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THE RUHR AND REVOLUTION:
THE ORIGIN AND COURSE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT
IN THE RHENISH-WESTPHALIAN INDUSTRIAL REGION,
1912-1919

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the
Australian National University

February 1975

This thesis is my own work.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jürgen Tampke', written in a cursive style.

Jürgen Tampke

Acknowledgements

This thesis was made possible by a Commonwealth Postgraduate Scholarship and a travel grant from the German Academic Exchange Service. I visited a large number of archives for the research work and received friendly assistance everywhere. I would thus like to thank the staff of the Hauptstaatsarchiv in Düsseldorf and the Staatsarchiv in Münster, the Zentrales Staatsarchiv in Potsdam and its historical division II in Merseburg, the International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis in Amsterdam, the Westphalian Economic Archive in Dortmund, the archive of the SPD in Bonn (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung), the archive of the DGB in Düsseldorf and the Coal Miners Union archive in Bochum as well as the Stadtarchive in Bochum, Bottrop, Castrop-Rauxel, Dorsten, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Hagen, Herne, Lünen, Mülheim, Oberhausen, Remscheid, Solingen, Wanne-Eickel, Witten and Wuppertal.

Distance still presents a considerable problem to the student of European History in Australia. It was overcome with the help of the Chifley Library of the Australian National University and the Stadt-und Landesbibliothek in Dortmund. I am grateful to the many people who gave advice, especially to my friend Chris Cunneen for his valuable assistance. Julie Barton did the typing most patiently.

The guidance of my supervisor Bruce Kent and the help of my wife Jane were indispensable.

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Abbreviations

<u>AfS</u>	<u>Archiv für Sozialgeschichte</u>
<u>AfSS</u>	<u>Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik</u>
AK	<u>Generalkommando des siebten Armeekorps</u> (Supreme Command of the seventh army corps)
ASL	Auxiliary Service League
<u>AZE</u>	<u>Arbeiter-Zeitung</u> , Essen
<u>BAS</u>	<u>Bergische Arbeiterstimme</u> , Solingen
<u>BAZ</u>	<u>Bergarbeiter-Zeitung</u> , Bochum
Bl.	Blatt (page)
<u>BVS</u>	<u>Bergische Volksstimme</u> , Remscheid
Diss.	Dissertation
DMV	<u>Deutscher Metallarbeiterverband</u> (German Metal Workers Union)
<u>GA</u>	<u>Generalanzeiger</u>
<u>GAZ</u>	<u>Gelsenkirchener Allgemeine Zeitung</u>
<u>GDK</u>	<u>Gewerkschaft (colliery) Deutscher Kaiser</u>
HSTAD	<u>Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf</u>
IdR	<u>Informationsstelle der Reichsregierung</u> (government information office)
IHK	<u>Industrie-und Handelskammer</u> (industry and trade chamber)
IISG	<u>Internationale Instituut fur Sozial Geschiedenes</u> (Amsterdam)
<u>IWK</u>	<u>Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung</u>
<u>JCH</u>	<u>Journal of Contemporary History</u>
<u>JMH</u>	<u>Journal of Modern History</u>
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German communist party)
LA	<u>Landratsamt</u>
<u>MB</u>	<u>Mitteilungsblatt</u> , Berlin

