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## Sombart and Weber on Professional Politicians

Kari Palonen

### Abstract

Max Weber's concept of *Beruf* is manifested in his view on politics both as a profession and vocation. The democratization of suffrage led to the rise of new types of politicians living off politics, who were fiercely criticized in the early-twentieth century. Werner Sombart's series of articles in 1907 offers us a 'representative anecdote' of this criticism. He combines idealistic, positivistic and syndicalistic disgust for the parliamentary and electoral politics and condemns the professional politicians. Weber never refers to Sombart's articles, but at least one passage in *Politik als Beruf* offers a direct allusion to Sombart. With his idealization of experts and contempt for the daily practices of politicians, Sombart serves as a good example of those academics and *literati*, whom Weber criticized for not understanding the distinctive demands that a politician must face. The distinctive point in Weber's defence of professional politicians concerns their chance to act as counterweights to bureaucratization.

Keywords: Conceptions of politics, Max Weber, politics of intellectuals, professionalization of politicians, Werner Sombart.

*Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* is most immediately linked to Weber's *Politik als Beruf* in the sense that in each case *Beruf* refers both to a profession and to a vocation, as Lassman and Speirs indicate in their translation (Weber 1994b). This distinction refers to the heated debates concerning the role and legitimacy of professional politicians. Among the fierce contemporary critics was the famous economist Werner Sombart. In 1907 he edited a short-lived journal entitled *Morgen*, in which he asked in a series of articles why German academics and *literati* ('die Gebildeten') turned away from politics and regarded the rise of professional politicians one of the main reasons for this disgust with politics.

Max Weber did not share his academic contemporaries' contempt for day-to-day politics and professional politicians. He grew up in a political home, took part in political debates from a young age, criticized Cicero's weak policy against Catilina at the tender age of 12 and read Machiavelli at 14. In his student days he entered into a

political correspondence with his uncle Hermann Baumgarten. Weber never shared the latter's (and his father's) conciliatory views toward Bismarck (see Baumgarten 1866), and he came to adopt the later Baumgarten's ironic distance from *Realpolitik* and the 'art of the possible' supported by Bismarck and his adepts (see Weber 1936).

Weber also broke with the political generation of Baumgarten and his father by accepting the conditions of democratized mass politics. His reading of James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* (1st edn, 1889), with its distinction between living for and off politics, was probably decisive (see esp. Bryce 1889/1995: 731-42). Weber adopted this distinction in a preface to an article on German Social Democracy (Weber 1905). He repeatedly refers to Bryce in the letters he began writing to Robert Michels in 1906 (see Weber 1990). Weber was disappointed by the fact that Michels never properly consulted Bryce's book in his famous work *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie*: 'Ich vermisse es, daß Sie nicht Bryce Am[erican] Commonwealth (*große Ausgabe!* nicht die kleine, die Sie zitieren) benutzt haben' (letter to Michels 31.12.1910, Weber 1994a: 761).

New kinds of professional politicians, who were actually living off politics, had been gaining ground in the United States since the Jacksonian presidency and the introduction of the spoils system. Weber was convinced that professional politicians were also becoming indispensable in Europe as a by-product of the process of democratization. He was disappointed with Michels' failure to analyse the rule of officialdom in the German Social Democratic Party in similar terms as Bryce had done with regard to the US party bosses.

Weber occasionally entered into explicit polemics with some of the critics of parliamentarism (Weber 1904a; 1908). Thanks to the work of Bryce and that of Ostrogorski (1903), he was aware of the movements against partisan politics in the United States, but he seems to have underestimated the anti-political trend among the academics and *litterati* in France and Britain in the early years of mass politics. In his later essays Weber discussed both the actions and opinions of politicians as well the empirical literature on politicians and parties but did not deal with the widespread anti-political literature. With the exception of the pedagogue F.W. Foerster (Weber 1919: 81), anti-political intellectuals are not mentioned in *Politik als Beruf* either. Upon closer examination, however, we can detect signs of a polemic against several anti-political thinkers of the time in his formulations.

I have found no mention of Sombart's *Morgen* essays in the works and letters of Weber that have been published thus far. We can be

quite certain that Weber had heard of these essays, when Sombart was the co-editor of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* and Weber's political friend Naumann responded to him in the journal. Nonetheless, we may ask whether Sombart – who with his war pamphlet *Händler und Helden* (1915) had moved far to the right of Weber – was an explicit or implicit target of Weber's criticism. *Die Politik als Beruf* was, indeed, the title of one of the articles in Sombart's series, and even if the title of Weber's lecture was suggested by the *Freistudenten*, he might have remembered that both Baumgarten (1866) and Sombart had used a variation of it in the past.

