

1848: Reform or Revolution in Germany and Great Britain

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THE TITLE OF MY PAPER points to the two questions I want to address. The first is: are events in Britain and Germany in the year 1848 at all comparable? The second is: how does the revolution of 1848 relate to the concept of reform? The two questions are linked. As most textbooks will tell you, one cannot compare England and Germany in the year of the European revolution of 1848 because of the gulf that separates reform and revolution. Just as Russia on the eastern fringe of the continent was not affected by revolutionary upheaval because its backwardness did not yet provide the soil on which revolutionary forces can grow, so, on the western periphery, England had already taken the highroad of reform and was on a *Sonderweg* which rendered revolution superfluous, whereas the continent was once again lost in the chaos of revolution. Thus in his famous article 'Why was there no revolution in England in 1830 or 1848'¹ George Rudé concludes that this question is not actually worth asking. And in the latest book on *The European revolutions, 1848–1851* by Jonathan Sperber even the index does not mention Chartism.²

But, on the other hand, the whole argument can be turned round. Some modern scholars such as John Saville and David Goodway³ argue that in England Chartism represented a revolutionary potential which has been underestimated and that Chartists intended a revolution which was prevented at the last minute by determined government action. According to this view the London events of 10 April 1848 form a link in the chain of that

¹ George Rudé, 'Why was there no revolution in England in 1830 or 1848', in Manfred Kossok, ed., *Studien über die Revolution* (Berlin, 1969), pp. 231–44.

² Jonathan Sperber, *The European revolutions, 1848–1851* (Cambridge, 1994).

³ See John Saville, *1848: the British state and the Chartist movement* (Cambridge, 1987); David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838–1848* (Cambridge, 1982).

year's revolutionary uprisings, even though this was nipped in the bud. Unfortunately I have not the time to draw a detailed comparison between the events of 18 March in Berlin and of 10 April in London, when the military state of Prussia acknowledged defeat by the masses, whereas in Britain, where the slogan 'No Standing Armies' was still widely accepted, government was able to quell the threat of revolution by the mere threat to put superbly organized armed force into action.

In any case, there can be no doubt that when Chartists resumed their campaign in 1847–49 and again presented their six points in a new mass petition, they were in fact presenting revolutionary aims and demanding the introduction of mass democracy. Not only in the view of conservative contemporaries did Chartism stand for the threat of the red revolution,⁴ but Friedrich Engels also observed, in his book on the *Condition of the working class in England*, that 'These six points, which are all limited to the reconstitution of the House of Commons, harmless as they seem, are sufficient to overthrow the whole English constitution, Queen and Lords included'.⁵ And in 1848, Chartists as well as government and establishment felt that they were caught up in the maelstrom of the continental revolution.

'France has the Republic, England shall have the Charter' ran the Chartists' national slogan and the Halifax Chartists let their resolution culminate in the threat: 'Should this measure of justice be much longer withheld, nothing can prevent the people from aspiring after... a similar change in the constitution to that which the French people have so recently obtained'.⁶ And though it will always be a matter of dispute to what extent those threats of revolution were actually based on a determination to take firm direct and even violent action, they provided ample reason to arouse the fears of the middle classes and cause them to close ranks with a government which made more than adequate preparations against any possible violence in the streets of London. Apart from the riots of 6 March in London and Glasgow, in which five people were killed, the Chartists' demonstrations of 1848 were the most striking repercussion in Britain of the revolutionary movement on the continent. When contemporaries such as Robert Peel were 'considering the events that are taking place in foreign countries, and considering the excited state of the public mind at home',⁷ they argued that England was on the brink of revolution. And consequently, when the demonstration of 10 April did not come off and it became evident that the greatest mass movement of the nineteenth century had ended in failure,

⁴ See Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The language of Chartism', in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience* (London, 1982), p. 3.

⁵ Saville, 1848, p. 214.

⁶ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London, 1984), pp. 311f.

⁷ Commons Debate, 7 June 1848, *Hansard*, 3rd. ser., xcVIII (1848) cols. 20f.

Prince Albert wrote next day to Baron Stockmar, 'We had our revolution yesterday, and it ended in smoke'.⁸

Of course, historians more or less unanimously agree — which in itself is quite a noteworthy fact — that there existed neither cause nor chance for a successful revolution in Britain in 1848. But there was a scenario of widespread fear, a heightened awareness of lurking danger so common on the eve of revolutions, that it remains legitimate to ask 'why was there no revolution in Britain in 1848?' — the more so, as the revolutions on the continent without exception also ended in failure.

