# “To be rowdy and make a fuss”: Urban Protest and Street Violence in Germany, 1905 – 1923[1]

Jens-Uwe Guettel
University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

“Those who are aware that . . . peaceful marchers were clobbered for no reason whatsoever will agree that the police have only themselves to blame for the existing hatred.” In the context of violent encounters between protesters and police in Berlin from 1960s student protests through 1980s and 1990s May Day riots to today this statement may seem banal, but this commentary on Berlin riots actually dates all the way back to the year 1910.[2] The fact that it might have appeared

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**2** For an overview of such protests, see: “Die Moabiter Krawalle vor Gericht,” *Schwäbische Tagwacht* 6 (January 9, 1911); “Police Covered Up Truth behind Infamous Student Shooting,” *Spiegel International*, January 23, 2012, https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/new-probe-into-1967-killing-police-covered-up-truth-behind-infamous-student-shooting-a-810877.html; “May Day Mellows in Berlin,” *Spiegel International*, May 1, 2007, https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/20th-anniversary-of-kreuzberg-riots-may-day-mellows-in-berlin-a-480391.html; “Polizei leitet offenbar Ermittlung gegen Beamten ein,” *Spiegel Panorama*, August 1, 2024, https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/polizeigewalt-berliner-polizei-leitet-offenbar-ermittlung-gegen-beamten-ein-a-aa1416aa-06ef-4db7-bca7-bb810ef5cfb3; Kai Liesegang, Jonas Wahmkow, and Susanne Memarnia, “Protestbefreite Universität,“ *taz*, https://taz.de/Raeumung-eines-Camps-an-der-FU-Berlin/!6006162/; Robin Celikates, “‘Das sind Einschränkungen, die man sehr ernst nehmen muss,’” interview by Jonas Wintermantel, *Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg*, May 16, 2024, https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2024/05/berlin-interview-fu-protest-universitaet.html; Michael Hesse, “Politikwissenschaftler Kraushaar über Uni-Proteste: ‘Das hat nichts mit Antisemitismus zu tun,’” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, May 17, 2024, https://www.fr.de/kultur/gesellschaft/tun-politikwissenschaftler-kraushaar-ueber-uni-proteste-das-hat-nichts-mit-antisemitismus-zu-93067682.html.

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alongside much more recent reports of street violence indicates the persistent importance of violent protests in over a hundred years of German history. Commentators often use street violence to raise questions about social and political developments. In 2010, after violent demonstrations to stop an infrastructure project in Stuttgart, observers wondered whether a new segment of "angry citizens" had come into being, and in 2024, pundits took pro-Palestinian protests and street violence to indicate the renewed presence of anti-Semitism in Germany. Some commentators thus even saw the politics of street protests and riots as threatening Germany's democratic order and political norms. This article likewise considers the politics of street violence including in relation to antisemitism. However, it looks at these problems from a historical perspective and focuses on the years between 1905 and 1923, a time during which "Germans learned to demonstrate," as historians have argued. This historical perspective is relevant for our understanding of present-day violent street events as it reveals continuities of street violence across different historical periods and changing political orders. The following analysis therefore tracks street violence through two systems of government, the monarchical German Empire and the Weimar Republic, and three historical eras, the prewar period, World War I, and the early 1920s.[3]

**3** Archives used: Landesarchiv Berlin: LAB; Preußisches Geheimes Staatsarchiv: GSTA; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes: PAAA; Staatsarchiv Hamburg: StaH; Sächsisches Staatsarchiv: SSta. Title quote: LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 170, 171, 172; Philipp Gassert, *Bewegte Gesellschaft: Deutsche Protestgeschichte seit 1945* (Stuttgart, 2018), 12–13.

Before 1918, despite important participatory elements in its constitution, Germany was a monarchy, not a democracy. Turning out in the streets and publicly voicing political demands, whether for democratization, against militarism, or other political objectives, was not a readily accepted element of public life. Such demonstrations often turned violent and were perceived as threats to German monarchical order. In turn, the nationalist press regularly associated the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the only German party before 1918 that wanted the country to become a democracy, with this violence and fostering supposedly revolutionary protests. However, after the SPD became the main

party supportive of Germany's new democratic order following the revolutionary events of November 1918, Social Democrats themselves began to view occurrences of public protest and street violence as threats. On the morning of November 9, 1918, large-scale crowds brought the German Revolution to Berlin, and the chairman of the SPD, Philipp Scheidemann, proclaimed the German Republic just a couple of hours later. Yet simultaneously the SPD's other chairman, Friedrich Ebert, who that same day became the first Social Democratic chancellor of Germany, "begged protesters to 'clear the streets, and to create order and peace.'" Ebert's qualms about the hundreds of thousands of marchers were grounded in his knowledge that there existed a longstanding tradition of political street protests turning violent and SPD leaders losing control of inner-city crowds. Ebert was clearly aware that regardless of what drove people to the streets, whether in 1905, 1914, or 1918, the hold of political leaders or political ideologies over those who turned out ostensibly to demonstrate or riot on behalf of political goals was at best tenuous.[4]

Sources such as police reports, sociological treatises, and news reports reveal that in terms of locality, structure, and demographics, the disturbances that occured after demonstrations for democratic reform in 1905 show similarities with the riots that followed antiwar marches in 1914. These in turn were connected to both wartime and postwar unrest, among them the 1923 pogrom in the Scheunenviertel, a working-class and Jewish neighborhood in central Berlin, with which this article concludes. Did certain demographics in specific urban neighborhoods – young, jobless workers in the Scheunenviertel, for example – switch from left to right after the end of the First World War, as their antisemitic violence in 1923 suggests? My analysis will show that, while such tendencies existed, they did not turn traditional areas of leftist urban street violence into easy neighborhoods for the Nazis to commandeer after 1918. While the developments highlighted on the following pages connect the pre- and postwar eras, they do not rep-

**4** Hedwig Richter has recently stressed the strength of the German Empire's democratic constitutional elements, yet this view has been strongly criticized. Compare Andreas Wirsching, review of *Demokratie: Eine deutsche Affäre: Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, by Hedwig Richter, *sehepunkte* 21 (2021), http://www.sehepunkte.de/2021/03/34995.html; Ebert quoted in Mark Jones, "The Crowd in the German November Revolution 1918," in *Germany 1916–1923: A Revolution in Context*, ed. Klaus Weinhauer et al. (Bielefeld, 2015), 54.

resent unbroken trajectories from the German Empire to the Third Reich.

Political demonstrations and street violence associated with these events have remained a constant phenomenon throughout twentieth- and twenty-first-century German history. This analysis sketches out specific arcs of street violence crossing from the German Empire into the Weimar Republic. Its sources invite an engagement with long-standing debates about German historical continuities and the role within such events of the Social-Democratic Party. Influential West German historians once argued that what connected the German Empire (1871–1918) to the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) was the influence of "old elites," which eventually also helped to facilitate the handover of power to the Nazis. While this view is no longer paradigmatic, historians continue to excavate links among these periods. The following analysis contributes to this scholarship from a different angle, by elucidating significant but decidedly non-elite, street-level continuities from the early years of the twentieth century into the 1920s and beyond. Just like much of today's media commentary on public protest, early twentieth-century German social commentators usually interpreted street riots as political and mainly associated them with left-wing political causes and organizations, most prominently the SPD. In the German Empire before 1914, conservative, nationalist, and at times also liberal observers accused the SPD of wanting to lead violent inner-city mobs into revolutionary street battles. Conversely, after Germany had become a republic in 1918, the Communist Party (KPD), which had split off from the center-left SPD during the war, berated their erstwhile comrades, now the primary party supportive of the new democracy, for having been too timid and not harnessing the urban proletariat's potential for violence and revolution even before 1914.[5]

In fact, however, the groups engaging in inner-city street violence, among them often youth gangs, were usually driven less by politics and more by their own agendas and dynamics

**5** Philipp Gassert, *Bewegte Gesellschaft*, 14; James Retallack, *Red Saxony: Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860–1918* (Oxford, UK, 2017), 394–395; Bernd Jürgen Warneken, *Als die Deutschen demonstrieren lernten* (Tübingen, 1986); Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge, UK, 2016), 27–66; Peter Lambert, "The End of the Weimar Republic: Individual Agency, Germany's 'Old Elites,' and the 'Crisis of Classical Modernity,'" in *Mass Dictatorship and Modernity*, ed. Michael Kim et al. (Basingstoke, UK, 2013), 230–231; Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK, 2008), 233.