### *Politicians as scapegoats*

The criticism of politicians was a common *topos* in Western Europe at the time when Sombart wrote his articles. This was also the case with British politico-literary journals in the early-twentieth century. For example, an anonymous author writes in the conservative *Quarterly Review*: 'But one fact stands broadly out – the ill-repute into which politicians generally have fallen' (*Recent Political Theory and Practice* 1900: 359). The writer Hilaire Belloc, himself a disappointed former Liberal MP, stated with a tone of resignation: 'it is rapidly bringing into contempt the reputation and the public position of politicians' (Belloc 1911: 34). The arch-conservative journal *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* conducted a regular campaign against politicians. For example Arthur Page writes: 'Politics and politicians are out of fashion' (Page 1913: 573).

The declining quality of political life since the introduction of mass elections through the 1867 and 1884/1885 parliamentary reforms is a frequent *topos*. W.H.S. Aubrey for instance remarks: 'It is indisputable that the standard of political life in the country has been lowered of late' (Aubrey 1905: 297). In a review of Bryce, Goldwin Smith wrote on the dangers of the future predominance of the US style of politicians: 'Politics will become in England as well as in the United States a regular trade, and of all trades the vilest' (Smith 1888/1889: 245).

In France, similar views were widely shared on opposite sides of the political spectrum. The US style *politiciens*, a neologism of the 1870s, were viewed as dangerous, although for example Joseph Reinach (1894) did not regard the situation as being as acute as it was in France. Both anti-*dreyfusards à la Paul Valéry* (1974, from 1910) and *dreyfusards à la Charles Péguy* (1910) turned against politicians, as did many socialists and anarchists (see Angenot 2003). Both the Bonapar-

tist Jules Delafosse, with his *La psychologie du député* (1904), and Henri Leyret, in two books against *les politiciens* (1909, 1910), were exponents of this genre. Georges Sorel (1908) combined elements of the syndicalist and extreme right wing critiques of politicians. Even the republican political journalist Robert de Jouvenel wrote in his *La république des camarades* (1914: 237) that the French had lost their flair for politics.

In the German context no such emphasis on the decline of political activity was needed. Old slogans, such as 'Politik verdirbt den Charakter', were still being used, and Bismarck spoke out against professional politicians in his resistance toward payment for the members of the *Reichstag*, which was not accepted until 1906 (for the debates see, for example, Butzer 1998). During the first decade of the twentieth century, however, a pro-political attitude was beginning to emerge among the francophile *literati*, such as Heinrich Mann, Kurt Hiller and Ludwig Rubiner. They, too, however, wanted to protect politics from professional politicians (cf. Palonen 1985 and 1989).

#### *Werner Sombart as a critic of politicians*

In comparison to other contemporary critics of politics and politicians, Sombart seems to use a broader repertoire. His point of departure is the seemingly ahistorical opposition between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* (1907b: 68). In this argument politics becomes entirely depersonalized. Simultaneously, politics appears to Sombart as overly individual and subjective. In this spirit he does not shy away from going as far as to claim that – with reference to nineteenth-century Russia – politically reactionary ('rückständig') times tend to produce the highest form of culture (1907b: 68). As such, it is consequential that he went on in a later article to claim that politics should not be over-estimated, 'daß die Politik in ihrer Bedeutung für die Gestaltung des menschlichen Lebens im allgemeinen ganz ungeheuerlich überschätzt wird' (Sombart 1907f: 420).

At the same time, Sombart also ponders the question of why so few – or, so many – *Gebildete* participate in German politics? The rise of the 'unseligen Spezies' of professional politicians lay the groundwork for the development of a hostility toward politics (Sombart 1907a: 41). In *Die Politik als Beruf*, he regards political participation as natural in democratic cities, whereas in the empires absolutism rules and citizens have no part in politics. The democratization of empires had created the professional politician who lived off politics, that is 'Entstehung eines selbständigen politischen Gewerbes, einer Zunft von Berufspolitikern,

die... sich als eine immer zahlreicher werdende Gruppe innerhalb der Bürgerschaft selbst ausbreiteten' (Sombart 1907c: 196).