On the other hand — and this is the second point I want to make — one might compare Britain and Germany because what actually happened in Germany was not a revolution but rather a widespread powerful movement for reform.

It is a commonplace that German liberals, the driving force behind the events of 1848, abhorred revolution; at most they were unwilling revolutionaries. They demanded change, even fundamental change, but it had to be achieved by peaceful means. Especially after having witnessed terror and bloodshed in the wake of the French Revolution, the only form of drastic change they would accept was by 'revolution from above' as proclaimed and partly put into practice by Hardenberg and the rest of the Prussian reformers. Revolution 'as fundamental change against the will of the ruling power',⁹ even brought about by sedition and rebellion, by violence 'from below', was not on the political agenda of middle-class liberalism. So when in March 1848 violence did break out and blood was shed, especially in Vienna and on the barricades of Berlin, the immediate aim of the liberals who now took over in the states and who formed the majority in newly elected assemblies was the containment of revolution or rather, to 'overtake revolution by the way of reform'.¹⁰ Thus the Prussian liberal Friedrich Harkort exclaimed, full of indignation and in spite of what had happened on the streets of Berlin: 'We — revolution; we in Prussia! This is absolutely impossible. We in Prussia want a peaceful, popular reform and a liberal constitution, but by no means a revolution'.¹¹ And later on, during the great debate of the Paulskirchen Assembly on the installation of a German provisional government in June 1848 which at the same time was a debate on the consequences of the German revolution, Friedrich Daniel Basserman declared: 'We have no *tabula rasa* in Germany, but we have given conditions [*gegebene Verhältnisse*] and the

⁸ Saville, *1848*, p. 126.

⁹ See below, p. 153.

¹⁰ See Helga Grebing, *Der deutsche Sonderweg in Europa, 1806–1945* (Stuttgart, 1986), p. 90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 'Wir Revolution? Wir in Preußen? Das ist ganz unmöglich. Wir wollen in Preußen friedliche, volkstümliche Reform und liberale Verfassung, aber unter keinen Umständen Revolution.'

essential thing is to reform, not to revolutionize'.¹² After the two great national assemblies in Frankfurt and Berlin had finally gathered in May, revolution was at most discussed, but not made, and the majority always decided in favour of reform, as it had already done in the preparatory assembly (*Vorparlament*) on 31 March when the attempts of some radicals to perpetuate revolution by installing a revolutionary government had been stalled by an overwhelming liberal majority.

To the same extent to which liberalism dominated political thought and political action during 1847–8, the concept of reform was at the heart of politics and provided the dominant topic of contemporary political discourse. This holds true even if we turn to the left: that is, the minority of democrats and republicans who advocated radical change of political constitution and thorough social reforms, whose programme was the equivalent of the People's Charter in Britain.

Here, especially for the disciples of Hegel such as Karl Marx and Arnold Ruge, revolution in principle ranked high on their agenda. Their philosophy of history defined revolution as the key element of progress, as the often violent readjustment and bringing together of disparate historical developments at different levels. Thus, according to Arnold Ruge, revolution was, 'die äußerliche Darstellung der Rückkehr des Bewußtseins aus der Entfremdung des Geistes in sein präsenes Selbstbewußtsein'.¹³ ('The outward representation of the return of awareness from the alienation of the spirit to its present self-awareness'.) And Julius Fröbel in his important book on the 'System of social politics' coined the gripping formula: 'Die Revolution hat recht, die Reaktion hat unrecht, die Revolution ist rechtmäßig, die Reaktion ist unrechtmäßig — denn die Revolution ist der Fortschritt.'¹⁴ ('Revolution is right, reaction is wrong, revolution is legitimate, reaction is illegitimate — for revolution is progress'.)