– and these underlying social dynamics changed only gradually from 1905 to 1923 and beyond. Momentous changes occurred during this time as well, but these transformations were so considerable that they can at times obscure slower, more steady developments such as relatively stable patterns of violent street events in specific urban neighborhoods. The following analysis of continuities in political street violence thus also touches upon a point of tension between two historiographical fields: on the one hand, social, political, and cultural historians have gone to great lengths to point out ruptures and changes that occurred in Germany during and immediately after the First World War. On the other hand, scholars of urban history have recently emphasized local continuities which transcended era markers like 1914 and 1918. As historian Friedrich Lenger has argued, "revolutions, wars, and civil wars undoubtedly exacerbate practices of [urban] violence, yet these practices nevertheless remain part of continuities." Lenger's argument is not entirely new, as in the late 1970s historian Richard Evans had already speculated about links between street riots in 1906 and the often-violent urban street politics of the last two years of the First World War. Despite Evans' arguments, the most intense scholarly debates in the 1980s tended to revolve around questions of historical continuities among the "old elites" and largely ignored the incessant street violence that extended from the German Empire to the Weimar Republic.[6]

This article traces this continuity across three eras by taking a geographically broad approach to the years of the German

(Essen, 1993), 36–37; Thomas Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik: Zur Geschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914* (Bonn, 1995), 207, 300–304, 360, 378–383; Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 7, 22; Jones, "The Crowd," 54; Klaus Weinhauer et al., introduction to *Germany 1916–1923*, 12; Dirk Schuhmann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933: Kampf um die Straße und Furcht vor dem Bürgerkrieg* (Essen, 2001); Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925–1934* (New Haven, CT, 1984); Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, UK, 1993).

**6** Friedrich Lenger, "Zur Einführung," in *Kollektive Gewalt in der Stadt: Europa 1890–1939*, ed. Friedrich Lenger (München, 2013), x; Klaus Weinhauer, "Mobilisierte Gesellschaft: Soziale Bewegungen, urbane Kontaktzonen, Staat und Ordnung in Deutschland 1916–1923/24," in *Gewerkschaften in revolutionären Zeiten: Deutschland und Europa 1917–1923*, ed. Stefan Berger et al. (Essen, 2020), 25–42; Richard Evans, "'Red Wednesday' in Hamburg: Social Democrats, Police and Lumpenproletariat in the Suffrage Disturbances of 17 January 1906," *Social History* 4 (1979): 1–31, 12; Willibald Gutsche, "1. August 1914," *Illustrierte Historische Hefte* 3 (1976); Fritz Klein, ed., *Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1968), 1:264; Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus: Die Deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Frankfurt/M., 1973); Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, UK, 2000); Wolfgang Kruse, *Krieg und nationale Integration: Eine Neuinterpretation des Sozialdemokratischen Burgfriedensschlusses 1914/15*

7 Jones, “The Crowd,” 54.

Empire between 1905 and 1914, analyzing protests and riots in several German cities and states, especially Hamburg, Berlin, and Dresden. When considering the war and the early Weimar years, the focus narrows to Berlin and the Scheunenviertel, which stands in for similar poor and working-class neighborhoods elsewhere in Germany. This change in perspective is determined by the sources’ invitation to nuance our understanding of the historical actors engaging in, but also discussing, and repressing street violence from the perspective of the survival of two different political systems. This article thus shows why and how continuities of street violence also reflected enduring tensions between granular concerns with survival, autonomy, and (self)-respect, and state and media attempts to interpret this violence from sociopolitical meta perspectives rather than street-level undercurrents.

## I. Emergent Patterns: Prewar Unrest between 1905 and 1914

During the morning hours of November 9, 1918, large crowds marched through the streets of Berlin, thus marking the arrival of the German Revolution in the country’s capital. But the revolution indicated neither the beginning nor the end of street unrest, as the last war years and the first years of the Weimar Republic were also marred by turmoil in the streets. While the revolution certainly brought about the beginning of a new political era in Germany – the system of government changed from monarchy to democratic republic – large-scale political marches with more than 100,000 protesters, often accompanied by violence, continued apace and even increased. Moreover, for at least a decade before 1918, street violence that onlookers interpreted as revolutionary or civil-war-like consistently complemented demonstrations motivated by questions of democratization.[7]

This increasingly common feature of street life in Germany’s most densely populated and industrialized regions arrived with a bang in late 1905 and early 1906. In November and

December of 1905, the SPD organized marches in many cities in Saxony to protest the potential introduction of a more restrictive suffrage law in the state.[8] In Dresden in early December 1905, a demonstration descended into vicious physical altercations between tens of thousands of protesters and the police. Policemen were beaten by the crowd, and in return, officers used their sabers to deal out their own bloody and disproportionate retribution. Just a couple of weeks later, in January 1906, an SPD-led protest in Hamburg against the city's undemocratic suffrage reform turned violent and, for some of the marchers, deadly.[9] The scenes in Hamburg resembled those in Dresden, with protesters trying to break through police cordons while being attacked by mounted police with their sabers. In both cases, a soon-to-be standard feature of street violence was becoming apparent, as socialist organizers proved unable to control inner-city crowds. Instead, while crowds were certainly attacked by police, they also meted out their own violence, often indiscriminately. On December 16, 1905, SPD leaders in Dresden had explicitly demanded caution, but these calls went unheeded. Instead, crowds looted shops and sought out confrontations with police and bystanders. An analogous development occurred in Hamburg on January 17, 1906, when during the initially peaceful protest gatherings, Social Democratic speakers became alarmed "at the military mood of their audiences." As in Dresden, Social Democratic chaperones in Hamburg became increasingly unable to control large segments of the crowds – mostly young men and women, described as "the rabble" by both organizers and police – and the demonstrations became progressively violent. The violence was initially directed against the police, but as the crowds moved into the poor and working-class Gängeviertel neighborhood, rioters began to target shops and private businesses, several of which were looted during the night.[10]

Looting had become a feature of life in densely populated urban areas, often in the wake of political street demonstrations,

**8** The Dresden riots in December 1905 came on the heels of two years of discussions and rumors about a possibly more restrictive new Saxon franchise. The actual suffrage reform, which was highly complex and indeed meant to disadvantage the SPD, only came another three years later, in January 1909. It was tested for the first and only time in the elections in Saxony during the same year. Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 522.

**9** The reform in Hamburg further disenfranchised low-income (male) Hamburg citizens as it upped the income threshold for voters. Evans, "'Red Wednesday,'" 3.

