Forging a Revolutionary Community Through Ritual:

Communist May Days in Weimar Germany, 1919-1924

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Abstract

This article examines German communists' efforts to construct a revolutionary political culture during the Weimar Republic. It focuses on May Day rituals from 1919 until 1924 as a window to the nascent political culture of the German Communist Party (KPD). Employing anthropological methods, this paper demonstrates how communists attempted to appropriate the historic labour holiday and refashion it into 'fighting day' (*Kampftag*) by promoting a set of militant symbolic practices designed to forge a revolutionary community. By presenting themselves as a disciplined mass, celebrants played key roles in the militant dramaturgy, resulting in both an inward political conversion and an outward public display of revolutionary commitment.

Keywords: May Day, communism, political culture, Weimar Republic

Introduction

'With clenched fists and grinding teeth, the workers assemble once again on May First. This certainly is not going to be a holiday. It is not for pleasure or dilly-dallying around'.[1] With these words, communist leader Paul Frölich summed up the German Communist Party's (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) view on the international working-class holiday. It was a 'fighting day', a *Kampftag* – a day when communists were to parade their revolutionary stripes boldly in public. By advocating a militant demonstration, Frölich echoed calls for revolutionary protest that dated back to the labour holiday's founding in the 1840s. Indeed, in Germany as elsewhere, May Day had had a long history of radical protest. At the same time, however, many labour activists in interwar Germany preferred a festive May Day, a celebratory holiday for the entire working-class family, filled with choral performances, gymnastic demonstrations, dancing, and beer drinking.[2]

The communist May Day was born in an epoch of political strife. The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) came into existence on the heels of Germany's defeat in the First World War. In October 1918, political turmoil erupted in a number of cities, culminating in the November Revolution on 8-9 November and the abdication of the Kaiser. In July 1919, the new government, harboured in the city of Weimar to escape revolutionary fire, promulgated a constitution and officially established the Republic. Nonetheless, violent revolutionary upheaval persisted through 1923. The far right launched failed coups: In March 1920, Wolfgang Kapp and Walther von Lüttwitz led paramilitaries in the so-called Kapp Putsch in Berlin, and on 8-9 November 1923, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*, NSDAP, Nazi Party) attempted its coup d'état in Munich. The far left also engaged in revolutionary activity in the first years of the Weimar Republic. In January 1919, the newly founded KPD launched its Spartacist Uprising in Berlin, meanwhile in Munich revolutionaries unsuccessfully struggled from November 1918 through May 1919 to establish a socialist republic. In March 1921, communists in Saxony spearheaded a failed revolutionary insurrection. Finally, in the midst of the severe economic, social, and political turmoil of 1923, communists battled in Saxony, Thuringia, Hamburg, and Munich. It was not until 1924 that the unrest subsided, and Germany entered an era of relative social, economic, and political stability, lasting through 1929.

This article examines communist culture in the first years of the Weimar Republic to investigate how communists constructed a political movement and culture to rally sympathisers to the communist movement and to distance themselves from their former political allies in the German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD). It focuses on communist May Day rituals from 1919 until 1924 as a window into the KPD's nascent political culture. As the consummate cultural expression of working-class politics, May Day marked the liturgical high-point of the labour calendar. An examination of communist May Day rituals, symbols, and discourses in the early years of the Weimar Republic sheds light not only on how communists attempted to appropriate this holiday, but also on how they refashioned an array of cultural practices to cultivate a new revolutionary community amongst May Day celebrants during an era of acute political instability.

In the 1970s and 1980s, May Day was the subject of significant scholarly attention, but by the 1990s, it had fallen off most historians' agendas. As the field increasingly studied the historical record through discursive and cultural practices beginning in the mid-1980s, labour's high holiday was largely

ignored.[3] Employing anthropological methods, this article recasts the history of the communist movement during the first years of the Weimar Republic by examining the birth of its political culture through the lens of May Day rituals. Essential to this inquiry are approaches that investigate how May Day rituals established a sacred community or in the word of Victor Turner 'communitas',[4] how collective rites foster group identities,[5] and how rank-and-file communists played performative roles in May Day rituals.[6]

As heirs to the rich traditions of the German labour movement, Weimar communists built a political culture that relied heavily upon pre-war socialist cultural precedents. Amongst the most meaningful was May Day. During the Weimar Republic, communists sought to appropriate 1 May to stir working-class passion and protest. Assuming leadership of May Day, they reasoned, would legitimise their movement by connecting it to the rich heritage of German labour. At the same time, communists distanced themselves from many pre-war labour symbolic practices, as they laid the foundation for a militant culture. Communist culture was to be a fighting culture. May Day was a '*Kampftag*', a revolutionary alternative to the SPD's parade of 'flowers and garlands'.[7] During the early years of the Weimar Republic, communist May Day ceremonies were stamped with a militant tone, evident in the rhetoric, symbols, and rituals unfurled on May Day. Participants played key roles in the dramaturgy. By presenting themselves as a disciplined mass alongside their comrades, they helped to forge a revolutionary community through ritual. At the same time, communist May Day observances were instrumental in effecting participants' political views. As they partook in the rituals, they publicly pronounced their commitment to revolutionary politics and working-class struggle.

May Day 1919

The Weimar Republic's first May Day was pivotal to the communist movement's construction of a martial political culture with a militant May Day. Already in 1919 communists instrumentalised the holiday to demonstrate their revolutionary potential and to denounce the SPD and the Weimar Republic itself. Decisive to the development of a militant communist May Day was the revolutionary struggle that took place in Bavaria following the collapse of the German Empire and the abdication of the Bavarian king, Ludwig III, in November 1918. Munich was overtaken by political unrest, which led to the establishment of a council movement under the leadership of playwright Ernst Toller of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, USPD)

on 7 April 1919. By 12 April, a more radical faction, composed primarily of communists, seized control of Munich and established the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Meanwhile, counter-revolutionary forces organised to quash the fledgling Republic. On 1-2 May, the Ehrhardt Brigade, a division of the right-wing Free Corps (*Freikorps*), battled the Bavarian Red Army, brutally suppressing the revolution with support of the SPD-led Munich government, which had retreated to Bamberg after the unrest had broken out. Deliberately attempting to avoid the creation of working-class martyrs on labour's high holiday, the counter-revolutionary forces intended to move in on Munich on 2 May.[8] However, after both sides executed hostages on 29-30 April, the counter-revolutionary forces rapidly descended on Munich on 1 May. The outcome was mass bloodshed, including the execution of over a thousand revolutionaries without trial.[9]

For communists, May First in Munich was a signpost of future revolutionary struggles. This was no workers' holiday; it was a day to mount the barricades, as described by the local KPD organ:

> The red flags do not blow on a day of joy; they blow in front of the battle lines of the working class. And our proletariat in Munich is again covered in the blood of its best, surrounded on all sides by the raging reaction….On May First, the Munich revolutionary proletariat made the highest sacrifice. As the harbinger of the Germans, of the international revolution, it [the Munich proletariat] springs forward in struggle, conscious of its holy obligation. World day of battle! To the trenches! In struggle and death for communism![10]

Although the Weimar government had recognised May Day as a national holiday in April 1919, seemingly representing a historic victory for the working classes, Weimar's first May Day ended tragically. Instead of celebrating the victories of the November Revolution, Germany's working classes were torn asunder.[11]

The crushing of the revolutionary movement in Bavaria was a decisive bellwether in the deepening breach that characterised the working-class movement during the Weimar Republic. Since the first days of the Great War, German labour, ostensibly united under the umbrella of the SPD, had begun to fracture. The evolving fissure, which Carl Schorske cogently narrated in the 1950s, was rooted in both theoretical disagreements about labour strategy and a pressing debate about support for the state's war effort.[12] The result of this discord was the exodus of the SPD's left wing, which founded two new political parties: the USPD in April 1917 and the

KPD in December 1918. For communists, the break with the SPD became incontrovertible during the Spartacist Uprising in January 1919, when the KPD's leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were assassinated. Communists pinned the murders on the SPD brass in Berlin, 'the henchmen of the Ebert-Scheidemann Government', and thereafter, they relentlessly denounced the SPD leadership, who had 'treacherously murdered two of our best'.[13] With the deaths of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, labour's schism was permanently cemented.