But, on the other hand, Fröbel concedes that the legitimacy of revolution does not imply that it will not lead to disaster in the end because the lessons taught by history do not confirm the conclusions drawn by theoretical deduction. The experience of 'the cursed French Revolution'¹⁵ in particular has dashed beyond repair all the hopes placed in revolution in general. Thus even the democrats on the left hold conflicting views concerning revolution,

¹² Franz Wigard, ed., *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der deutschen constituierenden Nationalversammlung* (9 vols, Frankfurt/Main, 1848–9), I, p. 381 (19 June 1848): 'Wir haben keine tabula rasa in Deutschland, wir haben gegebene Verhältnisse und es gilt zu reformieren und nicht zu revolutionieren.'

¹³ Arnold Ruge, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (10 vols, Mannheim, 1846), III, p. 465.

¹⁴ Julius Fröbel, *System der sozialen Politik* (2 vols. Mannheim, 1847), I, pp. 110f.

¹⁵ Ludwig Bamberger in *Mainzer Zeitung* (30 March 1848), cited in Peter Wende, 'Der Revolutionsbegriff der radikalen Demokraten', in Wolfgang Klötzer, ed., *Ideen und Strukturen der deutschen Revolution 1848* (Frankfurt/Main, 1974), p. 65.

the more so as revolutions are to be made and accomplished from below, by the common people who, at present, are not to be trusted to meet the demands which the course of history makes on them. In 1848 only a minority of that minority, men such as Friedrich Hecker and Gustav Struve called for direct action and tried to accelerate the revolutionary progress by not only proclaiming, but taking up arms for, a German republic.

The majority of the left also took the way of reform, though they were not in step with the liberals. They often called for more drastic measures and though they refrained from revolutionary action, they were always prepared to invoke revolution, to 'talk swords and daggers'¹⁶ as Ruge called it, in order to press successfully for more and decisive reforms. The closest the national assemblies in Berlin and Frankfurt came to revolution was when they debated whether they should, as a formal pledge to revolution, put that revolution on record — I will come back to this later. The fact that even these modest attempts at revolution were blocked by liberal majorities puts the whole story of the German revolution into a nutshell.

Anyone who talks of the failure of the German revolution should bear in mind that there were hardly any revolutionaries in 1848, and that revolution had not been put on the agenda by the overwhelming majority of the political opposition which was at most prepared to invoke revolution in order to press on with reform.

And at the same time, wherever and whenever revolution raised its head, it was sought to contain and canalize it by reforms. Friedrich Daniel Bassermann made this point when he told the Paulskirchen Assembly that in April, after the session of the preparatory assembly and the appointment of the Committee of the Fifty, the right to revolution had been lost and the duty to reform had begun.¹⁷

Obviously the political discourse of the German revolution is dominated by the concept of reform to such a degree that we need to define it more carefully by asking to what extent its close relationship with the concept of revolution may have changed its meaning or perhaps even tainted its essence.

I cannot possibly give a complete history of the concept of reform here and I need not do so, because this has already been done¹⁸ — though one might add that further work needs to be done in this field. Instead I intend to concentrate on 1848 and the years leading up to it. But in order to do this, and to discover shifts and changes of meaning, let me first outline once again

¹⁶ See Arnold Ruge, ed., *Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publizistik* (2 vols, Zürich, 1843), II, p. 15.

¹⁷ Wigard, *Sten. Ber.*, I, p. 1417: '[hat] das Recht der Revolution aufgehört und die Pflicht der Reform begonnen'.

¹⁸ See mainly, Eike Wolgast, 'Reform, Reformation', in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, eds, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (9 vols, Stuttgart, 1972–97), v, pp. 313–60.

the essence of the concept of reform in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

As in the case of the term 'revolution', new and different meanings of the word 'reform' signal the fundamental change which affected political and social thought and discourse around the middle of the eighteenth century, thus providing further evidence for the epoch-making importance of what Reinhart Koselleck has labelled 'die Sattelzeit', that is the great turning point in modern European history. Originally both terms under discussion here implied a return to the past, revolution in the form of a circular movement, reform in the sense of a reformation, that is the restoration or renewal of past conditions. During the eighteenth century, in the wake of a new understanding of the course of history, the terms 'revolution' and 'reform' began to imply special modes of change in the realm of law, constitution, or society, in the context of history conceived as the unfolding of evolution and progress. But as with so many other notions and ideas, the concept of reform was redefined in the light of the experience of the French Revolution. Reform now came to stand more or less for the opposite of revolution. 'Reforms, but no revolutions' Ludwig Schlözer admonished his compatriots in 1793,¹⁹ and especially in England, since Burke's criticism of the events taking place in France, reform had become the conservative alternative to revolutionary change and upheaval. This finally led to the standard textbook comparison between the revolutionary anarchy of France and Britain as the model for the success of reform.