**10** Retallack, *Red Saxony*, 398–399; Evans, "'Red Wednesday,'" 5–7, 10, 23; SSta 10736 Ministerium des Innern, No. 11042, 16 (backside), 30–31; StaH 331–3 (Politische Polizei), No. 4605, 194–196; No. 2355, 140; No. 2358, 142.

even before the first wartime bread riots in 1915. In Hamburg, the course of events on January 17, 1906, was not surprising, given how the planning meetings for what eventually came to be known as "Red Wednesday" had developed over the previous months. Planning assemblies had noted the participation of increasingly rowdy crowds and of those who called on attendees "to take the path of violence" – and the same groups and individuals turned out for the demonstration. Socialist organizers counted on young people to attend the protests, police complained, as SPD coordinators were eager to "to make the gatherings as large as possible." Indeed, those convicted of rioting and looting during the unrests were 20 years old, on average. Things looked similar in Saxony: following the Dresden events of December 1905, police cracked down on any kind of public meetings to discuss suffrage reform, based on the belief that any suffrage-focused meeting would attract Social Democrats. In turn, according to police reports, Social Democrats invariably drew the "young, unfledged riffraff and also those elements present in all big cities that covet every opportunity to put themselves in opposition to laws and the authorities." Although Saxon officials and the conservative and nationalist press blamed the SPD for the riots, in their internal communiques Saxon officers differentiated between Social Democrats and the "young riffraff." Police in Hamburg and Berlin agreed with this assessment.

In press releases the police and conservative-nationalist commentators nevertheless purposefully conflated this "rabble" with the socialist labor movement, and liberal papers only occasionally expressed more nuanced positions. The unruly crowds thus reflected poorly on the SPD and labor union leaders, as their violent irreverence towards the established authorities seemingly proved that the labor movement was actively revolutionary, despite their many statements to the contrary. In turn, official socialist voices (among them for example the SPD's main newspaper, *Vorwärts*) also rejected any kind of association of the SPD with this "rabble." Indeed,

both police and SPD used the same terms to describe the rioters as “Pöbel” or “Jahnhagel” (riffraff, rabble), sometimes also as “Halbstarke” (literally: “half-strong” youths).[11]

In Hamburg, the SPD leadership denounced rioters as “Lumpenproletariat,” a term that, in addition to its Marxist connotation, increasingly referred to youth gangs – “wild cliques/gangs” (*Wilde Cliquen*) – in poor, working-class neighborhoods. From the last third of the nineteenth century on, such territorially anchored urban youth groups developed localized cultures and forms of behavior that included participation in neighborhood-centered political protests and the use of physical violence against outsiders. During the Weimar Republic, youth gangs were often seen as a symptom of the young republic’s incompetence and weakness. And yet, as historian Klaus Weinhauer has shown, “their professional counterparts (youth welfare workers, police, the justice system) had been well aware of them before 1918.” Even in 1905, violent groups of adolescents, both male and female, were not a new phenomenon. In 1906 in Hamburg, nationalist commentators saw them as ostensible proof of the urban proletariat’s propensity for violence and revolution. Historian Detlev Peukert has pointed out that the meaning of these groups’ violent behavior varied according to one’s vantage point, although the media and the judicial system usually perceived youth-gang activities as challenges to the existing social and political order.[12]

**11** SSta 10736 Ministerium des Innern, No. 11042, 30–31; StaH 331-3 (Politische Polizei), No. 4605, 194–196; Evans, “Red Wednesday,” 12–13.

**12** Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Grenzen der Sozialdisziplinierung: Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Jugendfürsorge von 1878 bis 1932* (Köln, 1986), 57; Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence 1929–1933* (Cambridge, UK, 1983), 131–132; Klaus Weinhauer, “Urbane Jugendproteste, Jugendbanden und soziale Ungleichheit seit dem 19. Jahrhundert: Vergleichende und transnationale Perspektiven auf Deutschland, England und die USA,” in *Kulturen jugendlichen Aufbegehrens: Jugendprotest und soziale Ungleichheit*, ed. Anna Schäfer et al. (Weinheim, 2011), 27; Patrick Wagner and Klaus Weinhauer, “Tartarenblut und Immertreu: Wilde Cliquen und Ringvereine um 1930 – Ordnungsfaktoren und Krisensymbole in unsicheren Zeiten,” in *Unsichere Großstädte? Vom Mittelalter bis zur Postmoderne*, ed. Martin Dinges and Fritz Sack (Konstanz, 2000), 266–267; Sharon Bäcker-Wilke et al., “Gewaltgemeinschaften im städtischen Raum: Barcelona, Berlin und Wien in der Zwischenkriegszeit,” in *Gewaltgemeinschaften: Von der Spätantike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Winfried Speitkamp (Göttingen, 2013), 319; Rainer Haubrich, *Das Scheunenviertel: Kleine Architekturgeschichte der letzten Altstadt von Berlin* (Berlin, 2019), 69, 83; Andreas Mischok, “‘Wild und frei’: Wilde Cliquen im Berlin der Weimarer Zeit,” in *Vom Lagerfeuer zur Musikbox: Jugendkulturen 1900 – 1960*, ed. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (Berlin, 1985), 47; Pamela Swett, *Neighbors and Enemies: The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin, 1929–1933* (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 200–202. On the SPD’s relationship to youth and education before 1918 see Andrew Donson, *Youth in a Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 20–21.

Even before the First World War, groups and individuals that did not fit the Social-Democratic political mold (or did so only uneasily) turned out for street events organized by or associated with the SPD. That was the case in Dresden and Hamburg in 1905 and 1906, where demonstrations meant to push for democratic reform attracted significant "uncontrollable" elements. After 1906, the issue of suffrage reform increasingly became the SPD's rallying cry in Prussia, Germany's largest and politically and economically most powerful state. Until 1918, Prussia's parliament was elected according to a tax-based three-tiered franchise that guaranteed wealthy and powerful men outsized influence on the state's politics. The Prussian suffrage reform movement reached its prewar highpoint in 1910, when hundreds of thousands took to the streets all over the state to demand universal suffrage. Yet the intersections between suffrage reform and street violence were already noticeable before 1910, for example in December 1908, in Rixdorf (now Berlin-Neukölln). In 1908, Social Democrats had for the first time been able to gain mandates in the Rixdorf city council assembly despite being disadvantaged by the wealth-based three-tier franchise. This development quickly led liberal-bourgeois and conservative city-council deputies to demand the increase of the income-tax threshold for voters in the lowest tier. On December 17 their disenfranchising motion was registered,[13] mobilizing thousands of Neuköllners – on a weekday late in the evening – who spontaneously hastened to the city hall and amassed outside and in surrounding streets. Conservative newspapers reported that a "vast mass of people" had assembled quickly in front of the city hall to demonstrate against this "suffrage robbery." A "strong and large police force" prevented the outbreak of violence outside but was not strong enough to stop at least 600 demonstrators from entering the building.[14]

This event highlights how even at the local level the suffrage issue could quickly mobilize large numbers of people who were willing to risk violent clashes with the police. Were

**13** In Rixdorf city suffrage provisions replicated the tax-based three-tier franchise at the Prussian state level. Yet, as this incident shows, for local elections these already undemocratic regulations could be restricted even further by a super majority of two-thirds of all councilmen. Given the simultaneous and increasingly heated debate about the "three-tier shame" at the state level, the "Rixdorf suffrage robbery" received attention nationwide. "Sturm im Rixdorfer Stadtparlament," *Berliner Morgenpost* 297, December 18, 1908; "Die Wahlrechtsverschlechterer im Rixdorfer Rathause," *Vorwärts* 296, December 18, 1908.