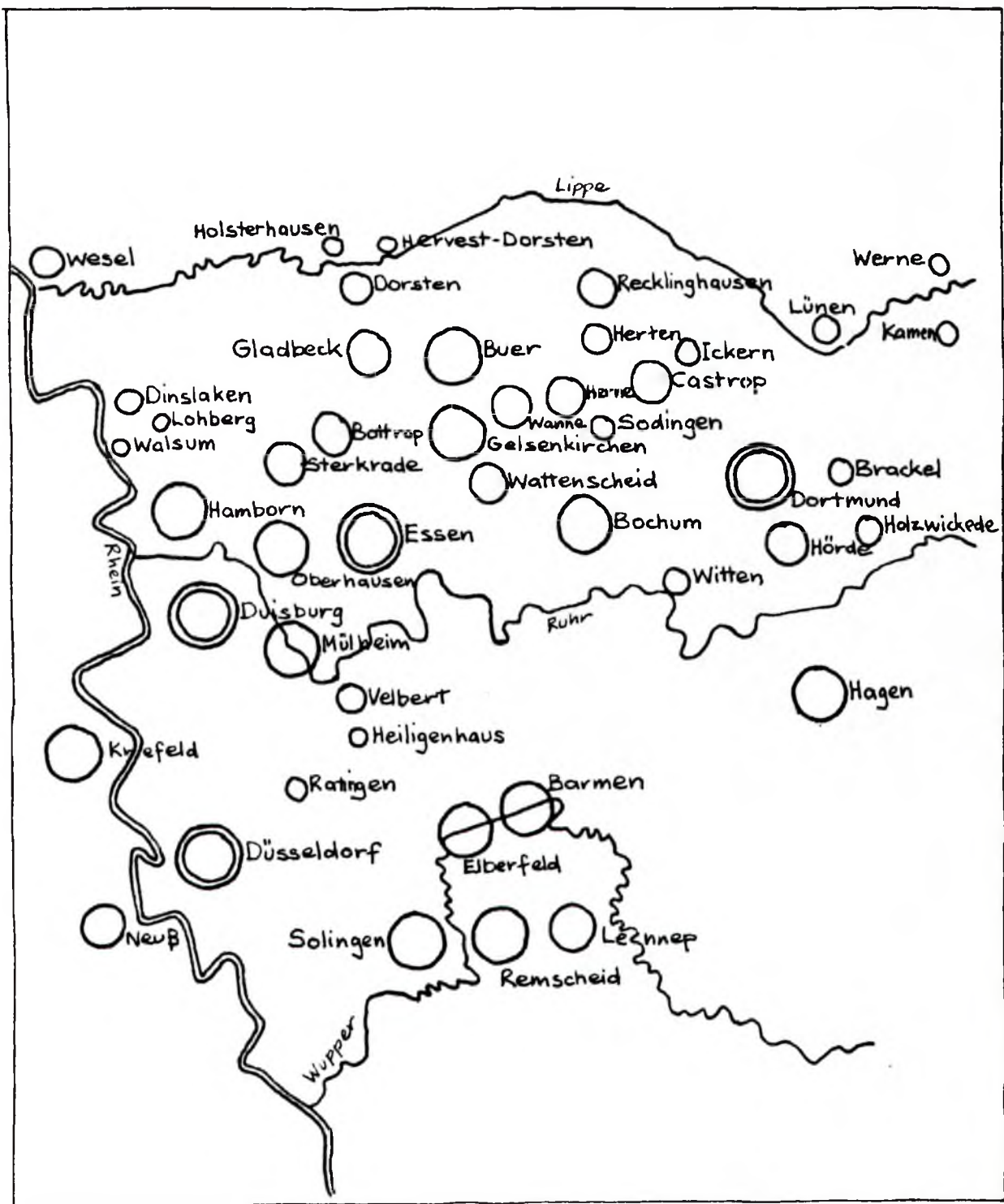
OBA	<u>Oberbergamt</u> (government mining office) (Dortmund)
RdI	<u>Reichsamt des Inneren</u> (office for the interior)
Reg.	<u>Regierung</u> (government)
RWZ	<u>Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung</u>
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
STA	<u>Stadtarchiv</u>
STAM	<u>Staatsarchiv</u> Münster
USP	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent German Social Democratic Party)
VBB	<u>Volksblatt</u> , Bochum
VfSW	<u>Vierteljahreshefte für Sozial-und Wirtschaftspolitik</u>
vol.	volume
VZD	<u>Volkszeitung</u> , Düsseldorf
WAVZ	<u>Westfälische-Allgemeine Volkszeitung</u> , Dortmund
WWA	<u>Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv</u> , Dortmund (Westphalian economic archive)
WZ	<u>Walder Zeitung</u>
ZfG	<u>Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft</u>
ZStA, Po	<u>Zentrales Staatsarchiv</u> , Potsdam
ZStA, M'burg	<u>Zentrales Staatsarchiv, Historische Abteilung II</u> , Merseburg