Thus the list of meanings and connotations of the term 'reform' comprises: change, especially gradual change without violence from below, initiated from above in order to adapt laws and constitutions to changing conditions, in order to achieve necessary improvements, and all to prevent the abrupt and fundamental change, brought about by violence from below, which is the essence of revolution.

But as soon as one takes a closer look at the thick web of meanings of the concept of reform, especially during the period of the 'Vormärz' in Germany, such simple attributions of certain words to certain matters no longer hold, but dissolve into a complicated pattern of convergent and divergent lines.

Though as a rule reform is seen as the opposite of revolution, at the same time a strong affinity between reform and revolution can be registered, until both concepts seem to merge. To give just one example, let me quote from the speech which the student Karl Heinrich Brüggemann gave in his defence at his trial where he stood accused of preaching sedition at the Hambach Rally in 1832: 'Deutschland will und muß eine Revolution haben; zeigt das Volk

¹⁹ August Ludwig Schlözer, *Allgemeines Staatsrecht und Staatsverfassungslehre* (Göttingen, 1793), p. 162, quoted in Wolgast, 'Reform', p. 343.

sich entschieden, so ist es befähigt, seine Revolution gesetzlich durchzuführen, wie es eben England tut'.²⁰ ('Germany wants a revolution and must have it. If the people is determined, then it is capable of carrying out its revolution lawfully, as England is doing'.) Again and again liberals of a more radical disposition, such as Karl von Rotteck for example, when demanding reform instead of revolution were actually advocating revolution in the guise of reform. Radical change, even radical change in the realm of the constitution, was to be brought about by lawful means. On the other hand, reforms, even those initiated by princes like Joseph II, have been judged revolutionary, by contemporaries as well as by historians. Legal reform was supposed to take on the task of illegal revolution whenever reform was announced as 'eine Revolution im guten Sinn'.²¹

The German revolution of 1848, as a movement for reform, must be seen and judged as the result of this close relationship between reform and revolution during the *Vormärz*. Since the French Revolution it had become a commonplace argument that reform and revolution actually served the same end: the adaptation of laws and constitutions to changed conditions. Therefore they differed only in *how* necessary change was brought about, and it was widely accepted that timely reforms would render revolutions unnecessary, whereas thwarted or even delayed reforms were sure to cause revolutionary upheaval. Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz put it into a nutshell when he argued in 1823 'daß den meisten, wo nicht allen, Revolutionen durch zeitgemäße Reformen hätte vorgebeugt werden können' ('that most, if not all, revolutions could have been prevented by timely reforms') and more than fifty years later the economist Gustav Schmoller maintained: 'Der ganze Fortschritt der Geschichte besteht darin, an die Stelle der Revolution die Reform zu setzen'.²² ('Progress in history consists entirely in putting reform in the place of revolution'.)

As soon as this argument was taken up by those who actually favoured revolution, certain essentials of the classic concept of reform were not only left out but even changed. Whereas the reforms at the beginning of the century, which Wehler for example has labelled acts of defensive modernization, were measures inaugurated by governments in order to prevent further change which might endanger the sovereignty of the rulers, during the *Vormärz* the call for reform could stand for aggressive modernization, for the attempt to force rulers into conceding far-reaching, even fundamental reforms under the threat of impending revolution.

²⁰ Cited in Reinhart Koselleck, 'Revolution', in Brunner, Conze and Koselleck, eds, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, v, p. 746.

²¹ Hardenberg's 'Rigaer Denkschrift' (12 September 1807), in Georg Winter, ed, *Die Reorganisation des Preußischen Staates unter Stein und Hardenberg* (2 vols, Leipzig, 1931), I, p. 306.

²² Cited in Koselleck, 'Revolution', pp. 752f.