**14** "Stürmische Szenen in der Rixdorfer Stadtverordnetenversammlung," *Abendblatt der Frankfurter Zeitung* 351, December 18, 1908; "Sturm im Rixdorfer Stadtparlament," *Berliner Morgenpost* 297, December 18, 1908.

all of those who turned out on December 17, 1908, Social-Democrats? Likely not. SPD leaders (local and national) were not in the habit of encouraging the storming of administrative buildings or violently engaging with police. Moreover, already in 1908 but even more so during the 1910s and 1920s, Neukölln was notorious for street violence, political and otherwise. The very same streets and street corners, among them the Hermannplatz, an area notorious for crime and riots even today, that produced the group of rioters on December 17, 1908, made the news again and again: in 1914, during the First World War, in 1923, and even the infamous "Bloody May Day" of 1929 – a series of violent protests all over Berlin brutally suppressed by police with over 100 people killed – began in that same neighborhood. Throughout different historical periods with their own important sociopolitical specificities and transformations, similar patterns of violence continued to be regular features of street life in this and similar localities.

Two years after the events in Neukölln, in 1910, in Berlin alone hundreds of thousands of marchers assembled weekly to demonstrate for democratic reform – and many more protests occurred all throughout the surrounding state of Prussia. The spring 1910 suffrage marches are best known for the marchers' promenade tactics that allowed them to quickly assemble and thereby ideally evade the police by pretending to take afternoon walks. Yet these maneuvers were only adopted after police killed a protester in Neumünster, over 100 marchers were severely injured by saber blows in Frankfurt-am-Main, and on March 6, women and children were trampled by mounted police riding up the steps of the *Siegessäule* monument in Berlin. On that day, Berlin police also used their new Browning-style handguns to fire over the crowds. From 1910 onwards, Berlin police would regularly use firearms as a means for crowd control, even after Germany had become a republic. Before 1914, peaceful street protests were regularly met with police violence, which in turn made violent

reactions *and* actions by those turning out to the streets more likely. Police violence, too, thus remained a continuous feature of street life in Berlin and other German cities, linking the prewar, wartime, and postwar periods.[15]

Although no marcher was shot on March 6, 1910, six months later two Berliners were killed and over a hundred severely injured by police during days-long street protests, which contemporaries saw as a crowd response to the police's brutality earlier that year. A lawyer defending an arrested marcher thus commented that "those who are aware that during the suffrage demonstrations peaceful marchers were clobbered for no reason whatsoever will agree with me that the police have only themselves to blame for the existing hatred." On September 26, 1910, news spread through working-class neighborhoods in the inner city of Berlin that firearms had been used by out-of-town scabs against striking workers at a coal distribution company in Berlin-Moabit. Soon afterwards, the neighborhood became the site of bloody and deadly clashes between police and locals, the so-called Moabit Riots. During these riots, police were pelted with objects (including bottles of urine) from apartment windows. In turn, officers randomly opened fire on their attackers, at times blindly shooting into open windows, a deadly practice Berlin police would continue to use after the war. Police also indiscriminately attacked bystanders including, in one particularly embarrassing instance, the Berlin correspondent of the *New York Times*, an incident that led to a minor diplomatic crisis between Washington and Berlin. At the same time, local gangs attempted to separate individual police officers from their units and did so successfully at least once. In this instance, the policeman was found in a pool of his own blood and barely alive in a dark Moabit backyard. In addition, young Moabiters coerced those in their neighborhood who did not openly display sympathies for the strike and the riots to do so, for example by threatening to destroy their property or to beat them up. This kind of violence was never advocated by Social-Democratic

**15** *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, February 19, 1910, 1409; "Revolutionary Talk in the Reichstag," *New York Times*, February 21, 1910; "The Prussian Franchise Demonstrations," *The Times* (UK), March 7, 1910; Amerigo Caruso, *"Blut und Eisen auch im Innern": Soziale Konflikte, Massenpolitik und Gewalt in Deutschland vor 1914* (Frankfurt/M., 2021), 196–198. Compare Simone Lässig, *Wahlrechtskampf und Wahlreform in Sachsen (1895–1909)* (Weimar, 1996), 183; Molly Loberg, *The Struggle for the Streets of Berlin* (Cambridge, UK, 2018), 136.

or union organizers but was typical of youth gangs defending their neighborhood or territory. Clearly, activities that during the 1920s were beginning to be described as hallmark behaviors of youth gangs – "protecting," sometimes in extremely violent fashion, a territory or neighborhood against outsiders, for instance – were already occurring in Moabit in 1910. In the aftermath of the Moabit Riots, newspaper articles, police reports, and court proceedings against the rioters arrested in Moabit therefore explicitly mentioned when specific defendants belonged to a "clique."[16]

Time and again, it turned out to be impossible for SPD or union organizers to control inner-city crowds – among them especially groups and gangs of adolescents – that had come together ostensibly to march for a certain political goal or to protest a specific development. Police officers often commented on the "helplessness" of socialist leaders in the face of unruly "demonstration mobs." For union or SPD party organizers, street violence was thus a double-edged sword. If the violence was meted out by the forces of the state, it could and often did influence processes of social mobilization in positive ways as it resulted in more – and more determined – people turning out. Yet when the SPD or labor unions were associated with street violence in the media, as happened during the Moabit Riots for example, it made it harder to retain (or gain) support from bourgeois and politically liberal sections of the public. Christine Krüger's article in this issue points out similar processes taking place in Hamburg and London already during the 1890s. Mobilizing youth groups and gangs on behalf of political goals, potentially on purpose in Hamburg in 1906, yet afterwards usually by default, was a tightrope walk for the SPD.[17]

Between 1910 and 1914, violence occurred at the margins of several sizable suffrage demonstrations (with up to 250,000 attendees). In July 1914, many large-scale antiwar protests took place across all of Germany, usually dwarfing the parallel jingoistic prowar events; and even at these antiwar events

**16** "Die Moabiter Krawalle vor Gericht," *Schwäbische Tagwacht*, January 9, 1911; "The Rioting in Berlin," *The Times* (UK), September 30, 1910; "Germany Refuses Redress: Says Police Attack on Correspondents Was Due to Misunderstanding," *New York Times*, October 13, 1910; GSTA: I. HA Rep. 77, Tit. 2525, Nr. 3, Fasz. 4, Bd. 1: 2, 5, 25, 26, 29, 38, 41, 42, 70; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 122, 128 – 159, 167; "Die Moabiter Strassenexzesse vor dem Schwurgericht," *Vossische Zeitung*, January 10, 1911; Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik*, 272–273. On the behavior of youth gangs see Klaus Weinhauer, "Urbane Jugendproteste." Thomas Lindenberger has argued that "regular" and "respectable" workers living in Moabit at least temporarily joined together with cliques and violent gangs; a fact that in Lindenberger's view explains the magnitude of the riots. Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik*, 275.

**17** LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 157 (113), 170 (127).

18 Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*, 30–37; Gutsche, "1. August 1914," 12; Klein, *Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg*, 1:264; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 147, 150, 173; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030. No. 15908, 1.

violence occurred. Especially in Prussia and particularly in Berlin, on July 28, 1914, the peak of the antiwar protests, tens of thousands of marchers who tried to reach the city center not only chanted "Down with war!" but also yelled "Long live universal suffrage!" Within the present-day city limits of Berlin, one hundred thousand protesters were on the move that day. Large groups ranging from thousands to tens of thousands of protesters essentially besieged the city center, as they marched towards it from all directions. Police eventually closed all bridges to the inner-city quarters, which mostly limited the outbreak of violence to those choke points, but especially in the Scheunenviertel and the adjacent Spandauer Vorstadt thousands of demonstrators were chased by groups of police officers or at times themselves chased the police through the streets. Principally on the nearby Unter den Linden boulevard policemen used sabers, and mounted police rode into the crowds; in turn, marchers also evaded or broke through police cordons. The July 1914 demonstrations were clearly not a unique symptom of an extraordinary moment in twentieth-century history, but rather an existing method of expressing political grievances that was also used as yet another opportunity to take longstanding political demands to the streets. The July 1914 marches displayed all the features that by then had become typical of urban street events in Germany: calls for change, especially demands for democratic reform, and police and gang-related violence.[18]