While ideological and political disputes undergirded the fragmentation of Germany's labour movement, the growing clash between social democrats and communists also played itself out on cultural terrains. Indeed, from diverging visions of a socialist utopia to competing iconographic repertoires, social democrats and communists increasingly cultivated two separate political identities, replete with a host of ideologically fraught symbols and rites that they paraded in public. May Day, in particular, came not only to reflect, but more importantly, to contribute to the deepening divide within German labour. While social democrats increasingly opted for sociability and festivity on May Day, communists saw it as an opportunity for militant protest. Labour activists were thus embroiled in a 'symbolic competition' on May Day, espousing a different set of ritualistic practices to win the hearts of workers on labour's 'high holiday'.[14]

These diverse perspectives about May Day were largely a reprise of a long-standing debate about the purpose and content of May Day that dated back to the end of the nineteenth century. Already in 1890, when German labour was granted the legal right of assembly with the lapsing of the Anti-Socialist Laws (*Sozialistengesetze*, 1878-1890), working-class leaders exercised caution on May Day. Asserting that mass protests and strikes would result in employer retaliation and political persecution, labour leaders called for open-air festivals, family excursions, and dances.[15] As May Day grew in popularity amongst the working classes in Wilhlemine Germany, many SPD and trade union leaders encouraged festivity over protest. They especially opposed demands for a mass strike, for they worried about employer retribution, and their apprehension was certainly warranted, as employers routinely fired, blacklisted, or locked out workers who struck on 1 May.[16] Fearing that participation in a militant demonstration would result in severe personal financial difficulties, many workers concurred that May Day observances should not aggressively confront employers.[17]

One of the most significant consequences of the calls to moderate the observances was an easing of the revolutionary tenor, as festivity came to dominate the staging of May Day during the Kaiserreich. May Day

increasingly took on a festive character, commencing with morning or afternoon marches or even leisurely strolls with marchers donning their Sunday best and red carnations or red paper roses and often parading in silence. May Day activities typically included sporting competitions, hiking, bicycle riding, and games. The climax of the day was an evening assembly in an enclosed room bedecked in working-class slogans. These gatherings usually featured performances by working-class choirs, musicians, agitprop theatre troupes, comedians, and gymnasts. Dancing, drinking, and evening fireworks often rounded out the rites. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, May Day came to resemble a folk festival for the entire working-class family, blending politics, socialising, entertainment, and festivity.[18]

The increasingly festive atmosphere of labour's antebellum May Day gatherings was a flashpoint for activists, however. While some preferred a tempered celebration, others charged that festivity was supplanting real activism on May Day.[19] Critiquing the celebratory character of some May Days, SPD leader Franz Mehring summed up the diverging views in 1901:

> While some see it [May Day] as a sharp and powerful weapon, others are much more modest in their demands for May Day. For them, it is little more than a refreshing day of rest, so to speak, a big family party or just a cosy coffee-klatch for the working class.[20]

Some rank-and-file activists agreed.[21] In 1890, for example, approximately 100,000 workers struck, defying labour leaders' calls for a more muted observance.[22] Robert Schmidt, a member of the General Commission of the Trade Unions, summed up their position in 1905: 'When we want to fight, we must decide it for ourselves and not the employer'.[23] By 1910, Rosa Luxemburg, one of the fiercest advocates for a militant protest on May Day, called for 'a powerful mass demonstration of the proletariat's unified revolutionary will'.[24]

During the First World War, May Day demonstrations grew increasingly militant. Bedecked with red carnations and carrying banners inscribed with revolutionary slogans, hundreds of thousands of workers participated in May Day protest marches, even when they had to be nominally disguised as leisurely promenades due to the banning of open-air demonstrations.[25] The increasing gravity of the wartime May Day observances was evident in Berlin in 1916 when a massive demonstration took place. One participant described the scene:

> As far as I can see, all the streets and side streets are full of surging, silently moving human beings; all moving in the direction where the

> May Day demonstration is to take place. These are men and women, mostly women. The men amongst them are mostly over fifty. Suddenly it becomes apparent to me that there are more children in the crowds than men and women together. As they march, I notice that I cannot see one in the crowd who has a smile on her or his face. Along the route no one is cheering them. I had never seen such immense crowds in the streets of Berlin ... The crowds move as though they are part of a funeral procession. They are all sad, very sad. I recognise a group of comrades in the crowd. I rush in and join them. Keep your mouth shut is the unwritten rule, and everyone seems to observe it strictly.

As the consummate expression of a radicalised working-class identity, such May Day processions represented a 'triumphal public act of the proletarian class' in which the streets 'had been re-conquered for the politics of the masses', explains Gottfried Korff.[26] Indeed, such mass demonstrations were a testament to the working classes' capacity to seize public space, signalling a symbolic occupation of public spaces for at least one day. The apex of the 1916 demonstration was the speech by Karl Liebknecht in which he denounced Germany's war effort:

> Workers, comrades, and you, women of the people, let not this festival of May, the second during the War, pass without protest against the Imperialist Slaughter. On the First of May, let millions of voices cry, "Down with the shameful crime of the extermination of peoples! Down with those responsible for the War!"[27]

Imploring the participants to condemn Germany's participation in the War, Liebknecht viewed May Day as an opportunity to confront the government overtly. Shortly after he concluded, the demonstration turned violent, with mounted guards armed with whips reportedly attacking the demonstrators. By the end of the day, Liebknecht had been arrested, and he would remain in prison for the duration of the War.

The different perspectives on the character of May Day observances resulted in a perennial debate about the nature of May Day that grew increasingly strident during the Weimar years. The controversy was fomented by the ideological competition that characterised the Weimar polity. Fusing uncompromising ideologies and mass politics with a bitter dispute within German labour, Weimar's working-class politics promoted conflicting political perspectives and practices that were exhibited on May Day. Such discord was already evident in April 1919 when the National

Assembly voted to make May Day a national holiday to represent the 'entire will of the nation [*des Volkes*]'.[28] As a ruling partner in national, state, and local governments, the SPD had a clear stake in Weimar's new political arrangement, and it sought to appropriate May Day for the Republic as a testament to national reconciliation after months of revolutionary turmoil. Extoling the fact that the eight-hour day had been widely instituted with the founding of the Weimar Republic, the Trade Union General Commission proclaimed in 1919, 'This year, May Day will be a victory celebration for the German workers'.[29] Consistent with their pre-war stance, SPD and trade union leaders advocated a holiday emptied of its revolutionary tenor in a move that signalled a rather blatant co-optation of the holiday for political ends. Wilhelm Keil, an SPD leader from Stuttgart, summed up the political positions on May Day 1919:

> What earlier had been a militant May Day – fought hard for, for decades, by many victims – now fell like ripe fruit into the workers' laps. And this great achievement was celebrated like a festival – no longer something for which to struggle. The battle amongst working-class brothers would not allow it to be otherwise. As a result, the demonstrations on May First took on the unique flavour of a national holiday.[30]