Note on Administrative Terms

In 1918/19 the Ruhr was part of the Prussian western provinces of Rhineland and Westphalia. At the lowest level of the Prussian administrative system was the Amt, an amalgamation of several parishes the head of which was the Amtsrat, and the town, headed by the Bürgermeister (Mayor). Several Ämter and towns combined to form the Kreis (Stadtkreis or Landkreis). The chief administrator of the Kreis was the Landrat. Grosstädte (cities with a population of more than 100,000) were taken out of the Kreis and became self-governing under the leadership of an Oberbürgermeister (lord mayor). Several Kreis and Grosstädte combined to form the Regierungsbezirk (government district) which was headed by the Regierungspräsident (Government President). The latter was responsible to the Oberpräsident (Supreme President) of the province and at the top of the pyramid was the Prussian Minister for the Interior.

Parallel to the administration was a system of representative institutions to which delegates were elected (Gemeinde or Stadtverordnetenversammlungen, Provinziallandtage). These assemblies had responsibility for important local policies and election to them was based on a class franchise system.

With the exception of the terms Mayor, Lord Mayor, government district and Government President, the German terms mentioned above are used throughout this thesis.



The Ruhr, 1919

INTRODUCTION AND ABSTRACT

For more than a decade there has been a strong revival of historical interest in the German revolution of 1918/19. Following a series of personal accounts given by participants shortly after the event¹ the November Revolution and its aftermath, the time of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, quickly fell into oblivion. The official attitude of the Weimar Republic was to play down the revolution. It was referred to as a period of general unrest such as might be expected to follow defeat in war and the overthrow of the monarchy.² The term revolution itself was avoided. It stood for something opposed to the German tradition of obedience and law and order. Historians, at best, credited the SPD leaders for having averted the grave bolshevist danger which was said, and believed, to have faced Germany at that time. This interpretation of the revolution survived until the 1960's.³ By this time, however, new literature on the November Revolution had emerged in the West as well as in East Germany.

Large scale research began earlier in East Germany than in the West.⁴ The first revolution in a fully industrialized country would

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1. For bibliographical summary: R. Rürup, "Problems of the German Revolution", JCH, 1968, vol.3, No.4, p.109.
 2. See for example the essays in O. Stollberg (ed.), Zehn Jahre Deutsche Geschichte (Berlin, 1928), especially the contribution by Oncken, pp.5-20 and Noske, pp.21-39.
 3. Rürup, "Problems", p.111. The notable exception in German historical writings is A. Rosenberg, The birth of the Weimar Republic (Oxford, 1931). See also the critical studies by Anglo-Saxon scholars: A.J. Berlau, The German Social Democratic Party 1914-1921 (New York, 1949), and R. Coper, Failure of a Revolution (London, 1955).
 4. For bibliography: L. Winckler, "Die Novemberrevolution in der Geschichtsschreibung der DDR", Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht, 1970, vol.21, No.4, pp.213-234. Quoted in A. Decker, "Die Novemberrevolution und die Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR", IWK, 1974, vol.10, No.3, p.269.

obviously attract Marxist historians. Its closeness in time to the Russian October Revolution encouraged comparisons and led to explanatory studies of why the German revolution had failed. Moreover, the linking of the November Revolution with the foundation of the Communist Party and its history to the present day is of vital importance in East Germany's historical tradition. In West Germany initial studies by Tormin, Sauer and Schieck¹ in the 1950's were followed by Kolb's work on the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and von Oertzen's analysis of the role of works councils.² Then came a long series of publications dealing with a whole range of topics associated with the revolution. Its causes were again investigated, as were its main events, its institutions and the reason for its failure. The question was asked to what extent the term revolution was applicable, and many regional studies were published.³ By placing more emphasis upon the orthodox or centrist wing of the USP these studies maintained that the revolution offered a genuine chance to alter existing inequalities and to lay the basis for a social, economic and constitutional reconstruction of German society. They argued that the SPD leaders failed to realize the revolution's potential and were in part to blame for exposing the Republic to the political extremism which proved so fatal for Weimar Germany. Of course, their failure in

-
1. W. Tormin, Zwischen Rätediktatur und sozialer Demokratie (Düsseldorf, 1954); W. Sauer, "Das Bündnis Ebert-Groener" (Diss. Freie Universität Berlin, 1957); H. Schieck, "Der Kampf um die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik nach dem Novemberumsturz 1918" (Diss. Heidelberg, 1958).
 2. E. Kolb, Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik 1918-19 (Düsseldorf, 1962); P. von Oertzen, Betriebsräte in der November Revolution (Düsseldorf, 1963).
 3. Rürup, "Problems", pp.111-112. A series of important articles by Western historians on the various topics has recently been published by E. Kolb (ed.), Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik (Köln, 1972).