Following the general call of the SPD to turn out, youth groups and gangs not only did just that, but they also engaged in all kinds of transgressive (and from the perspective of SPD leaders unwanted) behavior. These "half-grown lads" (*halbwüchsige Burschen*) as the *Vorwärts* called them, disparaging both their age and their actions, engaged in violent and disruptive activities, especially in the Scheunenviertel and the streets and city squares in its immediate vicinity, where ferocious clashes between police and youth gangs also led to some destruction of property on July 28, 1914. The Scheunenviertel

was one of Berlin's many poor, working-class, and traditionally hard left-leaning neighborhoods, in many ways similar in its social structure and lay-out (narrow streets with houses built before the eighteenth century) to the Gängeviertel in Hamburg. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the area had simultaneously become a transitory home for recently arrived Eastern European Jews and the center of life for a rapidly increasing number of industrial workers. By 1914, as in other socio-economically similar areas, the Scheunenviertel was not only notorious for pro-democracy and left-wing violence, but also for crime and gang activities. On July 28, in and around the Scheunenviertel, violence occurred into the night, as youth gangs continued to engage with police. In the early morning hours, the situation escalated to the point of a battle royal between officers and gangs of young men and women along the Scheunenviertel's western border: youngsters and police officers first hurled insults at and then frontally attacked each other. In addition, instances of property demolition were reported, among them the destruction of a shop along the quarter's southeastern edge.[19]

Moabit, a neighborhood we have already encountered, also raged on July 28, as gangs patrolled the quarter's streets to intimidate and threaten those who did not agree with the protest marches. One of these groups dragged an old man out of a bar into which he had fled and beat him up. SPD chaperones intervened, but later the same gang began stopping and vandalizing street cars, beating up conductors, and spitting at passengers. Just as in 1910, on July 28, 1914, in Moabit at least one policeman was separated from other officers and beaten with clubs. In Neukölln, police followed a group of young Berliners, male and female, who screamed and hollered, scaring passers-by off the streets. On the bridge to the Kottbusser Ufer, the male members of the group exposed their genitals to the police. In the late 1920s, social workers monitoring youth gangs described similarly sexualized performances of masculinity as a standard part of life in Berlin

**19** Haubrich, *Das Scheunenviertel*, 69, 83; Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik,* 300–304, 327; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 134, 147, 151, 152, 153, 155, 167; "Zusammenstöße am Königstor," *Vossische Zeitung*, July 29, 1914; "Demonstrationen gegen den Krieg in Berlin," *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*, July 29, 1914.

20 LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 170, 171, 172; Christine Fournier, "Ringvereine der Jugend" in *Die Weltbühne* (Vol. 27.1 [1931]), 92–93; Eve Rosenhaft, "Organising the 'Lumpenproletariat': Cliques and Communists in Berlin during the Weimar Republic," in *The German Working Class, 1888–1933: The Politics of Everyday Life*, ed. Richard J. Evans (London, 1982), 178, 197; J. Robert Wiggs, *Growing Up Working Class: Continuity and Change Among Viennese Youth, 1890–1938* (University Park, PA, 1989), 70–73.

cliques. The same group then marched towards the *Vorwärts* offices where they first cheered for SPD Reichstag deputies Arthur Stadthagen and Theodor Fischer but then insulted them after the two Social Democrats told them to go home: "You assholes, if you don't want us to be rowdy and make a fuss [*Klamauk und Krakehl*], why did you call us here? . . . Go home yourselves . . . and go to bed!" The gang then stormed off and started rioting just a few blocks away, leaving Stadthagen and Fischer standing alone and dejected in front of the *Vorwärts* offices. This episode illustrates the relationship between inner-city youth and Social-Democratic organizers. SPD-planned occasions such as the demonstrations in July 1914, or the labor-union organized strike in Moabit in 1910, the vote in the Neukölln city hall in December 1908, and the demonstrations in Saxony and Hamburg in 1905 and 1906 provided a framework for these groups to turn out. However, their agendas were at best partially aligned with the events' overall purposes – and one major aspect of these groups' plans was "to be rowdy and make a fuss" – something the SPD leadership did not support. If Social-Democratic loyalties existed at all, they were brittle and could disintegrate over the course of a single afternoon. Although initially celebrated, SPD deputies Stadthagen and Fischer were thus quickly abandoned by an irreverent and violent "young rabble." After 1918, in an environment even more tense and rife with problems than that of the prewar years, such allegiances were even less likely.[20]

In late July 1914, forty-three years of peace came to an end in mainland Germany, a momentous rupture that would bring significant change not only to the country itself but also to the world at large. And yet, in the localities described above, not everything changed. Instead, largely stable patterns of street violence that had been established before the war reemerged after a temporary lull in late 1914 and 1915, tying together the local political culture of the prewar, wartime, and postwar eras.

## II. Continuity and Escalation: Street Events and Riots between 1914 and 1918

After the preceding section's geographically broad discussion of how prewar urban unrests took shape, were deployed by both protesters and those locals who joined them, and were perceived by authorities, the next two sections of this article will offer a more targeted exploration of these processes in specific neighborhoods in Berlin. While a broad view of the nation also reveals continuities across the war, narrowing the focus to specific areas of Berlin, the Scheunenviertel in particular, allows us to examine continuing patterns of street violence literally on a street-by-street basis. The Scheunenviertel is particularly useful for such a shift in perspective because it was so centrally located that political marches and demonstrations – often the starting points for riots – impacted this district more than other urban hotspots of violence. After all, these events always happened right next to it, on the Alexanderplatz, Unter den Linden, or along the Friedrichstraße. Particularly in the Scheunenviertel some of the very same streets and street corners that defined prewar riots continued to be sites for such protests, during the war and after 1918. Even as political and social systems changed, the tactics of discontented groups thus persisted within given localities.

Because of the massive economic disruptions caused by the war and the British blockade of German ports, looting became a more prevalent public phenomenon between 1914 and 1918 than it had been before 1914; just as before the war, it usually occurred alongside political protests. The first wave of major political demonstrations against German government policies began during the spring of 1916, the second full year of war. In June, these protests culminated in the first major political strike of the war years, the so-called Liebknecht Strike, which opposed the incarceration of the hard-left Social Democrat Karl Liebknecht, one of the co-founders of the Spartacus League, which in 1918 became the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). By the summer of 1916, Liebknecht

21 LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15818, 7, 17, 37; A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15840, 407; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15819, 1–2.

22 The site commemorates those killed during revolutionary street battles in Berlin in March 1848.

had established himself as one the fiercest critics of the war and was arrested. Moderate Social Democrats, too, called for political change at the time, among them the future chancellor Friedrich Ebert, who again began to demand the democratization of Prussia's franchise as the SPD had done before the war. Even before Liebknecht's arrest in June 1916 the illusionary "peace of the fortress" – the (vain) hope that Germany would be free of any internal strife and political divisions during the war – had thus become brittle. As political protests against various policies of the German government grew, both on the floor of the Reichstag and in many German cities, "the rabble" and "the riffraff" ignored directives to behave respectably and turned out to riot. This happened in Berlin and Leipzig in May and June of 1916, when police reports noted that "rioting and looting" in the wake of bigger and smaller street protests "is mainly perpetrated by the young rabble," and in Hannover, where in early May "the young rabble" rioted at the margins of political street protests.[21]

Before and after 1914 groups of young men and women thus initiated street violence, which usually involved confrontations with police as well as passers-by and business owners. This was true in all densely populated urban areas in Germany, but it was especially virulent in Berlin, one of Germany's most crowded and economically divided regions. As Belinda Davis has shown, even standing in line in front of a grocery store could be interpreted as a political statement in wartime Berlin. Government authorities and the media thus saw any clash of youth gangs with the police as having political dimensions. In 1917, a large group of youngsters appeared at the "Cemetery of the Fallen of the March Revolution," located about one mile to the east of the Scheunenviertel, on that year's commemoration of the March Revolution of 1848.[22] After clashes between young Berliners and the police had occurred at this location in March of 1910, during that year's springtime suffrage reform demonstrations, these SPD-organized celebrations had been tightly monitored by police.