Thus, with the founding of the Weimar Republic and the integration of labour into the German polity, the necessity of protest on May Day had abated, and for many labour leaders, May Day 1919 provided the opportunity to celebrate a series of working-class victories. Standing in opposition, representatives from the KPD and the USPD voted against the institutionalisation of May Day as a national holiday.[31] For KPD leaders, a celebratory May Day was simply unseemly in the context of the violent struggles of 1918-19, and they denounced the SPD for 'celebrating May First on top of corpses', including those of Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and all those who died during the revolutionary fighting.[32] Not surprisingly, communists called for a day of protest in the radical tradition of German labour, and they opted out of the government-sponsored May Day observances, which they denounced as a 'farce'.[33]

Despite the mounting ideological divide between the KPD and the SPD, there were occasions when communists urged labour unity on May Day. During eras of social and political upheaval, such as the 1923 hyperinflation and after the onset of the Depression in 1930, KPD leaders, at least nominally, invited social democrats and unionists to join 'brotherly hands' on May Day in a 'common struggle to a common victory' of the working

classes.[34] It is reasonable to question KPD leaders' sincerity about joint action, as SPD and union leaders certainly did, for by May Day 1924, KPD leaders were already castigating SPD and union leaders as 'our worse enemy' due to their 'enormous treason' against the working classes.[35] One consequence of such antagonistic rhetoric was a growing divide within labour, including on May Day, as the two working-class parties held separate events with very different characters. Social democratic May Days were largely social and cultural celebrations for working-class families. SPD organisers emphasised the holiday's folk roots, carving out public space for dancing, singing, and drinking, while discouraging radical political activity.[36] Some SPD May Days even adopted bourgeois cultural forms with stanzas of Verdi and Wagner ringing throughout the gatherings.[37]

The Communist May Day

Emulating the more radical traditions of May Day protests during the Kaiserreich, communist May Days were generally more martial in nature than their Social Democratic counterparts. Communist May Day activities typically began in the late morning with a stream of closed-rank processions from proletarian neighbourhoods to a central location, usually an open-air public space in the inner city. Carrying pictures of revolutionary heroes, posters and banners inscribed with political slogans, red flags, and Soviet flags, workers, sometimes with their families, paraded through city streets, reciting revolutionary chants and songs in unison. Alongside the marchers were floats adorned with an array of communist symbols and slogans, and at the front of many of the parades were children's groups, marching together. Thousands, tens of thousands, and in some cities even hundreds of thousands of marchers converged in the city centre. The scene was a 'forest of flags and banners towering over the heads' of the masses.[38] The open-air demonstrations featured a variety of activities, including performances by musicians and working-class choirs. The highpoint was speeches by prominent KPD leaders, and the capstone to all May Day events was the collective singing of *The Internationale*. In many locales, communists also held evening ceremonies geared toward the entire working-class family and featuring speeches by party leaders. As they marched home, still often in disciplined formation, communists typically sang revolutionary songs on the streets.[39]

A few elements of communist May Day observances stand out. First, the processions from working-class boroughs to the main demonstration field were instrumental in preparing participants psychically for the mass

gathering. These processions functioned as 'rites of transition'. According to Arnold van Gennep, to gain *entrée* into the ritual domain, participants cross over a threshold through which they move into ritual space and time.[40] As workers took leave of the rhythms of everyday life through the ritual of the May Day neighbourhood parade, the processions served to move them from ordinary space and time to sacred space and time. Marchers left their everyday lives at home and entered the domain of the ritual, which had a self-transformative effect that created an anticipatory sense of excitement and prepared participants emotionally for the ritual's climax, which was the mass open-air gathering in the city centre.

The convergence of thousands of marchers in the city centre created a mass spectacle, and this mass itself was one of the communist May Day's most important symbols. In an effort to convey that the KPD enjoyed a mass following, party leaders orchestrated May Day rituals to showcase the cadre *en masse*. Rank-and-file communists, thus, were never merely spectators at the May Day events, for they were cast as essential performers in the rites. Since the 1890s, May Day observances had been shaped by the emerging age of mass politics, which was due in large measure to the growing practice of universal manhood suffrage in Western Europe. May Day thus was born in an epoch in which the electorate had significantly increased, and with this expansion came new political organisations and new political practices. As George Mosse maintains, the nineteenth century saw the birth of mass movements, which necessitated 'a new political style' to 'transform the crowd into a political force'.[41] Amongst the new political practices was the mass spectacle, which not only assembled disparate citizens into an ideological cohesive unit, but also called upon the masses to play key roles in the political dramaturgy. May Day marches provided the ideal rostrums to orchestrate the mass spectacle. Indeed, from the first labour May Days, participants themselves became ritualistic icons in the working-class theatre. Sporting their Sunday best and red flowers, they marched silently in step and sang in unison in a show of working-class fraternity. No wonder then that one socialist newspaper advocated the construction of viewing mounds that would allow the celebrants to observe the mass procession of which they were integral components.[42]

Weimar communists similarly constructed May Day activities to showcase the mass. Following the tradition of the pre-war labour movement, the KPD annually called for a massive show on May Day, such as this 1923 summoning of workers: 'On 1 May, you must prove through mass participation that you are ready and determined … to oppose your enemies'.[43] In many cities, the KPD did indeed assemble tens of thousands

and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people.[44] Descending upon the city centre, the masses were invoked as performers in a dramatic display of revolutionary power. In Berlin in 1921, for example, the mass huddled together on Alexanderplatz, as described by the KPD's central organ, *Die Rote Fahne*: 'Soon the large square was so overflowing that some of the parades had to go onto the neighbouring streets. A beautiful scene, a colourful mass with blood-red flags and banners'.[45]

Despite the emphasis on the mass as a single revolutionary body, communist May Day rituals were also choreographed to arouse individual celebrants' emotions. To transform the working classes into militant soldiers, communists reasoned, May Day celebrations should feature symbolic practices that unleash an outpouring of feelings. To this extent, communist May Days were consistent with pre-war labour rites that were replete with emotive rituals.[46] Sociological scholarship provides an explanation for the inclusion of emotionally laden symbolic practices in political culture. As David Kertzer explains, it is the 'dramatic character' of the ritual that brings about physiological changes, including the arousal of emotions. 'Ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us'.[47] This structuring of one's perceptions underscores the capacity of rituals to manage participants' emotions, and this managing of emotions through ritualistic practice is an operation of power. 'Emotional control is the real site of the exercise of power', as William Reddy asserts. Politics, in other words, is 'a process of determining who must repress as illegitimate' or 'who must foreground as valuable the feelings and desires that come up for them in given contexts and relationships'.[48]

Since the first labour May Days in the late nineteenth century, contemporaries had sought to construct a set of symbolic practices that would have a transcendental impact on participants. At the 1892 SPD Party Congress, Austrian leader Victor Adler spoke of the importance of imparting a 'religious feeling' at May Day events.[49] Scholars similarly underline the chiliastic features of May Day ritualistic practices during the Kaiserreich, as German labour sought to develop mass secular rites that represented an alternative to religious and nationalistic rituals. In doing so, labour paradoxically integrated quasi-sacral elements into the festivities to satisfy the cadre's desire to be members of a sacred community.[50] Of particular note was labour's language and iconography of the promise of a future socialist utopia, of deliverance, consummately represented by labour's prominent use of the rising sun imagery. May Day celebrations especially provided the ideal forums to project a better world, as its discourses and iconographies attempted to appeal to the cadre's longing for liberation.[51]

Communist May Days also provided opportunities to inspire celebrants to imagine a better socialist future. As August Thalheimer expressed in 1921, May Day offered the promise of a better world: 'With us, the new world order marches forward, and that is why the millions who don't want to perish in chaos will march with us'.[52] The prospect of a socialist paradise, however, was more than an abstract fantasy, for communists hailed the Soviet Union as a tangible alternative to capitalist society. In Russia, 'a new life, a new order is being built – the communist order', so described the KPD leadership on May Day 1921.[53] The characterisation of the Soviet Union as a communist utopia was a central May Day motif during the entire Weimar Republic, as reaffirmed by the Comintern in 1924.