Unlike most of the contemporary critics, who tended to subscribe to various conspiracy theories, Sombart regards the rise of professional politicians as a quasi-natural consequence of both the increasing complexity and democratization of politics (Sombart 1907c: 196). As an economist he understands why the *dilettanti* would no longer suffice: 'die bloß gelegentliche Beschäftigung mit diesen Dingen nicht mehr ausreichte, um sie gründlich uns sachgemäß zu betreiben' (Sombart 1907c: 196). Correspondingly, he also finds a return to the politics of *Honoratioren* impossible. However, like the French syndicalist critics of parliamentary politics, to whom he refers in his *Morgen* articles, he draws the conclusion that the parliamentary form of democracy is inherently illusory, 'daß nun die große Masse der Bürger von der regulären Mitwirkung an der Politik ausgeschlossen blieb' (Sombart 1907c: 196).

Like many syndicalists and socialists (see Angenot 2003), Sombart shared the views of the technocratic critique of the politician's necessary dilettantism in specialized subjects, 'in allen Fragen, die nicht in das von ihm beherrschten Handwerk einschlugen' (Sombart 1907c: 196). Similarly to the technocrats, Sombart saw politics as a mere means of problem-solving, without acknowledging that political constellations shape the problems themselves or that political judgment is not a specialist skill. Nonetheless, he admits that politics is a difficult, laborious and boring profession, '[d]as Gewerbe der Politik selbst aber...zu den schwierigsten, mühsamsten und ödesten von allen Gewerben unserer Zeit gehört' (Sombart 1907c: 196). In line with the anti-parliamentarians in Britain and in France, he also turns against rhetoric: 'Neben der nüchternen Geschäftsrede dominiert im Reichstag nur noch die Phrase, die man anhört, ohne sich weiter um sie zu kümmern' (Sombart 1907d: 226). In the name of both cultural purity and technical efficiency he denounces the role of political constellations in deliberations and negotiations, which form the key parliamentary activity in the internal life of a professional politician.

...in der Erledigung der laufenden Geschäfte der Gesetzemacherei und was dazu gehört und der für die Instandsetzung der politischen Maschine erforderlichen Maßregeln, wozu eine gewisse Routine und Selbstverleugnung vonnöten sind, und in einem unausgesetzten Abwägen und Ausnutzen der politischen Konstellationen, einem steten Handeln und Feilschen um Stimmen bei den parlamentarischen Aktionen. Wobei einige die Drahtzieher, andere die Puppen abgeben, die von jenen in Bewegung gesetzt werden (Sombart 1907d: 226).

Here we can detect a teleological and single-agent oriented conception of a great national policy (perhaps inspired by Nietzsche's enigmatic *große Politik*) to be followed according to plan. The increasing political role played by daily parliamentary and electoral struggles in the absence of stable majorities in the post-Bismarckian Germany was seen by Sombart as disgusting.

One of the unwelcome consequences of the mass agitation that occurs during elections lies, according to Sombart, in the necessary simplification of political life, for example in the recourse to slogans. For him, this means above all that professional politicians lose contact with reality:

...daß in diesen Schlagworten schließlich alles wirkliche Sachverhalten, alle lebendige Wirklichkeit eingekapselt wird, daß die Vorstellungen und Empfindungen des aktiv wie positiv politisch Tätigen schließlich von dem Quell des Lebens ganz abgedrängt werden und nur noch in dieser unwirklichen, verzerrten, verwaschenen Begriffswelt des politischen Schlagwortes eingeschlossen bleiben, daß er vom Leben selbst überhaupt nichts mehr hört noch sieht. Das Lebendige stirbt und das Tote lebt allein weiter (Sombart 1907c: 197-98).

We can detect his debt to another fashionable intellectual style, namely the *Lebensphilosophie*, as an up-to-date version of the objective spirit. For Sombart, 'life itself' requires a 'concrete' style in terms of the formation of concepts: abstract slogans necessarily lose touch with 'concrete reality'. In this sense politics tends to suppress the truth, as it is incarnated in 'life itself', and renounce the fine manners as well: 'Man geht immer laxer mit der Wahrheit, immer laxer mit der Ehre des Gegners um und man nimmt immer mehr die Manieren eines Rüpels und eines Rowdys an' (Sombart 1907c: 199).

In contrast to Naumann, Sombart claims that politics is doomed to decline once it reaches the lower social strata: 'das politische Leben degeneriert von Tag zu Tag mehr, weil es in immer tiefere Schichten hinabsteigt'. This leads him to reject democracy 'in ihrer heutigen Gestalt' (both quotes Sombart 1907f: 419). His syndicalist critique of powerless people does not, however, lead him to idealize popular rule.