On March 18, 1917, according to the patrolling officers, the adolescents arrived "from all sides" and "lingered" around in smaller groups, while taunting the police. When the officers decided to arrest them, the groups resisted, threatening to "crack the cops' skulls" – not an empty threat in the streets of Berlin's working-class districts, as we have already seen. Police chased after the roughly one hundred young women and men but were only able" to arrest six of them "after much difficulty."[23]

During the war years, both police officers and socialist organizers continued to use the same language to describe street riots as they had before the war. For contemporaries, location-specific violence was therefore clearly not a new, wartime phenomenon: skulls had been cracked in Moabit in 1910, and skulls could be cracked again after 1914 or 1918 in this and similar neighborhoods. Just as before the war, such incidents of violence happened primarily in certain areas. In Berlin, the hotspots were Neukölln, Moabit, Kreuzberg, Wedding, and the Scheunenviertel. On April 16, 1917, one month after the March Revolution commemoration incident, following protest marches towards Berlin's city center, groups of young Berliners (the police counted around "100–150 lads and girls, 'Pöbel' and 'Jahnhagel'") rioted and tried to loot stores in the Münzstraße in the southeastern Scheunenviertel, previously a site of rioting in July 1914. To disperse the rioters, officers used their sabers, though no injuries were reported.[24]

Wartime marches, riots, and lootings echoed prewar patterns, most significantly that they were not the actions of a single political group or organization. Instead, a significant portion of attendees decided spontaneously to participate, or to arrange their own events parallel to those organized by political associations. In particular, youth gangs rarely joined public events because they were asked to do so. Instead, they turned out on their own terms and with their own goals in mind. As a result, crowd events were volatile occurrences that only partially followed any kind of preconceived marching orders by

**23** LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15902, 280; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, No. 15839, 66 (front/back), 67 (front/back); Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 3. It is often impossible to glean precise numbers about the size of these groups and gangs, and even the arrest figures in police reports must be taken with a grain of salt, as police often arrested uninvolved bystanders.

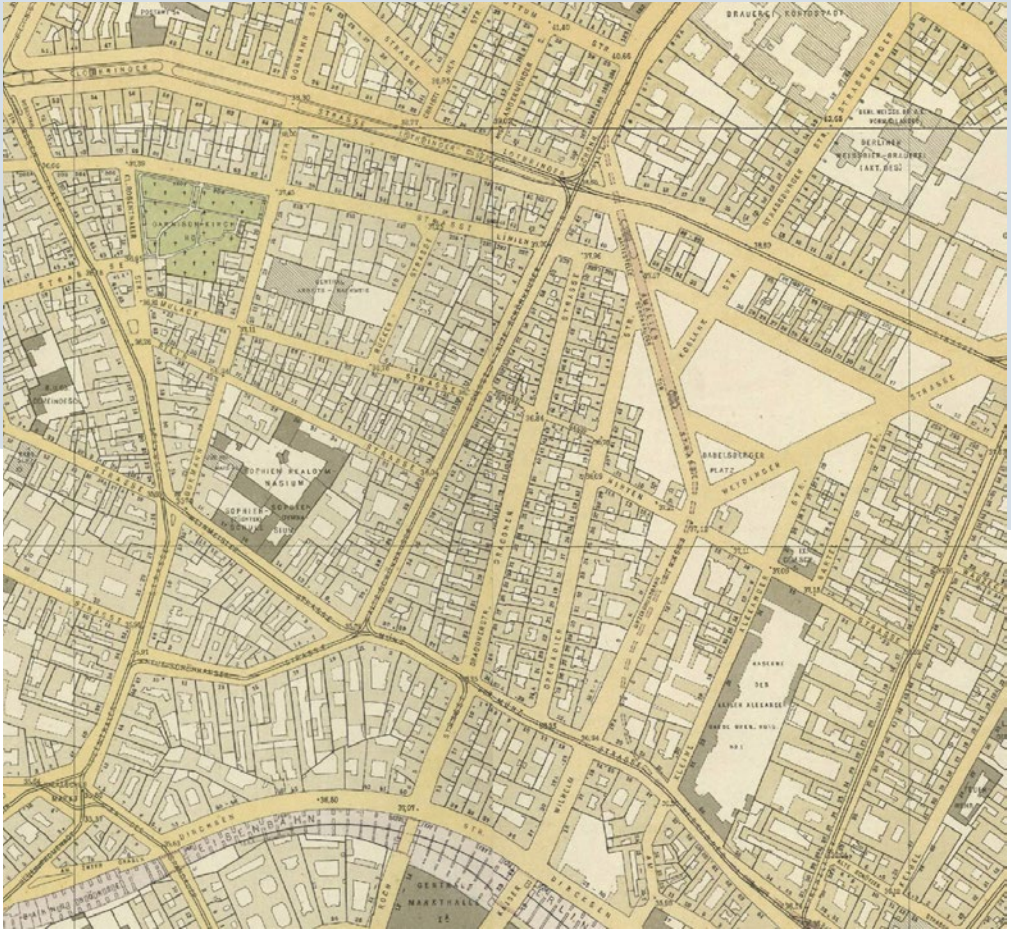
**24** LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15902, 280; LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Tit. 95, No. 15839, 66 (front/back), 67 (front/back); "Zur Streikbewegung" in *Vorwärts* (April 17, 1917).

25 "Kanzler Ebert ans Volk," *Berliner Morgenpost* 312 (November 10, 1918).

local organizers or party chaperones. This volatility continued from the German Empire into the Weimar Republic as the actions of certain urban groups were potentially destabilizing for both regimes, which is why, as we have already seen, on November 9, 1918, Friedrich Ebert, who had just become the first Social-Democratic chancellor of a newly democratic Germany, asked Germans to "clear the streets, and to create order and peace." On the first day of the new republic its highest Social-Democratic representative thus saw the very crowds that had made democracy possible in the first place as a potential threat. Under the German Empire, violent street protests had been perceived as endangering the country's monarchical order; after the revolution, they came to be seen as dangerous for the new republican Germany as well.[25]

### III. Enduring Patterns, Escalations, and Transformations: Postwar Riots in Berlin and the Scheunenviertel

In the less than two years between the 1917 disturbances in the Scheunenviertel and the end of the German monarchy in November 1918, many more riots, lootings, and political marches occurred all over Germany – a phenomenon that continued into the postwar years. On November 20, 1918, ten days after Emperor Wilhelm II's escape to the Netherlands, and eleven days after the proclamation of the new republic, large-scale demonstrations commemorating those who had died during the first days of the German Revolution took place all over the inner city of Berlin. One of the city's major daily newspapers, the *Berliner Morgenpost*, wrote about these marches: ". . . a certain calm blanketed everything; a somber satisfaction about the victory of the revolution. Just as during the days of the great upheaval, one joyfully remembered that our sense of order regarding public life is so highly developed that we truly and profoundly feel justified to replace the old police state with a freer organization." The self-congratulatory tone of this article would begin to ring hollow four weeks later when, in December 1918, the first clashes between




regular soldiers and revolutionary troops in Berlin signaled the beginning of an almost five-year-long period of civil-war-scale unrest all over Germany.[26]