> The Communist International shows you another way. Look at Russia. There, the majority of the people have shaken off the chains of bondage…. Take a look at May First in Russia. Proletarians of all countries! Communists throughout the entire world! On this day of proletarian-revolutionary reckoning, follow the well-travelled road and overcome the obstacles to reach our goals.[54]

Characterising the Soviet Union as a promised land, KPD leaders capitalised upon May Day to promise deliverance to the working classes. To this extent, the language of a better world after liberation from the 'chains of bondage' contained connotations of salvation, underscoring the sacral and emotive aspects of the communist May Day.

Communists' use of May Day observances to restructure celebrants' emotional worlds was especially prominent in the rituals to honour fallen comrades. During the early years of the Weimar Republic, dead comrades took centre stage on May Day. Looming over all of the fallen were Luxemburg and Liebknecht whom May Day orators eulogised as the premier martyrs of the communist movement. Celebrants also remembered the dead of the 1919 revolution in Munich. KPD leaders called on supporters to honour the 'victims of the revolution' on May Day so that they 'did not die in vain'.[55] The dead heroes were to function as archetypes in the communist pantheon, for they had sacrificed everything for the struggle of the working classes. In recognition of their fallen comrades, May Day celebrants were urged to pay homage to the heroes by preparing themselves likewise '[i]n battle and death for communism!'[56] Such language tapped into one of the founding myths of the communist movement and communist culture: namely, that the struggle for the communist promised land would necessitate sacrifice, consummately expressed by Eugen Leviné in in

the midst of the Munich Revolution: 'An honourable death and experience for the future is all we can salvage from the present situation'.[57]

Although it is reasonable to assume that celebrants' emotional apperceptions during the May Day rites varied considerably, it is also evident that the KPD exercised emotional and political control over participants through ritualistic practices in order to project the image of a disciplined political army. The rank and file did indeed learn and follow the communist script, for the same rituals, symbols, and languages appeared and reappeared in May Day observances across Germany. *Die Rote Fahne* described the impact of the discipline in 1923 when 500,000 people assembled in Berlin's *Lustgarten*: 'Berlin's workers marched in closed ranks, serious and disciplined to show the fascists that the red Berlin proletariat still lives, that it is determined to strike at the monarchist murdering gangs [who are] cruel to the core'.[58] The celebrants' performance of May Day ritualistic acts was decisive both to cultivate a regimented political community and to promote party discipline. To this extent, the KPD utilised cultural practices to teach members the correct political stance, and ample evidence exists to show that the celebrants readily sported uniforms, marched in cadence, and sang on cue on May Day, thus propagating revolutionary discipline themselves.

One of the most conspicuous ways that KPD leaders cultivated and projected a disciplined revolutionary cadre on May Day was through the promotion of wearing common attire. Since Germany's first working-class May Days in the 1890s, dress had been an integral component of the mass spectacle. To showcase a united collective identity, workers donned their Sunday best, labour badges, red handkerchiefs, and red carnations in imitation of the bourgeois dandy's use of flowers as accessories.[59] Throughout the Weimar years, KPD leaders likewise beseeched the cadre to continue the practice of sporting common clothing and emblems that represented revolutionary values. However, by the early year of the Weimar Republic, men's suits began to disappear on communist May Days, as the celebrants began to wear military-style clothing, including hats, trench coats, and boots. Such unified clothing underscored the fact that participants were hardly passive spectators on May Day; rather, they transformed themselves into disciplined revolutionary fighters, assuming prominent roles in the communist theatre.

Communists' emphasis on discipline reflected a long-standing tradition amongst labour activists of demanding self-control on May Day.[60] Influenced by military models, the pre-war SPD, for example, had called for 'sacred silence' during the May Day procession as a sign of its growing potency and political maturity.[61] KPD leaders similarly urged participants to conduct themselves with decorum and dignity on 1 May. Already in the

early 1920s, KPD leaders exhorted members to behave in a disciplined, militarised manner on May Day, as expressed by August Thalheimer: 'May First must be a day of military review for the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat in order to build new strength for the next struggle', he declared.[62] To project a serious revolutionary cadre, excessive alcohol consumption was especially discouraged. 'Down with alcohol! Above all, get rid of the beer glass from the fist of the proletarians!' party leaders urged. 'The struggle for the freedom of the proletariat, for his own cause, needs clear, sober heads'.[63] Criticising social democrats for hosting May Day celebrations filled with dancing and drinking, communists beseeched May Day marchers to exercise discipline and project seriousness as central motifs of the communist May Day dramaturgy.[64]

The many participatory rituals in the communist May Day underscore the ways in which ritual action was designed to effect celebrants' belief systems. Above all, leaders choreographed the rituals and managed participants' emotions in order to instil in them a sense of revolutionary class consciousness. For Arnold van Gennep, ritualistic practices are instrumental in effecting the personal conversions of the celebrants. 'Rites of transition', in which participants detach themselves from their former social positions, prompt celebrants to perform ritualistic tasks as essential steps in the conversion process.[65] Victor Adler, one of the most ardent proponents of a symbolic demonstration of proletarian power on May Day in the 1890s, understood the potency of rituals steeped in rousing content to bring about a transcendental experience in which working-class values 'penetrated into the people's consciousness'.[66] Rosa Luxemburg similarly saw the capacity of a mass May Day demonstration to effect participants' political views. In 1910, she argued that 'the right to street demonstrations … should and must be fully exploited as the most excellent means of gathering the masses together, shaking them up, enlightening them, fulfilling them with a fighting spirit'. This, she continued, was 'the best means to unfurl the power of the class-conscious working class before the eyes of the opponents'.[67]

Weimar communists largely concurred with their predecessors about the ability of symbolic action to foster class consciousness. By actively partaking in May Day participatory rituals, such as collective singing, celebrants ritualised expressions of working-class consciousness, and through such ritualised articulations, participants were either to undergo a political conversion or to recommit themselves to the revolutionary movement on the public rostrum. To highlight the political function of communist ritualistic verbal expressions, KPD leaders routinely invoked devotional language, as exemplified in this 1924 appeal by the KPD's youth

organisation: 'Demonstrate with us … with the hundreds of thousands, with the millions. [L]et this May Day demonstration be your vow to the revolution in which the communist youth fights ever more bravely'.[68] Calling on celebrants to pledge themselves to revolutionary struggle alongside their fellow comrades, KPD leaders fashioned May Day practices as sacral oath ceremonies in which ritual subjects dedicated themselves to revolution publicly, with the intention of affecting celebrants' political consciousness.

The inculcation of political ideology through ritual action was not merely an intellectual exercise, however. Indeed, symbolic practices, particularly ones that called on participants to express themselves verbally, such as songs and cries that they uttered in unison, were designed to provoke deep emotional responses. To this extent, these ritualistic expressions were, to use William Reddy's term, 'emotives', 'instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, [or] intensifying emotions', which have a self-transformative capacity.[69] Communist May Day rituals were choreographed to stir political passions in order to intensify participants' feelings, especially feelings of class belonging and revolutionary fraternity. Prodding celebrants to showcase their political stripes on May Day through ritualistic expressions, KPD leaders attempted to engineer a political metamorphosis in which participants refashioned themselves into committed communist soldiers, effecting both an inward emotional conversion and an outward public display of the faith.