Now reforms were no longer to be initiated from above, but brought under way by pressure being exerted from below. At the same time a new element was introduced into the discussion of reform politics: the principle of agreement ('das Prinzip der Vereinbarung'), in other words reforms were no longer to be one-sided acts by the government, executed without public debate, but negotiated between the ruler and his subjects, or rather the representatives of his people. Characteristically the official title of the Prussian National Assembly was 'Versammlung zur Vereinbarung der Preußischen Staatsverfassung' ('Assembly for the Agreement of the Prussian Constitution'). Here constitutional change on a grand scale was to be achieved by 'transaction between the crown and the people', as the Prussian minister Hansemann called it.²³

But political negotiations always take place in the context of power politics, especially when a shift of sovereignty is put on the agenda, as in 1848 when German states were expected to become part of a new nation-state and rulers were expected to share power with their subjects. This was the dilemma of the liberal majorities in the assemblies. The power they could draw upon was the power they had renounced, because it was the power of revolution. On the other hand, the democratic minorities, which gained strength in the course of the events, at least tried to invoke the threat of revolution. They tried to conjure up that alternative to reform in order to press on for fundamental change by agreement. This was the difference, and the contest which lay behind the often passionate debates on the range of the revolution which had taken place in the days of March.

The great example for this was set by the Berlin Assembly, when it discussed the motion proposed by the left: 'Die hohe Versammlung wolle in Anerkennung der Revolution zu Protokoll erklären, daß die Kämpfer des 18. und 19. März sich wohl um das Vaterland verdient gemacht haben.'²⁴ ('In recognition of the revolution, the assembly wishes to have it put on record that the fighters of 18 and 19 March rendered the fatherland great service.') The proposers of this motion also wanted to stress that the assembly was the child of revolution and that its existence implied the recognition of the revolution²⁵ and of the sovereignty of the people, whereas their liberal opponents maintained that the rights of the people and the existence of the National Assembly were the result of an act of grace by the king. In the heat of this debate Riedel, a liberal member of the assembly, stated the true point at issue: 'We all know: revolution is constitutional change taking place

²³ *Verhandlungen der Versammlung zur Vereinbarung der Preußischen Staats-Verfassung* (2 vols, Berlin, 1848), I, p. 160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 'Die Versammlung selbst ist aus dieser Revolution hervorgegangen, ihr Dasein ist also faktisch die Anerkennung der Revolution.'

against the will of the ruling power whereas reform means change taking place with the assent of that power'.²⁶ The left resorted to revolution at least in order to enforce a one-sided bargain in their favour, trying to assume the position of the victor who dictates the terms of the treaty. The liberals also wanted a 'fundamental change in the constitution to take place; but for the reformation to take effect only through conviction acted upon conviction, within the law and without the use of violence' ('daß eine prinzipielle Änderung der Verfassung stattfindet, aber die Art und Weise, wie die Reformation wirkt, ist keine andere, als die, durch die lebendige Überzeugung auf die lebendige Überzeugung, innerhalb der Formen des Gesetzes und ohne Anwendung materieller Gewalt').²⁷

To achieve fundamental constitutional change by negotiating an agreement with their sovereigns: this was the essential aim of liberals during what has been called the German revolution.

I should now like to put three final questions: Though revolution foundered, did reform also end up in failure? If so, what were the reasons for the failure of reform? And can the failure of German reformers and of British Chartists be compared, and can any conclusions be drawn from this which could help us define some limits for reform in general?

In Germany Manfred Hettling has recently argued that though revolution in 1848 was to prove an illusion, reforms were actually achieved. In most of the German states, especially those which already had constitutions and popular assemblies, non-violent demonstrations achieved 'reform without revolution' (this is the title of Hettling's important book on Württemberg during the *Vormärz* and the revolution).

Popular liberal governments, the so-called 'March ministries' were installed, liberty of the press was granted, the emancipation of the rural population (*Bauernbefreiung*), begun during the Napoleonic era and then often interrupted, was finally completed. And one could go further than Hettling and argue that even where revolution failed and reaction triumphed, as was the case in Berlin, reform on a grand scale was achieved by the installation of the Prussian constitution in December 1848, whose original version did hardly differ from what liberals had put on their constitutional agenda.

But this was not the result of deliberations and transactions, not reform by way of mutual agreement (*Vereinbarung*), but by way of octroi simply imposed from above. It was not the outcome of a bargain between two parties, not a compromise, as finally became obvious during the constitutional crisis of 1862.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 166. 'Revolution ist eine Staats-Veränderung, welche gegen den Willen der herrschenden Gewalt geschieht, und Reform ist eine Staats-Veränderung, welche mit dem Willen der herrschenden Gewalt geschieht, das wissen wir Alle.'