Sometimes Sombart sounds like an academic critic who wants to keep his hand clean of the dirty affairs of parliaments, elections, parties and politicians. On other occasions, however, he manifests political lucidity, as in his critiques of the powerless parliamentary and party politicians in Wilhelmine Germany. This concerns especially the secondary role of the Reichstag in the career of the Wilhelmine politicians.

...daß es bei uns in Deutschland ebensowenig wie in den meisten Bundesstaaten dasjenige gibt, was man in anderen Ländern die 'politische Karriere' nennt. Es ist bei uns dem gewählten Vertreter des Volks, auch wenn er der Mehrheit im Parlamente angehört, nicht möglich, mit Hilfe des Parlaments sich einen Platz in der Regierung zu erzwingen... Der Parlamentarier bleibt immer zweite Garnitur (Sombart 1907e: 257)

Applying Nietzschean jargon, Sombart insists that German politicians lack the lust for power: 'Es fehlt unseren Parlamentariern vollständig das Bewußtsein, Machthaber zu sein oder je es werden zu können' (Sombart 1907e: 258). In his dark vision nothing is likely to change over the next decades: 'daß der Gang der Politik in Deutschland in den nächsten Menschenaltern aller Voraussicht nach in den Grundzügen derselbe bleiben wird, der er heute ist' (Sombart 1907g: 479). The celebration of objective spirit and *Lebensphilosophie* is joined with an extreme pessimism regarding politics. He attributes priority to *Selbstverbesserung* over *Weltverbesserung* (Sombart 1907h: 514). Despite this, he does not completely renounce his interest in politics, but retains that of an interested spectator: 'Für uns ist jede politische Ansicht, jede politische Forderung ein Problem; wie sie es für den Parteimann immer nur sind – wenn sie vom Gegner vertreten werden' (Sombart 1907h: 514).

Among the contemporary critics of politicians Sombart has perhaps the broadest register. He is not content with a simple denunciation of politicians, but discusses different trends in contemporary politics and applies a broad arsenal of diverse arguments in his crusade against them. While he has hardly anything good to say about professional politicians, he still has some nostalgia for the great ideas of the past age, such as the period of the founding of the German Empire (Sombart 1907d: 226-27).

#### *Opposed views on politics*

There exists one direct parallel in the texts of Sombart and Weber. It struck me that Sombart, when mentioning the metaphorical extensions of *Politik* in contemporary Germany, expressed that it is possible to speak 'von der klugen "Politik" der Geliebten' (Sombart 1907a: 42). The parallel passage in Weber's work lies in the first lines of *Politik als Beruf*: 'Man spricht von der Devisenpolitik der Banken, von der Diskontpolitik der Reichsbank... ja schließlich von der Politik einer klugen Frau, die ihren Mann zu lenken trachtet' (Weber 1919: 35). This parallel offers us sufficient grounds to assume that Weber was really



well acquainted with Sombart's articles and that he tacitly alluded to his formula in the quoted passage, independently of whether he himself recognized where he had picked it up or not.

Both formulae refer to the old politics-as-art discipline that followed the *phronesis*-vocabulary and was commonly used in the *Privatklugheitslehren* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In that sense, *politisch* was used in German as a quasi-synonym for expressions such as *klug*, *listig* and *schlau* in more pejorative manner than the corresponding French expressions *fin*, *adroit* and *prudent* (see, for example, Sternberger 1978). When both Sombart and Weber refer here to *klug*, they are alluding, perhaps unwittingly, to this older usage, which is comparable to the English *politic*, which was sometimes used in Germany during the early-twentieth century (see Palonen 1985).

For Sombart, *Politik* refers to the normative regulation, 'Regelung unseres Lebens in der Gesellschaft durch äußere Normen' (1907a: 43). In *Politik als Beruf*, Weber is also interested in the 'performative' aspect of the question of the operations which a person carries out in order to be considered a politician (Weber 1919: esp. 80-88). As such, the politics of a 'wise woman' appears to Sombart to be improper, whereas Weber only demarcates this usage outside *Politik als Beruf*.

Here we can also detect a difference in the relationship between politics and administration. Sombart almost identifies politics with administration in his definition of politics as regulation. He understands political interest to be one that concerns legislation and administration, 'die Gestaltung der gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen durch Gesetzgebung und Verwaltung' (Sombart 1907a: 43). He represents, in short, a conception of politics as 'policy-making', or 'fabrication' in Arendtian (1958/60: 198) terms. Politics is a question of the efficient realization of a pre-given policy.