Such emotives of revolutionary commitment not only served to instil in celebrants a certain political consciousness, but they also helped to foster revolutionary solidarity. By gathering together thousands of people in a common public space in support of a revolutionary platform and convincing participants to perform revolutionary rituals, the communist movement nurtured a revolutionary community through symbolic practices. Scholars have long noted the importance of collective rites in the cultivation of group identity. Over one hundred years ago, Émile Durkheim proposed that collective rituals, particularly religious rites, serve to renew commitment to a community:

> There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which makes its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiment; hence come

ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies . . .[70]

While Durkheim focused on religious practices, he also acknowledged that secular rituals possessed the capacity to stabilise a community and reaffirm celebrants' commitment to the community and its political values.[71] Collective ritual practices, in other words, help to forge an *esprit de corps*, as David Kertzer explains: 'Ritual activity is not simply one possible way of creating group solidarity; it is a necessary way. Only by periodically assembling together and jointly participating in such symbolic action can the collective ideas and sentiments be propagated'.[72] For Victor Turner, symbolic activities establish a sacred community or 'communitas' – more precisely 'an ideological communitas' that offers 'a utopian blueprint for the reform of society'. Critical to creating a sacred community are rituals that guide participants to withdraw symbolically from the 'mainstream' and to 'seek the glow of the communitas amongst those with whom they share some cultural … feature [which] they take to be their most single mark of identity'.[73]

Since the end of the nineteenth century, socialist May Day observances had been instruments in building a working-class community that stood in opposition to the bourgeois order. Parading alongside their comrades in sacred silence, German workers showed themselves to be a united community in the public sphere on May Day. This demonstration of working-class fraternity was an indispensible component of the May Day ritual, for it helped to integrate celebrants into the socialist community.[74]

Weimar communists continued the tradition of fashioning May Day into a demonstration of revolutionary solidarity. Already in May 1919, the KPD called on workers to demonstrate on May Day in order 'to save Germany, to save the revolution; then you save yourself, then you save your brothers; then unite with all of your brothers around the world'.[75] The communist rhetoric of solidarity was reinforced on May Day with a host of participatory rituals designed to cultivate a sacred community. Amongst the most important were the wearing of common attire and communist emblems, marching in closed ranks, singing in unison, and collectively chanting revolutionary cries. The impact of the cultivation of solidarity through ritual was evident in Berlin in 1923, when, according to *Die Rote Fahne*, 25,000 men marching in lockstep in a communist *Hundertschaften* brigade and all donning red armbands joined with 500,000 other demonstrators at the *Lustgarten*.

> These were not workers in suits, demonstrating on 1 May quietly and nicely (*gemütlich*) according to tradition or party discipline. Despite the mass, these were not the unorganised in a line surrendering. These

> were workers who understand the danger of fascism, who are ready to resist the fascist assault on workers, and who know that only with unity and organization can the working class head off the [fascist] danger and bring about the victory of the proletariat.[76]

Through ritual action, including wearing similar attire and marching in closed ranks as a single revolutionary force, these men were transformed into communist soldiers, presenting themselves as part of a revolutionary community. By partaking in such rites, these men publicly articulated their commitment to the communist brotherhood, thus creating a common bond.

The Communist *Kampftag*

Invoking an array of belligerent languages and rituals, communists fashioned May Day into a militant day of protest to build a revolutionary community through joint struggle. For centuries, May Day had been associated with conflict, especially the contest between the seasons, winter and summer. During the Kaiserreich, class struggle took centre stage in socialist May Day rhetoric. As Elizabeth Harvey maintains, the fashioning of the holiday into a day of international working-class revolution was May Day's 'most essential chartering myth'.[77] Asserting that they had inherited the mantle of revolutionary struggle from the pre-war labour movement, Weimar communists made working-class struggle the centrepiece of the communist cultural liturgy, and they called on workers to flaunt their revolutionary stripes on May Day. The events of 1919, particularly the quelling of the Sparticist Uprising and the Munich Revolution along with the assassinations of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, provoked communists into constructing May Day into an occasion for militant protest. 'Keep it [May Day] as a day of struggle against the bourgeoisie and its henchmen', *Die Rote Fahne* urged. 'Keep it was a day of struggle for the German revolution, for world revolution'.[78] Such rhetoric was re-invoked the following year. 'On 1 May, the Communist Party calls German workers together, not to a victory party because first a complete victory must first be achieved through struggle'. Instead, *Die Rote Fahne* called on workers to assemble on May Day as a 'revolutionary army, armed and ready for the new decisive battle'.[79] According to communist logic, only through struggle could the working classes achieve liberation, as expressed in this 1921 appeal by the KPD leadership:

> Workingmen and workingwomen! You have the choice either to slowly

> be strangled in the arms of the German and Entente bourgeoisie or to fight your way out of this two-fold exploitation and oppression. If you stand together with the revolutionary vanguard, if you unite together in battle against poverty and oppression in a revolutionary resolute front against capitalism, you are strong enough to pave the road to freedom.[80]

Imploring workers to fight together against exploitation and oppression in order to attain liberation, such pleas were intended to tie the communist May Day to the radical traditions of mass protest on May Day.

The KPD's characterisation of May Day as a day of struggle underscored the fact that the communist May Day was to be a fighting day (*Kampftag*) – a day of militant protest in which celebrants were to make an aggressive mass public display of their commitment to revolutionary struggle. By portraying May Day as a 'fighting day', KPD leaders not only attempted to incite the rank and file to militant protest, but they also sought to draw a categorical distinction between the communist May Day and its social democratic counterpart. While the communist May Day was to be a 'fighting day' in the radical tradition working-class struggle, KPD leaders berated SPD leaders for hosting a 'social-democratic May Day stroll', complete with men wearing 'coattails'.[81] SPD May Days, accordingly, were 'holidays' filled with dancing and drinking, so charged communists.[82]

In their advocacy of militant protest, communists invoked labour's core historic demand on May Day: namely, the eight-hour workday. Tapping into the long tradition of advancing the eight-hour workday on May Day through mass protest marches and strikes, Weimar communists attempted to link their political agenda to the heritage of both the German and international labour movements by fomenting radicalism on May Day.[83] At the birth of the Weimar Republic, German employers had widely recognised the eight-hour workday.[84] However, on the heels of the 1923 hyperinflation, the eight-hour day began to be eroded as business owners challenged a host of labour agreements to which they had acquiesced under revolutionary fire. As a consequence, by 1924 achieving the eight-hour workday topped the communist agenda once again.[85] KPD leader Paul Frölich summed up the party's stance in the days leading up to May Day 1924: 'The eight-hour day . . . was for us proof that we were on the march. It was the statement that we had removed the enemy. . . . The eight-hour day was taken from us and millions of us are without work, without wages, without a prospect for work and wages, and because of this, the brutal slavery of the workhouse threatens [us]'.[86] Advocating the eight-hour workday, which had been labour's preeminent demand since the days of the Second

International (1889-1916), Weimar communists sought to link their vision of May Day to labour's historic battles. The eight-hour workday, in other words, was a tool to legitimise the communist movement and to summon sympathisers to mass protest on May Day. By challenging the demise of the eight-hour workday through a militant demonstration, communists hoped to stoke working-class struggle on May Day.

Complementing the promotion of a mass strike for the eight-hour workday was communist rhetoric that called on participants to demonstrate *en masse* on May Day. In the days leading up to May First, party publications were filled with incessant calls for militant protest. The communist May Day was to be a day to 'exhibit the revolutionary army, the arming for the new and decisive battle', declared *Die Rote Fahne* in 1920.[87] May First was to 'be a day of military review … for the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat to build new strength for the next struggle', so implored August Thalheimer in 1921. The 'strongest troops' were to man 'their posts' in order to signal to the bourgeoisie that '[w]e are coming again even stronger, more experienced, harder, battle tested, and our victory is certain…'[88] '[O]n May First you must demonstrate your readiness to fight to show the exploiters that they should not think of oppressing you in bondage', reiterated the party's leadership in 1924.[89] KPD iconography similarly promoted militancy on May Day, as seen in this sketch, published on the front page of the 1920 May First issue of *Die Rote Fahne*.