²⁷ Ibid.

Revolution foundered in Germany in 1848. Events were dominated by the concept of reform — but revolution was not the only illusion. There was also the illusion of reform. As soon as the heart of the matter was touched, as soon as the question of sovereignty was raised, reform by agreement had to turn out to be an illusion. Fundamental constitutional change was to be the touchstone of the strength and depth of the reform movement and whenever this question was raised, sovereigns remained adamant in their rejection of any compromise.²⁸ And this was also to contribute heavily not only to the failure of constitutional reform in the member states of the German Federation, but also to the failure of the national revolution; in other words: the foundation of a German nation-state which would have more or less abolished the sovereignty of the thirty-something German princely rulers.

The hope of being able to compromise on sovereignty, and to divide supreme political power evenly between the ruler and his popular assembly would prove to be the illusion of reformers which led to the failure of reform in 1848.

But — and this is my second point — this kind of failure was not accidental. It was the outcome of an attempt to achieve certain aims by inadequate means. Or, rather, it was a failure that resulted from attempts to ignore the limits of reform. And this, at the same time, was the consequence of that peculiar concept of reform which equated reform with revolution minus violence, and which argued that revolution might be replaced by reform.

The illusion of achieving revolution by reform sprang from an inadmissible mixture of aims and means, from the belief that as long as one adhered to the principle of non-violent change, even radical measures could be put through.

It was the radicals who clearly saw that revolution was doomed to failure as soon as it switched to reform, and it was this idea which underlay their efforts at least to ensure the recognition of the principle of revolution by formal declarations, to establish a reign, not of revolutionary terror, but of revolutionary rhetoric. And it was Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, the liberal essayist of the *Vormärz*, who, now at the age of 63, made this point in a running commentary in his diaries. On 19 May he noted: 'Deutschland scheint nicht zu retten als durch den Sturmschritt auf dem Wege der Revolution. Wer weiß, ob wir nicht bald bedauern müssen, daß Struve und Hecker gescheitert sind'. ('It seems that Germany cannot be saved except by

²⁸ See Wolfram Siemann, *Die Revolution von 1848 in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main, 1985), p. 226: 'Kein Herrscher der führenden deutschen Staaten war willig zu einem konstitutionellen Kompromiß auf der demokratischen Basis von 1848.' And Hettling has to concede the same even for Württemberg (Manfred Hettling, *Reform ohne Revolution: Bürgertum, Bürokratie und kommunale Selbstverwaltung in Württemberg, 1800–1850* (Göttingen, 1990), p. 191).

revolution on the double. Who knows — we might soon regret that Struve and Hecker failed'.) One month later (17 June): 'Jeden Tag wird es klarer, daß der König nur dem Zwange nachgeben hat, daß er beschämt und ergrimmt darüber ist, daß er die Richtung, die er zu halten versprochen hat erwünscht und haßt'. ('Every day it emerges more clearly that the king has merely given way to pressure, that he is humiliated and infuriated, that he curses and hates the direction which he has promised to take'.) Again, four weeks later (10 July): 'Die Sachen gehen einen schlimmen Weg. Die Einheit der Deutschen wird nicht mit und bei den Fürsten zustandekommen. Nur das Volk allein kann sie bewirken und genießen. Ob das aber ohne die Fürsten zu handeln versteht, reif dazu ist?' ('Things are taking a bad turn. German unification will not be achieved with and by the princes. The people alone can effect it. But can the people act without the princes, is it mature enough?') And finally, on 12 August: 'Bei uns zeigt sich diesmal recht, daß unsere Revolution keine ganze war.'²⁹ ('This time it has become crystal clear that our revolution was not a proper one.')

And as my final witness I again call on Manfred Hettling, the advocate of 1848-reform, when he concedes: 'Da eine Revolutionierung der Verhältnisse abgelehnt wurde, war auch die Reform ohne Revolution zum Scheitern verurteilt.'³⁰ ('As a revolutionizing of conditions was rejected, reform without revolution was also condemned to failure.')