From such a perspective we can also better understand his devaluation of the activities of politicians, such as regarding elections as a sport or a carnival, the 'Faschingzeit der Berufspolitiker' (Sombart 1907a: 41) and the 'Handeln und Feilschen um Stimmen bei den parlamentarischen Aktionen' (Sombart 1907c: 195). Similarly, the deliberative speech that takes place in the parliaments and during elections appears rather as a disturbance. The subjective or performative side of politics is subordinated to its 'functions' within the 'objective spirit'.

Weber, of course, draws a sharp distinction between politics and administration, between the politician and the official, and does not distinguish between words and deeds. On the contrary, he emphasizes that politics is an eminently verbal activity, and judging the

political role of words is one of the politician's primary activities. 'Denn die heutige Politik wird nun einmal in hervorragendem Maße in der Öffentlichkeit mit den Mitteln des gesprochenen oder geschriebenen Wortes geführt' (Weber 1919: 53-54, see also Weber 1918: 237, 263-64). Connected to this is his idealization of two professions, advocates and journalists, as the backdrop for the formation of high quality professional politicians, based on the mastery of the spoken and written word respectively.

The defence of advocates and journalists is just one of the unpopular moves Weber made in favour of politicians, explicitly opposing, for example, Bismarck's frequent polemic against both these kinds of professional politicians (cf. the speeches in the *Reichstag* 5.5.1881 and 26.11.1884, <http://mdz.bib-bvb.de/digbib/reichstag/>; for an analysis of Bismarck's anti-rhetorical rhetoric see Goldberg 1998). For Weber, the verbal character of politics also signifies an emphasis on both historical and conceptual links between the demagogue and the politician, not in order to depreciate the latter but rather to reevaluate the former (Weber 1919: 38, 65).

#### *Anti-political intellectuals versus professional politicians*

One of the main topics in Weber's late work on suffrage, parliamentarism and politics is the polemic against anti-politicians. My favourite piece among Weber's writings is *Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland*, written and published in late 1917. Weber applies an unscrupulous style of rhetoric in his devaluation of the opponents of politicians among the contemporary German *Literaten*. One of the main aspects of his rhetorical strategy is refraining from mentioning the names of the persons and writings which are the object of his polemics.

Weber discusses the entire range of antidemocratic suffrage reforms *en bloc* (Weber 1917: 157-68). He regards them as expressions of *politische Kindlichkeit*. The *literati* are characterized as *Tintenfaßromantikern* and *Kaffeehausintellektuellen*, who use a *Phrasendreschmaschine* (Weber 1917: 165, 168, 185, 181). The only footnote in the article is directed against one of his favourite targets, the authoritarian and neo-feudal student corporations (Weber 1917: 180). The antidemocratic and anti-parliamentary opponents are not seen as worthy of serious criticism:

Wir haben alle diese romantischen Phantasien, welche ja für den Kundigen der Ehre ernster Widerlegung nicht wert sind, hier nur erwähnt, weil diese ganz ungeschichtlichen Konstruktionen immerhin den einen Schaden anrichten: die Wasserscheu des deutschen Spießbürgertums

(aller Schichten) vor dem Eintauchen in die spezifisch moderne Problemlage noch zu steigern, es noch weltfremder und unpolitischer zu machen (Weber 1917: 180).

Weber did not attempt to convert these *Literaten* but instead addressed a more general audience by using the rhetoric of ridicule (cf. Skinner 1996: 2002). Here we can only ask whether he would have also included Sombart's views from 1907 among similar expressions of political illiteracy?

The target of the following critique of the classicist tendency in the German academic and literary context could well be Sombart's contempt for the everyday parliamentary and electoral politics:

Der 'deutsche Geist' ist für deren Lösung nicht aus noch so wertvollen Geisteswerken unserer Vergangenheit zu destillieren... Die deutschen Klassiker können uns u. a. lehren, daß wir ein führendes Kulturvolk der Erde zu sein vermochten in einer Zeit materieller Armut und politischer Ohnmacht und sogar Fremdherrschaft. Dieser unpolitischen Epoche entstammen ihre Ideen, auch wo sie politisch und ökonomisch sind. Sie waren teils, angeregt durch die Auseinandersetzung mit der Französischen Revolution, Konstruktionen in einem politisch und ökonomisch leidenschaftsleeren Raum. Soweit aber eine andere politische Leidenschaft in ihnen lebte als die zornige Auflehnung gegen die Fremdherrschaft, war es die ideale Begeisterung für sittliche Forderungen. Was darüber hinaus liegt, blieben philosophische Gedanken, die wir als Mittel der Anregung zu eigener Stellungnahme entsprechend unseren politischen Realitäten und der Forderung unseres Tages benutzen können, — nicht aber: als Wegweiser. Die modernen Probleme des Parlamentarismus und der Demokratie und die Wesensart unseres modernen Staates überhaupt lagen ganz außerhalb ihres Gesichtskreises (Weber 1917: 185).