**Figure 1.** Map of the Scheuenenviertel neighborhood in Berlin. Source: *Übersichtsplan von Berlin*, publ. Geographisches Institut und Landkartenverlag Julius Straube (Berlin, 1910), courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Even earlier, the day after the *Morgenpost* published its celebration of calm and order, the southeastern edge of the Scheunenviertel witnessed violence and death. On November 21, a group of sympathizers of the left-wing Spartacus-League marched from Berlin-Wedding to the inner city, tracing a route that had been taken many times before by demonstrating socialists. The marchers wrongly believed that some of their comrades had been imprisoned at the headquarters of the Berlin police, known as the Rote Burg (Red Fortress). When they reached the inner city, they joined together with a crowd that had already assembled at the gates of the Rote Burg. For reasons that have never been fully explained, suddenly shots rang out that killed one policeman and two protesters. The *Vorwärts* newpaper placed the blame for the deadly violence

**26** *Berliner Morgenpost*, No. 328 (November 21, 1918).

solely on the Spartacus marchers. Yet the violence-prone Scheunenviertel was directly across from the site of the incident, and the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* was more careful about pointing fingers and reported that it was unclear who exactly had initiated the deadly violence.[27]

Friedrich Lenger's observation that "revolutions . . . exacerbate practices of [urban] violence, yet these practices nevertheless remain part of continuities . . ." clearly holds true with respect to the Scheunenviertel, as the neighborhood's southeastern corner right next to the Alexanderplatz was one of the spaces in Berlin's inner city where political protests frequently attracted violent crowds and then spun out of control. The district was also within walking distance from all other hotspots of urban violence, including Moabit (one and a half miles), Friedrichshain (one mile), and Wedding (one mile). While criminal gun violence was a constant feature of life in German working-class districts both before and after 1914, and police and strike breakers had used guns as well, firearms became regularly associated with political street altercations only after the war. This nation-wide escalation of political violence impacted local continuities of street violence in the Scheunenviertel, which saw its first shooting deaths related to political events only during the revolution. In the following months, the Scheunenviertel became an even more central site for this escalation when in March 1919 Spartacist insurgents clashed with regular soldiers on its streets.[28]

After 1918, the Scheunenviertel therefore became synonymous with unruly and violent urban neighborhoods. As a result, in his 1923 novel *The Spider's Web* the journalist and novelist Joseph Roth chose the area's intractable southeastern edge as the setting for a confrontation between demonstrating Berlin workers and right-wing militias, with the ensuing violence turning anti-Semitic and spilling over into the center of the Scheunenviertel. Roth's fictional depiction of an anti-Semitic riot in central Berlin sadly turned out to be prophetic.

**27** *Vossische Zeitung*, No. 598 (November 22, 1918); *Vorwärts*, No. 322 (November 23, 1918); Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 95; "Im Sperrgebiet" in *Berliner Morgenpost* (March 12, 1919), 3.

**28** Teresa Walch, "With an Iron Broom: Cleansing Berlin's Bülowplatz of 'Judeo-Bolshevism,' 1933–1936," *German History* 40 (2022): 61–87, 67.

Another novelist and journalist, Alfred Döblin, witnessed the actual Scheunenviertelpogrom, as it was called, on November 5, 1923, shortly after Roth's novel was published: "Crowds of people congregated on the corners; there were smashed windows and wrecked shops." Döblin, who like Roth came from a Jewish family, further observed that "most of [the looters] don't care about anti-Semitism; they want to plunder . . . ." Döblin's evaluation of the November 1923 riot as not exclusively anti-Semitic has shaped scholarly debates about it ever since. While some historians have stressed the event's connection to wartime food and bread riots, others have emphasized its anti-Semitic nature. Molly Loberg has outlined a middle position highlighting both the riot's anti-Semitism and its reflections of postwar tensions, ruptures, and commercial transformations. Situating the Scheunenviertelpogrom within a broader chronological analysis of sources shows how street violence both changed and "remained part of continuities," especially with respect to the hyperlocal undercurrents that motivated participants, between the early years of the twentieth century and the Weimar Republic.[29]

As had happened many times before, in the morning hours of November 5, 1923, the southeastern edge of the Scheunenviertel became the site of political agitation, as reported by three different newspapers. Yet on that day the nature of these gatherings was new: It was not Social Democrats or Spartacists marching through the neighborhood's streets demanding suffrage reform, bigger food rations, or the release of political prisoners, but ultra-right-wing *völkische* agitators peddling accusations against the Jewish inhabitants of the Scheunenviertel. A group of young men in the Grenadierstrasse (just around the corner from the site of the 1917 riots and lootings) then attacked Jewish street-peddlers, passersby, and Jewish stores. Plundering spread to other hotspots of urban violence, first to nearby Wedding, Prenzlauer Berg, Moabit, and eventually also to Friedrichshain, Lichtenberg, and finally towards Unter den Linden and to Charlottenburg.

**29** Joseph Roth, *Das Spinnennetz* (1923; München, 2011), 95–99; Alfred Döblin, *Ein Kerl muß eine Meinung haben* (Freiburg i.B., 1976), 220; Martin H. Geyer, "Teuerungsprotest und Teuerungsunruhen 1914–1923: Selbsthilfegesellschaft und Geldentwertung," in *Der Kampf um das tägliche Brot: Nahrungsmittel, Versorgungspolitik und Protest 1770–1990*, ed. Manfred Gailus (Opladen, 1994), 343; Robert Scholz, "Ein unruhiges Jahrzehnt: Lebensmittelunruhen, Massenstreiks und Arbeitslosenkrawalle in Berlin 1914–1923" in *Pöbelexzesse und Volkstumulte in Berlin: Zur Sozialgeschichte der Straße (1830–1980)*, ed. Manfred Gailus (Berlin, 1984), 117; Loberg, *Struggle*, 61; Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Hamburg, 1986), 338–339; Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt: Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 1999), 152–153; Karsten Krampitz, *Pogrom im Scheunenviertel: Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik und die Berliner Ausschreitungen 1923* (Berlin, 2023).

Outside of the Scheunenviertel, the violence was not obviously anti-Semitic.[30]

Indeed, once initiated, the Scheunenviertel riots followed the patterns of previous disturbances, and reports drew on the usual terminology to describe the rioters: "bands of young lads," "Lumpenproletariat," "ragtag," and "riffraff." As in Dresden in 1905, Hamburg in 1906, Moabit in 1910, and all over Berlin during the war, socially similar and spatially connected areas acted in parallel. The perpetrators in and outside of the Scheunenviertel were young and working-class, and often belonged to youth or criminal gangs. Under the cover of general unrest, even jewelry stores in affluent neighborhoods were robbed on and after November 5, 1923. In the Scheunenviertel one rioter attacked a group of Jewish veterans, all members of the "National League of Jewish Frontline Soldiers," who were trying to deter the mob and stop the looting. During the ensuing brawl a shot was fired that killed the young man. This incident resembled some of the scenes that had sparked the Moabit Riots thirteen years earlier, and the shooting incident on November 22, 1918, which had occurred just a couple of blocks away. In all these instances the shooter(s) could not be identified. With respect to gun violence, too, on November 5, 1923, previous patterns were repeated, thus linking some of the outlines of the November 1923 riots to prior manifestations of street violence both during as well as before the war.[31]

The events of November 5, 1923, pointed to both the past and the future, although, as we shall see in the conclusion, established