Whereas the replacement of revolution by reform could easily prove to be an illusion, on the other hand revolution and reform might get on very well together. Quick, radical, and fundamental change cannot be brought about by peaceful reforms; but the achievements of revolutions, if they are to last, must be cast into the mould of legal reforms, because, as Hegel observed, 'Revolution cannot last without reform'.³¹

Though I have mainly concentrated on some aspects of reform and revolution in 1848 Germany, I would, nevertheless, like to make some attempt to compare the failure of reform movements in Britain and Germany, even though, on closer inspection, striking differences seem to render every comparison futile. At a very general level one might argue that in both cases attempts were made to enforce rapid and radical political and constitutional change by way of reform. Both movements foundered because the policy of reform aimed at targets beyond what might be called the limits or boundaries of reform. In both cases the reigning sovereign was expected to assent to a transfer of power which would affect the constitutional framework and *de facto* revolutionize the political system.

²⁹ Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, *Journal einer Revolution. Tagesblätter 1848/49* (Nördlingen, 1986), pp. 149, 165, 173, 185.

³⁰ Hettling, *Reform*, p. 211.

³¹ See Heinz Monhagen, ed., *Revolution, Reform, Restauration*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1988), p. 6.

In England the movement miscarried in the teeth of resolute and unanimous resistance of the political nation in Parliament and outside Parliament where more than 100,000 special constables put on an intimidating display of force on behalf of the establishment. In Germany the movement miscarried because it lost its initial unanimity and resolution when facing the threat of revolution and thus opened up chances for the sovereign powers of the *ancien régime* to initiate their policies of defensive reforms and political reaction. In Britain, moreover, those resisting the claims of the Chartists could point to a whole catalogue of successful reforms, thereby demonstrating that Parliament was always 'ready to act according to the enlightened opinion of the people', as Lord Russell argued, when he spoke against a further extension of the franchise in June 1848.³² It was not to be no further reform, but only no further reform *now*, because, it was argued, the Chartists did not represent the majority of the people. Not only the great Reform Act of 1832, but also the Factory Acts as well as the repeal of the Corn Laws, testified to the fact that within the framework of the British constitution there were ample means 'to introduce those changes which the "great innovator Time" has rendered expedient'.³³ Thus the failure of the Chartists and the failure of German revolutionaries and reformers was of a different quality. In Germany the actual transfer of political power to the nation had still to take place and would finally be brought about only by 'blood and iron', by the wars of unification and the First World War and revolution. In England, by contrast, since the end of the seventeenth century, political modernization had meant adapting parliamentary representation to the changing scope of the political nation. In this respect the debate on extending the franchise in the House of Commons on 6 July 1848 was most revealing. Nearly everyone consented that this had to take place as soon as the majority of the people were to press for it because Parliament, it was stressed, is nothing but the agent of the people. As the advocate for further reform, Osborne, put it: 'In fact . . . all are for progress now-a-days; the only question appears to be, what is to be the pace, and who the drivers of the new vehicle?'³⁴

The many labels which can be attached to the nineteenth century certainly include that of reform. Because of continuous and often rapid change in many areas 'the great moving power of reform' becomes the essence of politics in order to adapt laws and institutions — as was pointed out in an article on reform in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1859. To remove abuses, to reorganize, to improve, to amend, to expand, to recast was to become the daily bread of politics to such an extent that nowadays reform is

³² *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCIX (20 June 1848), col. 930.

³³ 'Reform', *Edinburgh Review*, 109 (1859), col. 284.

³⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd. ser., c (6 July 1848), cols. 157f.

almost synonymous for politics. Nineteenth-century Britain already possessed the necessary framework for this process of adaptation which allowed the six points of the People's Charter to be put on the agenda of some future Parliament,³⁵ and which puts the failure of the Chartists into perspective: England's 'monarchy, limited as it is, is a republic under another name; and need not change its appellation in order to obtain universal suffrage, or after it has got it' as a 'Superior Spirit' put it in his *Reflections on the European revolution of 1848*, published in May of that year.³⁶ In Germany this framework had yet to be introduced. In Britain the failure of radical reform in 1848 meant the postponement of reform, in Germany the failure of reform meant waiting for a future revolution.

³⁵ See John Russell, *Hansard*, 3rd. ser., XCIX (20 June 1848), col. 930: 'I think that a time may come — perhaps it is not distant — when reform may be usefully introduced . . . for the improvement of the representation.'

³⁶ *Reflections on the European revolution of 1848, by a superior spirit* (London, 1848), pp. 180f.