According to Weber, *die Gebildeten* remained unpolitical in their attitude toward the practical politics of parties, parliaments and elections. This is the reason why he goes so far as to welcome a devaluation of academic degrees through democratization: 'sollte die "Demokratisierung" den Erfolg haben, das soziale Prestige des Prüfungsdiplomenschen zu beseitigen...so würde sie damit politisch wertvolle gesellschaftliche Formwerte bei uns nicht vernichten' (Weber 1917: 184).

Although Sombart recognized the secondary political role of the *Reichstag*, he did not differentiate Wilhelmine Germany from traditional authoritarian regimes. In the Weberian view, his longing for the political role of the *Gebildeten* would, in fact, further strengthen the dominant tendency in the contemporary world, namely the tendency

toward bureaucratization (see already Weber 1909: 277-78). Whether the *Gebildeten* themselves played a political role as the *Honoratioren* did or served as bureaucrats, in both cases the political consequences were fatal. This was one of the main points of Weber's critique of the antidemocratic proposals for franchise reform.

Sombart's claim of the privileged role of the *Gebildeten* and his suspicion of professional politicians are based on a traditional view of knowledge, although one that combines its idealist and positivist versions. Consequently, he remains insensitive to the dangers of bureaucratization as well as to the politician's special competence with regard to judging the struggle between perspectives. Sombart and Weber were Nietzscheans in different respects, Sombart in claiming privileges for the aristocracy of spirit, whereas Weber extended Nietzsche's perspectivism into the defence of politicians.

In his rejection of the daily parliamentary, electoral and partisan politics (esp. Sombart 1907a: 41) Sombart is a true incarnation of the unpolitical German academics whom Weber parodies. Sombart, nonetheless, recognizes that the career of a professional politician is tempting to intellectuals: 'entweder er bleibt allem politischen Leben fern, oder er wird Berufspolitiker oder widmet doch wenigstens einen großen Teils seines Lebens der Beschäftigung mit der Politik. Denn die dritte Möglichkeit fällt für ihn aus: die Rolle des politischen Herdentiers zu spielen' (Sombart 1907c: 199).

In Weberian terms, however, we may well question whether he describes the alternatives in a realistic and appropriate manner. The Sombartian *Gebildeten*, who wanted to become professional politicians, were *Honoratioren*, whose election into the parliament was rather unproblematic. Sombart's critique of democratization refers to the understanding that the chances for the survival of this type of politician were declining. According to Weber, they could only be part-time politicians, not those who lived entirely off politics (1919: 41-42).

We can, in addition, ask whether Sombart's first alternative of keeping oneself entirely outside the sphere of political life was in fact realizable. Weber's critique of the proverbial 'unpolitical Germans' does not render them politically harmless. On the contrary, they played a definite political role in strengthening the rule of the officialdom in Wilhelmine Germany. The declaration of keeping oneself out of politics is a mark of self-deception and tacit support of the *status quo*. For this reason, those who take a stand against 'politics' and 'politicians' become, in Weberian terms (Weber 1919: 41-42), passive and involuntary occasional politicians. The pro-war declarations of

German professors are, indeed, not so far removed from the Sombartian *Herdentier* either.

But can we count Sombart among the programmatic apoliticians? In his reply to Naumann he denies contributing to the formation of unpolitical persons.

Im Gegenteil: ich möchte gern dazu verhelfen, die erste und wichtigste Bedingung eines politischen Menschen zu erfüllen: Verständnis für Wesen und Bedeutung des politischen Lebens zu wecken. Dazu aber braucht man keine Politik zu 'machen', braucht man vor allem nicht berufsmäßiger Parteipolitiker zu werden (Sombart 1907f: 421).

Does this limited activity fulfil the Weberian criterion for the occasional politician? It does not correspond to Weber's paradigm of taking a stand: "Gelegenheits"politiker sind wir alle, wenn wir unseren Wahlzettel abgeben oder eine ähnliche Willensäußerung: etwa Beifall oder Protest in einer "politischen" Versammlung, vollziehen, eine "politische" Rede halten usw' (Weber 1919: 41). The 'educational' role of talking about politics seems not to be political enough for Weber. But we could also think that an active commitment against politics is a more explicit political act than the support of a contemplative understanding of politics.