**30** Haubrich, *Scheunenviertel*, 69, 83; PA AA, R 78719, L351289; "Die antisemitischen Ausschreitungen in Berlin," *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung* (Nov. 7, 1923, No. 523, Morgenausgabe); *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung* (Nov. 7, 1923, No. 524, Abend-Ausgabe); "Die Polizeiaktion gegen die Plünderer," *Vossische Zeitung* (Nov. 6, 1923, No. 526, Abend-Ausgabe); "Die Plünderungen gehen weiter," *Vossische Zeitung* (Nov. 7, 1923, No. 527, Morgen-Ausgabe); "Die gestrigen Unruhen," *Vossische Zeitung* (Nov. 7, 1923, No. 527, Morgen-Ausgabe). On the presence of right-wing demonstrators or "agitators" in the Scheunenviertel on November 5, 1923, contrast Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt*, 152–153. Walter bases his interpretation on a police report that in anti-Semitic fashion blames the Scheunenviertel's Jewish inhabitants for the riots, clearly trying to deflect blame from the police for not acting sooner. Three days after the riots, the *Vorwärts* pointed out that it was especially the right-wing and anti-Semitic press that rejected reports that actively anti-Semitic agitation had sparked the riots. Walter also argues that the police concluded that the shot that resulted in the death of one of the rioters was fired from an adjacent house to calm the situation, although the police reached no such conclusion. Compare LAB A. Rep. 358-01, No. 2743, Vol. 3: "Bericht;" "Keine Pogromhetze?" in *Vorwärts* (Nov. 8, 1923). Karsten Krampitz has recently repeated Walter's assertions (Krampitz, *Pogrom*, 10).

**31** LAB A. Rep. 358-01, No. 2743, Vol. 2, 266; LAB A. Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2743, Vol. 3, 43, 44; "Die antisemitischen Ausschreitungen in Berlin," "Die Polizeiaktion gegen die Plünderer," "Die Plünderungen gehen weiter," "Die Plünderungen gehen weiter," "Die gestrigen Unruhen"; Geyer, "Teuerungsprotest," 343; Scholz, "Ein unruhiges Jahrzehnt," 117; Loberg, *Struggle*, 61; Maurer, *Ostjuden*, 338–339.

patterns of violence on the streets of the Scheunenviertel also took on a new anti-Jewish element. In 1923, rioters were more aggressive than those who took part in the 1917 lootings in the same area, yet at least some of them likely participated in both events. In 1917, between one and two hundred adolescents looted in the Scheunenviertel, but these wartime lootings were not markedly anti-Semitic. In 1923, by contrast, multiple groups of up to a hundred rioters and looters roamed through the very same streets, many with the aim of attacking Jews or Jewish property. Yet, just as had happened during wartime and prewar riots, marchers in and outside the Scheunenviertel targeted everyone. They stopped cars and attacked their drivers; chased bystanders through the streets; compelled them to find refuge in bars or shops; forcefully entered businesses and private living quarters to drag people out; and intimidated and physically abused those they considered to be their opponents. The surprised reaction of high-ranking Social Democrats to the Scheunenviertelpogrom reveals that even in 1923, several SPD officials still saw poor, working-class, inner-city areas as "their" districts, thus fundamentally misunderstanding their relationship to young women and men in these districts. Party officials did not want to relinquish these areas to right-wing agitators, anti-Semitism, and anti-republican sentiments, or, conversely, to the KPD. The events of November 5, 1923, thus led concerned Social Democrats to launch a Germany-wide campaign against anti-Semitism. Yet, as we have already seen, in the Scheunenviertel and other similar neighborhoods, Social-Democratic leaders had been confronted with the limits of their authority for decades – and the Scheunenviertelpogrom confirmed rather than changed this decades-old trajectory.[32]

**32** Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität*, 152–153; Joachim Häberlen has shown how difficult it was for SPD leaders even during the last years of the Weimar Republic to endorse street-level actions. Joachim Häberlen, "Scope for Agency and Political Options: The German Working-Class Movement and the Rise of Nazism," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14 (2013): 377–394, 386.

## Conclusion

Despite many political, social, economic, and demographic transformations, Weimar Germany was characterized by

important continuities with the Kaiserreich. Among them were the behavioral patterns of participants in street violence in the country's inner-city neighborhoods both before and after the war. Throughout this time, urban riots displayed a mixture of bread-and-butter issues with political or ideological questions. Both before and after 1914, political allegiances in poor, working-class areas were typically elusive and could never be easily instrumentalized by just one political ideology or political group. At the same time, there always existed specific causes – such as the protest movement for democratization in Prussia before 1914 – around which more general concerns and motivations coalesced and that made street violence part of distinctly delineated political developments. Conversely, in November 1923, gangs of young rioters in a supposedly hard-left-leaning neighborhood could act on behalf of right-wing politics. While at least in the moment these gangs agreed with the political framework of the occasion that allowed them to turn out, the act of turning out itself, laying claim to specific urban spaces, and doing so on their own terms were also motivations. In areas like the Scheunenviertel, the surface politics of street riots rarely reflected deeply held commitments, whether left-wing before 1918 or right-wing and anti-Semitic in November 1923. The former could transform into the latter, as the 1923 riots showed, yet only momentarily.

After 1923, youth-related violence in urban working-class areas continued into the Nazi years, with some youth gangs targeting Nazis even after 1933. Conversely, as Pamela Swett has shown, some cliques also allied themselves with Nazi organizations. The Scheunenviertelpogrom certainly did not signal a permanent transformation of street politics and violence in this specific area. Instead, in the ten years between the 1923 riots and the handover of power to the Nazis in 1933, the Scheunenviertel became once again exclusively notorious for left-wing-associated violence. This became especially obvious during the Communist May Day unrests of 1929,

when the Scheunenviertel was one of the riots' epicenters, and gangs both chased and were chased by police through its narrow streets, just as had happened in 1914 or 1917. In 1926, the KPD actually moved its headquarters to the district, thus symbolically claiming it for the radical left. Nazi city planners also did not consider the 1923 events to have been a turning point for the area, although in November 1923 Nazi publications had hoped that this might be the case. Almost immediately after they came to power, local NSDAP politicians in Berlin began to change what they perceived as a "Judeo-Bolshevist" neighborhood beyond recognition through expulsions and targeted city-planning measures. Nazi administrators in Hamburg did the same to the Gängeviertel. When the Nazis slated these neighborhoods for the regime's first anti-Communist and anti-Semitic spatial cleansing actions in 1933, they were simultaneously recognizing and seeking to terminate the deep urban roots of these areas' socioeconomic and historical continuities.[33]

**33** LAB A. Pr. Br. Rep. 030, No. 15805, 157 (113), 170 (127); Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung: Gewalt gegen Juden in der deutschen Provinz 1919 bis 1939* (Hamburg, 2007), 101–219; Heinrich Muth, "Jugendopposition im Dritten Reich," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 30 (1982): 369–417; Walch, "With an Iron Broom," 63; Loberg, *Struggle*, 61; Michael Grüttner, "Soziale Hygiene und Soziale Kontrolle: Die Sanierung des Hamburger Gängeviertel 1892–1938," in *Arbeiter in Hamburg: Unterschichten, Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung seit dem ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Arno Herzig et al. (Hamburg, 1983), 368–371; Swett, *Neighbors*, 200–202; "Demonstranten-Schüsse am Vorabend," *Berliner Volkszeitung*, May 1, 1929; Chris Bowlby, "Blutmai 1929: Police, Parties and Proletarians in a Berlin Confrontation," *The Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 137–158, 150.

**Jens-Uwe Guettel** is Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. His first monograph, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States, 1776–1945*, analyzes the intersections of U.S. and German imperialism. His second book project takes a broad look at opposition groups, street politics, and violence in the German Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic. Guettel has published on the domestic ramifications of empire and colonial expansion for Germany and the United States; on political scandals in the German Empire; on National Socialist expansionism and genocide; and on German labor history.