'Zum 1. Mai!' *Die Rote Fahne: Zentralorgan der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands*, 1 May 1920.

Shielded by a large red flag, the shirtless, muscular male communist soldier prepares to hurl a grenade at the capitalist enemy. He is the embodiment of

a self-assertive, powerful working class that is prepared to do battle on May Day.

The KPD's continuous characterisation of May Day as a day of mass protest and revolutionary struggle might have appeared merely as hackneyed bombast, particularly from 1925 to 1929 when the Weimar Republic enjoyed relative social and political stability. However, the continuous repetition of bellicose rhetoric, already prominent in KPD propaganda in the first years of the Weimar Republic, laid the groundwork for violent protest when social conditions were not as favourable. Analogous to the pre-war labour movement's language of working-class struggle, Weimar communists' militant discursive repertoire functioned as something more than hyperbole, for it did indeed cultivate a militant political culture that promoted violence. Thus, in 1924 when a number of municipalities banned open-air May Day demonstrations, numerous communists protested in defiance, and some of these protests turned violent. Demonstrations in Berlin and Saarbrücken, for instance, resulted in confrontations with the police in which protestors were both injured and arrested. In Hindenburg, Königsberg, and Gelsenkirchen, May Day demonstrations similarly resulted in clashes with the police, but these also ended with the deaths of a number of demonstrators.[90]

Such militancy bubbled up again in the final years of the Weimar Republic, culminating in 'Bloody May' (*Blutmai*) in 1929. Defying a ban on open-air demonstrations issued by the SPD Police President Karl Friedrich Zörgiebel in December 1928, activists took to the streets in Berlin's working-class districts Neukölln and Wedding on 1 May. The police responded by declaring a state of siege and putting down the demonstrations with substantial force, leaving approximately 32 dead and 194 wounded after three days of battle. This event marked the fiercest street fighting in Berlin since 1919.[91] Although the KPD did not organise this protest, communists saw May Day 1929 as a turning point. As expressed by Paul Frölich, 'The bloody events of May cannot remain without consequences. The offensive of the social democratic leadership against revolutionary organisations is a preamble to a new political era'.[92] The KPD's rank and file echoed Frölich's words: 'The 33 dead raise themselves from the grave before your eyes and indict the social democratic hirelings of the capitalists. 33 dead was the price for the proletariat not having the right to demonstrate on 1 May. In 1929, the demonstrating proletariat were left to be shot down. They call on us in 1930 to demonstrate without shame'.[93] One of the consequences of May Day 1929 was the radicalisation of communists and sympathisers, and this radicalisation was often carried out on cultural terrains, including on May Day. This photograph from the 1931 May Day demonstration

in Berlin displays militant, uniformed male antifascist fighters with raised fists, marching and singing in martial formation.

Antifascist men demonstrating in Berlin on Bülowplatz on 1 May 1931. (SAPMO-BA, Berlin, Zentrales Parteiarchiv, Bild Y1-11838).

Aggressive in their stance, the young men convey that they are revolutionary soldiers. From the caps on their heads to their jackboots, they embody the militant communist hero of late Weimar who seizes the street on May Day in a powerful display of revolutionary commitment. Underlining such militant masculine visual representations was the belligerent public language of the male troops. Typical of this rhetoric was the *Rot Front der Jung Prolet*'s response to the murders of five Communist Youths in Berlin in 1930: 'We will answer these murders with "Revenge"! We will find the murderers of our young comrades and we will avenge their deaths'.[94] Certainly Germany's deteriorating economic, social, and political conditions in the early 1930s contributed the escalating radicalism on both the far left and far right. However, communist radicalism was also informed, in part, by a legacy of militant rhetoric and ritual that shaped not only its political agenda, but also its political culture, especially on May Day. In other words, when communists took to the barricades in the early 1930s, battling Nazis and other foes nearly every night in deadly confrontations,

they tapped into a history of militancy that had been etched in communist consciousness already in the early years of the Weimar Republic. Even after the establishment of the Third Reich in January 1933, KPD leaders called on supporters to mass protest in the radical tradition of the working-class May Day:

> On 1 May 1933, the German proletariat must prove that it is not defeated, that it does not stand behind the blood-stained swastika flag, that it remains true to the historic legend of the international workers' day of struggle, that the political mass strike and a new class struggle start to be built with mass demonstrations on 1 May, that it is ready to march for the liberation of its class, for world revolution.[95]

Conclusion

In 1925, the national leadership of the Young Spartakus League (*Jung Spartakus Bund*, JSB) called on parents to bring their children to the communist May Day events: 'Working-class parents, make sure that your children don't go to school on 1 May, but demonstrate together with you. The children want to be there when the workers take to the street. The children, too, want to carry the red flag'.[96] With these words, the KPD signalled a significant shift in its overall organisation and its approach to May Day. Specifically, as Germany entered an era of relative stability after the nearly continuous political, social, and economic upheavals of the early Weimar Republic, the communist movement manoeuvred to respond to the changing environment. The time for revolution had waned, and as a result, the KPD reorganised itself. Amongst the most significant changes was an organisational overhaul known as 'Into the Masses' (*Heran an die Massen*), which was designed to transform the KPD from a revolutionary party, dominated by militant male cadre, into a mass movement. At the heart of this shift was the creation of a host of ancillary organisations designed to broaden the party's appeal. The KPD sought to attract all members of the working-class family by sponsoring an array of social organisations for fathers, mothers, and children, and inviting children to the May Day events was an integral tactic of the new orientation.[97]

One consequence of this strategic shift was a dampening of militancy in the communist movement and its culture from 1925 to 1929. To appeal to women and to inculcate communist values into the next generation, the KPD softened its militant rhetoric and organisation. As the *grande dame* of Weimar communism, Clara Zetkin, maintained in 1926, a militaristic

orientation did not appeal to the majority of working-class women.[98] The party's new orientation influenced the character of the communist May Day, at least for the time being. While KPD May Day rhetoric continued to stress the urgency of revolutionary struggle, in practice, communist May Day events came to resemble the festive celebrations of the SPD. However, after the 'Bloody May' of 1929 and the onset of the Depression in 1930, the communist May Day returned to its militant roots, as the KPD called on the working classes to join together in closed ranks in a show of revolutionary commitment. In doing so, communists reactivated the May Day rituals and languages that were born during the first wave of revolutionary struggle in the early years of the Weimar Republic. Indeed, the original communist May Days provided later communists with a repertoire of militant rites and rhetoric that were once again unleashed in the final years of the Republic.

Notes

1 Paul Frölich, 'An diesem 1. Mai', *Sozialistische Republik*, 30 April 1924. (Hereafter *SR*).

2 On the history of May Day, see Udo Achten, *Illustrierte Geschichte des Ersten Mai*, Oberhausen, 1979; Udo Achten, *Zum Lichte Empor: Mai-Festzeitungen der Sozialdemokratie 1891-1914*, Bonn, 1980; Ulrich Borsdorf, et al., 'Germany 1890/91', in Andrea Panaccione, ed., *The Memory of May Day: An Iconographic History of the Origins and Implanting of a Workers' Holiday*, Venice, 1989, pp225-244; Horst Dieter Braun, et al., eds,*Vergangene Zukunft: Mutationen eines Feiertages*, Berlin, 1992; Horst Dieter Braun and Hanns-Albrecht Schwarz, 'Warum der Erste Mai am 2. Mai gefeiert wird. Überlegungen zur Zeitlichkeit eines Feiertages', in Horst Dieter Braun and Hans-Albrecht Schwarz, eds, *100 Jahre Erster Mai. Beiträge und Projekte zur Geschichte der Maifeiern in Deutschland*, Berlin, 1989, pp11-36; Maurice Dommanget, *Histoire du Premier Mai*, Paris, 1953; Philip S. Foner, *May Day*, New York, 1986; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1917', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1992, pp263-307, esp. 283-286; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour*, London, 1987, pp76-79; Walter Köpping, 'Der 1. Mai im Spiegel der deutschen Arbeiterdichtung', *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte,* vol. 16, 1965, pp276-283; Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labour in Imperial Germany*, New York, 1985, esp. pp99-101; George L. Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich*, New York, 1975, pp164-169; André Rossel, *Premier Mai. 90 ans de lutte populaire dans le monde*, Paris, 1977; Dieter Schuster, *Zur Geschichte des 1. Mai in Deutschland*, Dusseldorf, 1991.