#### *Experts versus professional parliamentarians*

Democracy without parliamentarism, which was popular among the *litterati* in wartime Germany (see Llanque 2000) and perhaps indicated in Sombart's rejection of democracy in its current form, was another target of Weber's polemics. For Weber, such models further affirm the rule of the officialdom: 'Was würde innerhalb dieser Verfassung mit ihrer obrigkeitlichen Beamtenmacht eine Demokratie ohne allen Parlamentarismus darstellen? Eine solche lediglich passive Demokratisierung wäre eine gänzlich reine Form der uns wohl-bekannteren kontrollfreien Beamtenherrschaft, die sich "monarchisches Regiment" nennen würde' (Weber 1918: 267).

In his pamphlet *Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland*, Weber once again focuses on the irresistible force of bureaucratization in general and the *Beamtenherrschaft* in imperial Germany in particular. He does not see the possibility for a reversal of the universal tendency but calls instead for counterweights. 'Wie ist es angesichts dieser Übermacht der Tendenz zur Bureaokratisierung überhaupt noch möglich, irgendwelche Reste einer in irgendeinem Sinn "individualistischen" Bewegungsfreiheit zu retten?' (Weber 1918: 222). His

main candidates, and main form of support for a minimal degree of individual freedom and democracy, are the parliamentary politicians. In the following key sentence he emphasizes the different responsibilities of politicians and officials: ‘ “Über den Parteien“, das heißt aber in Wahrheit: außerhalb des Kampfes um eigene Macht, soll der Beamte stehen. Kampf um eigene Macht und die aus dieser Macht folgende Eigenverantwortung für seine Sache ist das Lebenselement des Politikers wie des Unternehmers’ (Weber 1918: 223).

Sombart, with his idealization of experts and contempt for the daily practices of politicians, appears as a good example of those academics and *literati* who never understood the distinctive demands that a politician must face. Against the Bismarckian tradition, Weber takes a stand in favour of the professional parliamentarian, both as a fact and as a *desideratum*:

Der Berufsparlamentarier ist ein Mann, der das Reichstagsmandat ausübt nicht als gelegentliche Nebenpflicht, sondern – ausgerüstet mit eigenem Arbeitsbureau und -personal und mit allen Informationsmitteln – als Hauptinhalt seiner Lebensarbeit. Man mag diese Figur lieben oder hassen, sie ist rein technisch unentbehrlich, und sie ist daher schon heute vorhanden (Weber 1918: 244).

For him, the denunciation of professional parliamentarians is seen as very convenient for the bureaucrats:

Denn der Berufsparlamentarier an sich ist den Instinkten der bürokratischen Verwaltungschefs ein Dorn im Auge. Schon als unbequemer Kontrolleur und als Prätendent einer, immerhin, gewissen Anteilnahme an der Macht. Vollends aber, wenn er in einer Gestalt auftritt, um als möglicher Konkurrent um die leitenden Stellungen in Betracht zu kommen (was bei den Interessenvertretern eben nicht der Fall ist). Daher auch der Kampf für Erhaltung der Unwissenheit des Parlaments. Denn nur qualifizierte Berufsparlamentarier, welche durch die Schule intensiver Ausschußarbeit eines Arbeitsparlaments gegangen sind, können verantwortliche Führer, nicht bloße Demagogen und Dilettanten aus sich hervorgehen lassen. Auf solche Führer und ihre Wirksamkeit muß die ganze innere Struktur des Parlaments zugeschnitten werden, wie es in ihrer Art diejenige des englischen Parlaments und seiner Parteien seit langem ist (Weber 1918: 245).

Sombart emphasizes that when it comes to substantial questions politicians are doomed to remain dilettantes. Neither Weber nor the MPs themselves dispute this fact. The point, however, lies in the inability of the officials to recognize the inherent limits of their superior factual knowledge when it comes to political judgment and action. Weber

sees the most crucial question in terms of the control of bureaucratization as being the political limits of factual knowledge:

was die Bureaukratie als solche nicht leistet. Leicht ist nämlich festzustellen, daß ihre Leistungsfähigkeit auf dem Gebiet des öffentlichen, staatlich-politischen Betriebes ganz ebenso wie innerhalb der Privatwirtschaft feste innere Grenzen hat. Der leitende Geist: der 'Unternehmer' hier, der 'Politiker' dort, ist etwas anderes als ein 'Beamter'. Nicht notwendig der Form, wohl aber der Sache nach (Weber 1918: 222).

