 3rd ed. Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1861.
- . *Paris und Louis Napoleon: Neue Skizzen aus dem französischen Kaiserreich*. 2 vols. Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1858.
- . *Machiavelli und der Gang der europäischen Politik*. Leipzig: Dyk'sche Buchhandlung, 1851.
- Nyhart, Lynn K. "The Political Organism: Karl Vogt on Animals and States in the 1840s and '50s." *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 47, no. 5 (November 2017): 602–28. <https://doi.org/10.1525/hsns.2017.47.5.602>.
- Ricciardi, Joseph. "Marx on Financial Intermediation: Lessons of the French Crédit Mobilier in the New York Daily Tribune." *Science and Society* 79, no. 4 (October 2015): 497–526. <http://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2015.79.4.497>.
- Rochau, August Ludwig von [Churoa, A. L., pseud.]. *Kritische Darstellung der Socialtheorie Fourier's*. Edited by Gustav Bacherer. Braunschweig: G. C. F. Meyer sen., 1840.
- . *Geschichte Frankreichs vom Sturze Napoleon bis zur Wiederherstellung des Kaiserthumes, 1814–1852*. 2 vols. Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1858.
- . *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands*. Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1853.
- . *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands: Neue, mit einer Einleitung vermehrte Ausgabe*. Stuttgart: Verlag von Karl Göpel, 1859.
- . *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatliche Zustände Deutschlands: Zweiter Theil*. Heidelberg: Akademische Verlagshandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, 1869.
- . *Vier Wochen französischer Geschichte: 1. December 1851–1. Januar 1852*. Leipzig: Avenarius & Mendelssohn, 1852.
- Romieu, Auguste. *L'ère des césars*. 2nd ed. Paris: Ledoyen, 1850.
- . *Le spectre rouge de 1852*. Paris: Ledoyen, 1851.
- Roscher, Wilhelm. "Umriss zur Naturlehre des Cäsarismus." In *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, vol. 10, 639–753. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1888.
- 158 Ruge, Arnold. "Selbstkritik des Liberalismus." In *Verschiedene Stellungen der Kritik zur Zeit*, 76–116. Vol. 4 of *Arnold Ruge's sämmtliche Werke*, 2nd ed. Mannheim: J. P. Grohe, 1847–48.
- Ruggiero, Guido de. *The History of European Liberalism*. Translated by R. G. Collingwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927.
- Stahl, Friedrich Julius. *Was ist die Revolution? Ein Vortrag, auf Veranstaltung des Evangelischen Vereins für kirchliche Zwecke am 8. März 1852 gehalten*. 3rd ed., with an addendum *Die Reformation und die Revolution*. Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Schultze, 1852.
- Stein, Lorenz. *Das Königthum, die Republik und die Souveränität der französischen Gesellschaft seit der Februarrevolution 1848*. 2nd ed. Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1855.

- . *Der Begriff der Gesellschaft und die sociale Geschichte der französischen Revolution bis zum Jahre 1830*. 2nd ed. Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1855.
- . *Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs: Ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte*. Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1842.
- . *Die Verwaltungslehre: Erster Theil*. Stuttgart: Verlag der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1865.
- Stephan, Cora. "Genossen, wir dürfen uns nicht von der Geduld hinreißen lassen!" *Zur Theoriebildung in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1862–1878*. Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981.
- Trocini, Federico. *L'invenzione della "Realpolitik" e la scoperta della "legge del potere": August Ludwig von Rochau tra radicalismo e nazional-liberalismo*. Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2009.
- Venedey, Jacob. *Machiavel, Montesquieu, Rousseau*. Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1850.
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich. Introduction to *Grundsätze der Realpolitik: Angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands*, by Ludwig August von Rochau, 7–21. Edited by Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1972.
- Wittenberg, Erich. "Frantz, Gustav Adolph Constantin." *Deutsche Biographie*. Accessed June 25, 2024. <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118534939.html>.