3 May Day was the topic of a conference in West Berlin in spring 1989. See Horst Dieter Braun, 'A Hundred Years of the First of May: Projects on the History of May Day Celebration in Germany: A Conference Report', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 25, no. 2, June 1989, pp201-207. More recent studies that focus on May Day rituals include Beatrix Bouvier, 'Es wird kommen der Mai . . '. Zur Ikonographie des Arbeitermai im Kaiserreich', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 33, 1993, pp570-585; Peter Friedemann, 'Mit wem zog die neue Zeit? Maidemonstrationen am Ende der Weimarer Republik aus regionalgeschichtlicher Perspektive', in Bernd Jürgen Warneken, ed., *Massenmedium Straße. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Demonstration*, Frankfurt/M, 1991, pp182-201; Gottfried Korff, 'Bemerkungen zur Symbolgeschichte des 1. Mai', in Braun and Schwarz, *100 Jahre Erster Mai*, pp85-103; Gottfried Korff, 'Rote Fahnen und geballte Faust. Zur Symbolik der Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik', in Peter Assion, ed., *Transformation der Arbeiterkultur*, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde. Kommission 'Arbeiterkultur'. Arbeitstagung 1985*, Marburg 1986, pp137-148; Herbert Reiter, 'The First of May in Germany and Italy', in Abby Peterson and Herbert Reiter, eds, *The Ritual of May Day in Western Europe: Past, Present and Future*, New York, 2016, pp31-74.

4 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), Ithaca NY, 1982, esp. pp96-97.

5 Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (1915), New York, 2008, esp. p427; David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, New Haven CT, 1988, esp. p62.

6 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1909), Chicago IL, 1969, esp. pp10-15.

7 'Der 1. Mai in Köln', *SR*, 2 May 1923.

8 Alan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918-1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic*, Princeton NJ, 1965, p329.

9 On the 1918/19 revolutionary movement in Bavaria, see Hans Beyer, *Die Revolution in Bayern, 1918/19*, Berlin, 1988; Hans Beyer, *Von der Novemberrevolution zur Räterepublik in München*, Berlin, 1957; Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria*; Richard Grunberger, *The Red Rising in Bavaria*, New York, 1973.

10 "Weltfeiertag! Weltkampftag!" *Münchener Rote Fahne: Organ für das werktätigen Volk in Stand und Land*, 30 April 1919.

11 See Hanns-Albrecht Schwarz, 'Es war wie am Totensonntag 1919: Der 1. Mai ist Feiertag', in Braun et al., *Vergangene Zukunft*, esp. p87.

12 Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (1955), Cambridge, 1983. See also Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (1952), New York, 1962.

13 Die Zentrale der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschland (Spartakusbund), leaflet

'Karl Leibknecht und Rosa Luxemburg ermordet!' n.d. (ca. January 1919), Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR im Bundesarchiv (hereafter SAPMO-BA): RY1 I 2/8/2; Das Exekutivkomitee der Kommunistischen Jugendinternationale, 'Rüstet zum Gedächtnistag von Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg!' *SR*, 3 January 1924.

14 Korff, 'Bemerkungen zur Symbolgeschichte des 1. Mai', pp91-92. See also Korff, 'Rote Fahnen und geballte Faust', p98.

15 See August Bebel's letter to Friedrich Engels, 31 March 1890, in August Bebel, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, The Hague, 1965, pp384-386, esp. p384; Friedrich Engels, 'Letter to Sorge', 19 April 1890, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Letters to Americans 1848-1895: A Selection*, New York, 1953, pp229-232. On May Day 1890, see Ulrich Borsdorf et al., 'Germany 1890/91', pp226-227; Harvey, 'Mayday', pp1-3.

16 Bebel especially advocated this position. See Bebel, 'Die Maifeier und ihre Bedeutung', *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. 11, 1892/93, pp437-444. In 1905 employers locked out nearly 6,500 employees after May Day strikes, and in 1906 they locked out at least 32,000. Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 91.

17 Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protest to Socialist State* Princeton NJ, 1997, pp56-57.

18 Dommanget, *Histoire du Premier Mai*, p164; Foner, *May Day*, p71; Harvey, 'Mayday', pp208-209, 273-237; Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions', pp283-287; Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture*, pp100, 212-13; Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, pp169-170; Rossel, *Premier Mai*, p97.

19 Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, p77.

20 Franz Mehring, 'Ein dunkler Maitag, *Die Neue Zeit*, 1901/02, No. 2.

21 Harvey, 'Mayday', 192; Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 92. On the debates about the nature of May Day activities, esp. the question of a strike day, see esp. Braun and Schwarz, 'Warum der Erste Mai am 2. Mai gefeiert wird', pp15-24.

22 Mass strikes occurred in many cities, including Berlin, Bremen, Cologne, Dresden, Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg, and Leipzig. Borsdorf et al., 'Germany 1890/91', p227; Dommanget, *Histoire du Premier Mai*, p129; Foner, *May Day*, p47; Fricke, *Kleine Geschichte*, pp37-42; Harvey, 'Mayday', p176.

23 Quoted in Braun and Schwarz, 'Warum der Erste Mai am 2. Mai gefeiert wird', p23.

24 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Die Maifeier im Zeichen des Wahlrechtskampfes', *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung*, 20 April 1910.

25 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, pp28-29.