1918/19 was not the sole cause of Hitler's rise to power. But substantial social reforms might have arrested the deep division in the labour movement which was one of the more important factors crippling Weimar Germany's political life.¹

The Rhenish-Westphalian Industrial Region² was one of the parts of Germany in which the conflict between the socialist parties was especially pronounced. A series of strikes, battles between paramilitary forces, uprisings and indeed civil wars bears witness to an inexorable shift to the extreme political left throughout the fourteen years of the Weimar Republic. By the time of Hitler's take-over the Ruhr had become a communist stronghold.

An industrial area of great importance, the Ruhr has frequently attracted the interest of historians covering the German Revolution of 1918/19. The first and so far the only major work on the period is the first volume of H. Spethmann's Zwölf Jahre Ruhrbergbau.³ Spethmann's work, which was commissioned by the Ruhr industrialists, is counter-balanced by three short articles by left-wing authors. Richard Müller, revolutionary shop steward and chairman of the executive of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, published in the second volume of his Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik a short account of the

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1. For discussion of a 'third way': v. Oertzen, Betriebsräte, pp.60-67; E. Kolb, "Räteideologie in der deutschen Revolution von 1918/19", in H. Neubauer (ed.), Deutschland und die Russische Revolution (Stuttgart, 1968); E. Matthias, Zwischen Räten und Geheimräten (Düsseldorf, 1970).
 2. The term Ruhr in this thesis refers to the core of the Rhenish-Westphalian Industrial Region that is to the coal-mining and steel-producing area between the rivers Ruhr and Lippe and a belt of steel manufacturing cities to the south of the river Ruhr, from Hagen in the east through Solingen and Remscheid to Düsseldorf in the west.
 3. Berlin, 1928, 5 vols.

revolutionary events in the Ruhr.¹ The Illustrierte Geschichte,² the official history of the KPD, also devotes a richly documented section to the Ruhr miners. The third, P. von Oertzen's "Die grossen Streiks der Ruhrbergarbeiterschaft im Frühjahr 1919"³ is ranked today among the masterpieces of the literature on the revolution. A political scientist rather than an historian, von Oertzen presents a compact analysis. He stresses the possibility that socialization based on the mines and works councils as attempted by the Essen Workers' and Soldiers' council would have provided the answer to the social problems of the Ruhr miners. His argument has been the subject of recent discussion. Von Oertzen's theory was questioned by Erhard Lucas, whose own conclusions about syndicalism in the November Revolution have in turn been challenged by Manfred Kluge.⁴ Besides these articles there have been two studies of the Free Coal Miners' Union (Verband der Bergarbeiter Deutschlands),⁵ an essay on the

1. Wien, 1925.

2. Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution (Berlin, 1970).

3. Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 1958, vol.6, pp.231-262.

4. E. Lucas, Ursachen und Verlauf der Bergarbeiterbewegung in Hamborn und im westlichen Ruhrgebiet 1918/19 (Duisburg, 1971); M. Kluge, "Essener Sozialisierungsbewegung und Volksbewegung im Rheinisch-Westfälischen Industriegebiet", IWK, 1972, vol.16, pp.55-65. For discussion of the recent controversy see below, chapter 8.