For the apologists of objective spirit and technical efficiency à la Sombart, the idea that there could ever be too much knowledge and expertise in political decisions is seen as incomprehensible. For Weber, all knowledge consists of a special type of power share and is thus part of the political struggle. The rule of the officialdom in the German Empire was for him, to a decisive degree, a result of the situation in which the officials' special knowledge was left outside any realm of parliamentary control. The enablement of such control was the main political project in Weber's wartime political essays and pamphlets.

The core of Weber's critique of expert knowledge concerns the connections between *Sachwissen*, *Dienstwissen* and *Geheimwissen*. For Weber, they are indispensable aspects of the politics of modern states, but they indicate a view of knowledge, which, without counterweights, would be politically fatal. In other words, he disputes a 'monocratic' view of knowledge, the simple distinction between the possession and a lack of 'knowledge' of a given subject matter and in terms of a personal division into the categories of those who 'know' and those who 'don't know'. For Weber, bureaucratization lies in the situation in which the officials monopolize 'knowing' and regard it as a possession. For Weber's Nietzschean or rhetorical perspectivism, 'knowledge' consists of the competition between different points of view (see Weber 1904b in particular). This is incomprehensible to the ethos of an official, but it is to some degree analogous to the competitive situation of the politicians. I refer to Weber's 'parliamentary' theory of knowledge by taking the rhetorical principle of arguing *in utramque partem* as the core of the parliamentary procedures and practices (Palonen 2004).

#### *In defence of the politicians*

The secondary role of the *Reichstag* in the German Empire and the rise of professional politicians as an indispensable byproduct of democratization are commonly emphasized themes in the work of both

Werner Sombart and Max Weber. Their political responses to this situation were, however, almost diametrically opposed. Sombart used a broad register of the contemporary denunciation of professional politicians with certain personal nuances, while simultaneously committing himself to an aristocracy of spirit, which was not at all uncommon among the contemporary German professors.

Although Weber views some of the consequences of the rise of politicians living off politics with disgust, he accepts this situation not only as a fact but also as one containing new chances. They include the breakdown of the rule of the *Honoratioren*, which in Germany would have led not only to political dilettantism but also to attempts to create a parvenu aristocracy with neo-feudal tendencies (see esp. Weber 1917). In this respect he is already more radical than contemporary liberal politicians, such as Friedrich Naumann.

The distinctive point in Weber's defence of professional politicians concerns, however, their chance to act as counterweights to bureaucratization. This includes at least three distinct aspects: the specific German rule of the officialdom, the universal tendency of the age toward the extension of bureaucratic rule (*Herrschaft*) to all spheres of life, and the methodological claim of a monopoly on knowledge. As a critic of the rule of officialdom Weber was probably more competent and, consequently, more uncompromising than his contemporaries (cf. Kocka 1981 comparing Weber and Otto Hintze as critics of bureaucracy). The fear of universal bureaucratization was Weber's personal version of the cultural pessimism shared by many Germans, although he saw in politicians chances to act against the tendencies of stagnation (see Weber 1909: 277-78).

The most original aspect is, however, Weber's methodological view of the politician as a person who is accustomed to arguing *in utramque partem* and able to weigh the political significance of moves in his argumentation. In this respect, the parliamentary politician marks an explicit contrast to the official, for 'ein Parlamentarier im Kampf der Parteien zu lernen vermag, die Tragweite des Wortes zu wägen' (Weber 1917: 187). In other words, Max Weber's rhetorical view of knowledge, based on the competition between perspectives without pre-given criteria of judgment, is reflected in his apology on behalf of the parliamentary politician as a person who has become accustomed to struggling, thinking in terms alternatives and judging political consequences. For Weber, the value of the parliamentary politician transcends the struggles between governments and oppositions and between regimes, including 'parliamentarism' in the technical sense.



The politician is the hero of the Weberian cultural criticism, of the distinctively rhetorical political culture that he defends.

In the context of 1917–1919, the critique of the anti-politicians was not only directed against right wing antiparliamentary writers, such as Sombart. Weber's critique also turned against the pro-political leftist *literati*, such as Ernst Toller, who admired Weber, but who did not understand the point of his defence of parliamentarism. Toller and other young admirers of Weber understood even less that in order to defend politics in a plausible manner you have to take a stand in favour of professional politicians.

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