26 Korff, 'History as Symbols', p112.

27 Karl Liebknecht, 'The Future Belongs to the People', speech delivered on 1 May 1916.

28 Quoted in Fricke, *Kleine Geschichte*, p181.

29 Quoted in Köpping, 'Der 1. Mai', p281.

30 Wilhelm Keil, *Erlebnisse eines Sozialdemokraten*, vol. 2, Stuttgart, 1947, p160.
31 On the 1919 May Day debates, see DGB, *120 Jahre internationaler Kampf- und Feiertag der Arbeiterklasse in Erfurt*, Erfurter Freidenkerheft, no. 2, Erfurt, 2011, pp7-8; Schwarz, 'Es war wie am Totensonntag', pp71-75.
32 'Zum 1. Mai!', *Die Rote Fahne* (hereafter *RF*), 1 May 1919.
33 'Die Maifeier', *RF*, 2 May 1919.
34 'Das Echo aus den Betrieben', *SR*, 12 April 1923.
35 Kommunistische Jugend Deutschlands, 'Die revolutionäre Jugend und der 1. Mai', *SR*, 30 April 1924
36 Friedemann, 'Mit wem zog die neue Zeit?', p189; W. L. Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany: Between Tradition and Commitment*, New York, 1990, p198.
37 Korff, 'Rote Fahnen und geballte Faust', 100.
38 'Der Maiaufmarsch des kölner Proletariats', *SR*, 1 May 1924.
39 For descriptions of May Day activities, see, 'Sammlung nach der Schlacht!' *RF*, 2 May 1921; 'Auf zur Demonstration am 1. Mai!' *RF*, 29 April 1923; 'Der 1. Mai im Zeichen der Einheitsfront', *RF*, 2 May 1923; 'Der Maiaufmarsch des kölner Proletariats', *SR*, 1 May 1924; 'Der 1. Mai als Kampftag im Reich', *SR*, 1 May 1924; 'Maidemonstrationen im Aachener Gebiet', *SR*, 3 May 1924.
40 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p21.
41 Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses,* p4.
42 Ibid., p169.
43 'Auf zur Demonstration am 1. Mai!', *RF*, 29 April 1923
44 Communist-led demonstrations reached a highpoint in 1923. In Berlin, the KPD reported that the demonstrators totaled 500,000: 'Der 1. Mai im Zeichen der Einheitsfront', *RF*, 2 May 1923. In Cologne, the KPD organ reported that 40,000 people participated in the local May Day demonstration. 'Der 1. Mai in Köln', *SR*, 2 May 1923.
45 'Sammlung nach der Schlacht!', *RF*, 2 May 1921.
46 Hobsbawm*, Worlds of Labour*, p67.
47 Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, p10.
48 William M. Reddy, 'Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 28, June 1997, p335.
49 Harvey, 'Mayday', p189.
50 See Friedemann, 'Mit wem zog die neue Zeit?', pp184-185; Friedrich Giovanoli, *Die Maifeierbewegung*, Karlsruhe, 1925, pp114-118; Harvey, 'Mayday', pp189-193; Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions', p284; Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, pp33, 67; Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, p168.
51 Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions', p285.
52 August Thalheimer, 'Ein Tag der Heerschau', *SR*, 3 April 1921.
53 Die Zentrale der Vereinigten Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, 'Zum 1, Mai!', *SR*, 25 April 1921.
54 Das Exekutivkomitee der Kommunistischen Internationale, '1. Mai 1924', *SR*,

30 April 1924.
55 'Der 1. Mai in Köln', *SR*, 2 May 1923.
56 *Münchener Rote Fahne*, n.d.; quoted in Beyer, *Von der Novemberrevolution*, p132.
57 Rosa Leviné-Meyer, *Leviné: The Life of a Revolutionary*, Farnborough, 1973, p98.
58 'Der 1. Mai im Zeichen der Einheitsfront', *RF*, 2 May 1923.
59 On May Day clothing, see Fricke, *Kleine Geschichte*, p38-39; Harvey, 'Mayday', p216; Korff, 'Bemerkungen zur Symbolgeschichte des 1. Mai', p89-91; Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, p169.
60 Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, p76.
61 Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, pp167-169.
62 August Thalheimer, 'Ein Tag der Heerschau', *SR*, 30 April 1921.
63 'Ein ernstes Wort!', *SR*, 30 April 1921.
64 'Maidemonstrationen in Reich', *SR*, 3 May 1924.
65 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, pp10-15.
66 Adler in 1892, quoted in Harvey, 'Mayday', p188.
67 Luxemburg, 'Die Maifeier'.
68 Kommunistische Jugend Deutschlands, 'Die revolutionäre Jugend und der 1. Mai', *SR*, 30 April 1924.
69 Reddy, 'Against Constructionism', p331.
70 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p427.
71 Ibid., p428.
72 Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, p62.
73 Turner, 'Variations on the Theme of Liminality', pp46-47, 96-97.
74 Harvey, 'Mayday', pp368-369; Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions', p285.
75 'Zum 1. Mai!', *RF*, 1 May 1919.
76 'Der 1. Mai im Zeichen der Einheitsfront', *RF*, 2 May 1923.
77 Harvey, 'Mayday', p374.
78 'Zum 1. Mai!', *RF*, 1 May 1919.
79 'Zum 1. Mai!', *RF*, 1 May 1920.
80 Die Zentrale der Vereinigten Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, 'Zum 1. Mai!', *SR*, 25 April 1921.
81 'Der Maiaufmarsch des kölner Proletariats', *SR*, 1 May 1924.
82 'Maidemonstrationen im Aachener Gebiet', *SR*, 3 May 1924.
83 Köpping, 'Der 1. Mai', pp276-277.
84 In November 1918, employers and trade union leaders reached the Stinnes-Legien agreement, which laid the groundwork for cooperation between labour and business. Amongst the many outcomes of this agreement was the establishment of the eight-hour workday. See Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, New York, 1992, pp108-110.
85 Zentrale der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, 'Arbeitsruhe am 1. Mai!',

SR, 26 April 1924.

86 Paul Frölich, 'An diesem 1. Mai', *SR*, 30 April 1924.

87 'Zum 1. Mai!', *RF*, 1 May 1920.

88 August Thalheimer, 'Ein Tag der Heerschau', *SR*, 30 April 1921.

89 Zentrale der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, 'Arbeitsruhe am 1. Mai!' *SR*, 26 April 1924.

90 Open-air May Day demonstrations were banned in Halle, Remscheid, and Würselen. 'Der 1. Mai als Kampftag im Reich', *SR*, 1 May 1924; 'Zwei Kommunisten von der Polizei erschossen', *SR*, 1 May 1924.

91 On the events of May Day 1929 in Berlin, see Chris Bowlby, '*Blutmai* 1929: Police, Parties and Proletarians in a Berlin Confrontation', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 29, no. 1, January 1986, pp137-158; Thomas Kurz, *Blutmai. Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten im Brennpunkt der Berliner Ereignisse von 1929*, Bonn, 1988; Thomas Kurz, 'Arbeitermörder und Putschisten. Der Berliner "Blutmai" von 1929 als Kristallisationspunkt des Verhältnisses von KPD und SPD vor der Katastrophe', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 22, 1986, no. 3, pp297-317; Eve Rosenhaft, 'Working-Class Life and Working-Class Politics: Communists, Nazis and the State in the Battle for the Streets, Berlin 1928-1932', in Richard Bessel and E. J. Feuchtwanger, eds, *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, London, 1981, pp207-240; Léon Schirmann, *Blutmai Berlin 1929. Dichtungen und Wahrheit*, Berlin, 1991; Léon Schirmann, 'Neues zur Geschichte des Berliner Blutmai 1929', in Braun and Schwarz, *100 Jahre Erster Mai*, pp43-55; Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic 1918-1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War* (2001), New York, 2012, pp202-204; Pamela E. Swett, *Neighbors and Enemies: The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin 1929-1933*, Cambridge, 2004, pp120-136.

92 Paul Frölich, *Der Berliner Blut-Mai*, Berlin, c.1929, p20.

93 '1. Mai Kampftag', *Roten Osram Lampe*, cell paper of the Osram factory in Berlin, n.d. (c. April 1930), SAPMO-BA: RY1 I 2/8/75.

94 *Rot Front der Jung Prolet*, May 1930, SAPMO-BA: RY1 I 2/8/65.

95 'Mai 1933 – Antifaschistischer Kampfmai!' Round letter from the Zentralstelle to Bezirk Mittelrhein, n.d. SAPMO-BA: RY1/I 3/21/44.

96 Zentrale, Jung-Spartakus-Bund, 'Arbeitereltern. Eure Kinder wollen mit euch am 1. Mai demonstrieren!', *SR*, 30 April 1925.

97 On the KPD's ancillary organizations, see Richard Harold Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht*, Columbia SC, 1997; Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany*, pp74-106; Hartmann Wunderer, *Arbeitervereine und Arbeiterparteien. Kultur- und Massenorganisationen in der Arbeiterbewegung* (1890-1933), Frankfurt/M, 1980.

98 'Ausführungen Geschenkes vor dem Plenum der Erweiterten Exekutive der Komintern', Sondernummer, *Inprekorr*, 16 May 1926.