5. M. Dörnemann, "Die Politik des Verbandes der Bergarbeiter von der Novemberrevolution 1918 bis zum Osterputsch 1921 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisse im rheinisch-westfälischen Industriegebiet" (Diss. Würzburg, 1966); C. Del Tedesco, "Die Bergarbeiterbewegung im Ruhrgebiet im Schlussabschnitt des ersten Weltkrieges unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Politik des Verbandes der Bergarbeiter Deutschlands" (M.A. thesis, Marburg, 1971).

overthrow of the old regime in the Rhineland¹ and a series of local studies some of which are now being published under the auspices of R. Rürup.² Finally there is the East German dissertation by H. Walther and D. Engelmann on the development of left-wing extremism in the Ruhr during the war and the revolution.³ This thesis is based exclusively on documents of the East German archives, of which extensive use is made. But with no access to the local archives⁴ the study is limited, especially as far as the period November 1918 to April 1919 is concerned.

The primary aim of this thesis is to give a comprehensive account of the history of the revolutionary period in this part of Germany. It also seeks to explain why the Revolution took such a variable course in the Ruhr. Why did some places remain quiet throughout the period, why in others did opposition and strikes persist? How was it possible that within weeks of the collapse of the old order not only

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1. H. Metzmacher, "Novemberumsturz 1918 in der Rheinprovinz", Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein, 1967, vol.168/69, pp.135-265. The full dissertation "Novemberumsturz und Arbeiter und Soldatenräte 1918/19 im Rheinland" (Bonn, 1965) could not be traced at Bonn University. As it concentrates upon the whole Prussian Rhine-province, of which the western Ruhr is only a small part, it touches this thesis only marginally.
 2. For full list of local theses consult part II,3c of the bibliography below pp.335/337. The Rürup project includes extracts from the works of H. U Knies, "Die Vorgänge der November Revolution unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Geschehens in Elberfeld-Barmen" (Staatsexamensarbeit, 1966), I. Marssolek, "Die Revolutionären Ereignisse in Dortmund Ende 1918-Anfang 1919" (Staatsexamensarbeit Freie Universität, Berlin, 1971) and I. Steinisch's work on the Revolution in Mülheim. The latter thesis was not deposited at the Mülheim archive. According to the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung in Bonn all these works will be published in autumn 1975.
 3. H. Walther and D. Engelmann, Zur Linksentwicklung der Arbeiterbewegung im Rhein-Ruhrgebiet unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Herausbildung der USPD und der Entwicklung ihres linken Flügels vom Ausbruch des 1.Weltkrieges bis zum Heidelberger Parteitag der KPD und dem Leipziger Parteitag der USPD. 3 vol. (Diss. Leipzig, 1965).
 5. Walther/Engelmann, p.15.

left-wing socialists but also communists and syndicalists could present a challenge to the Majority Socialists and the state, which was based on ever growing support? This is not only to be explained by the course of events from November 1918 to April 1919. To find an answer to these questions it is necessary to place the revolution in its wider historical context and investigate a series of long-term trends which go back to the outbreak of the First World War and beyond. By doing so the study has moved into a field of history in which — as was stressed in some of the papers written for the recent international symposium on the industrial system and political development in the Weimar Republic — little has been done so far.¹ It is hoped that this work will contribute to knowledge about European urban and working class history.

The thesis describes in its first part the economic, social and political background of the region up to the coalminers' strike of 1912 and illustrates that by the time of this strike the seeds of division within the socialists movement which were to bear fruit in 1918/19 had already been sown. Part two examines how the war aggravated social hardship and accentuated the rift in the workers' party. The third part analyses the revolution during its most hopeful period between November 1918 and early January 1919. As a case study of the revolution under the leadership of the Majority Socialists the thesis looks at the eastern Ruhr. The quiescent course of the revolution here is contrasted with events in the Lower Rhine area, with its powerful working class tradition, where the left-wing USP led the revolution along much more radical lines. The thesis then turns to the background of the events in the trouble-stricken western Ruhr

1. Papers presented by R. Wheeler and H. Poor. (Unpublished)

and to the attempt by the Essen Workers' and Soldiers' Council to halt the rapidly growing polarization of the Ruhr's workforce. The collapse of the attempted socialization of the coal industry in Essen and the government's failure to introduce proposals aimed at altering the status quo in the coal industry and heavy industry set the stage for the final act, the confrontation between the disappointed workers and the government. The thesis investigates the details of the many tragic events which occurred in the region between February and April 1919 and shows how these clashes completed the division within the socialist movement and gave the extreme left the support of the majority of the working class.