

Hoteliers against the Republic

In defeat, the grand hotel scene became a microcosm of misery. Shortages, loss of property, financial insecurity, the breakdown in social relations, and political violence characterize the first several months of peace. All the city's hotels were subject to at least some of these phenomena; a few withstood them all: the Kaiserhof, the Eden, and the Adlon. They are uncommonly good vantage points for viewing Berlin and Germany's painful transformation from empire to republic.

World War I had left behind an exhausted and newly vulnerable grand hotel industry. The niceties were gone; so was the relative equipoise among management, white-collar employees, workers, guests, and the authorities. Incrementally, outside forces had corroded hotels' defenses and animated conflicts. Staff-management hierarchies trembled, service suffered, the labor force revolted, the state intervened. Each of these developments, any and all of which would have been inconceivable in the prewar period, posed an existential threat to the industry. Berlin's hoteliers responded by trying to form a cartel, that quintessentially illiberal formation.

Fresh threats assembled against them – from the left in the form of revolution, the January Uprising, and strikes; from the right in the form of vandalism, looting, atrocity, and an unsuccessful coup d'état. Then came the threats that originated neither on the right nor the left: material and labor shortages, high crime, inflation, hyperinflation, and rising taxes. Between 1918 and 1923, hoteliers began blaming the left and the state for all these misfortunes – a tendency that pushed them into the camp of the anti-republican right, Weimar's enemies. With the hyperinflation of 1923, a catastrophe for Berlin's grand hotels, that tendency became

the rule. The republic, they had come to believe, was bad for business. The efforts of Berlin's grand hoteliers to manage the crisis of the postwar era, 1918–23, reveal a progression from quotidian struggles to political decisions that led farther and farther from the liberal path.

REVOLUTION AND THE JANUARY UPRISING

The social and political tensions of the Weimar period (1919–32) came early to Berlin's grand hotels. On November 9, 1918, bullets broke the windows of the Hotel Adlon's most luxurious corner suite facing the Brandenburg Gate and Unter den Linden, according to Hedda Adlon, the wife of Louis Adlon Jr.¹ Then, in early January, a battlefield formed at the Adlon's front door, with pro-government Freikorps (paramilitary) exchanging fire with communist revolutionaries.² Volleys of bullets riddled the facade. Explosions shattered the plate glass.³

Upon the abdication of Emperor Wilhelm II and the dissolution of his regime in November 1918, the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or SPD), Friedrich Ebert, assumed control as Philipp Scheidemann, another SPD politician, proclaimed a republic from the balcony of the Reichstag. All of this occurred on November 9, 1918, the same day that bullets hit the Adlon. The next day, November 10, Ebert agreed to exclude the far-left wing of his party from the government in exchange for the support of the army under Wilhelm Groener. In opposition, the left-radical Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or KPD) formed on New Year's Day 1919. In the so-called Spartacist Revolt, KPD supporters took to the streets to effect another revolution, this one on behalf of the proletariat, and fight against the pro-government Freikorps. The Freikorps, in turn, commandeered the Kaiserhof as their headquarters, fortress, and impromptu jail on January 6. The end for the Spartacists came shortly thereafter, on January 15/16, when army officers arrested their leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, interrogated and beat them at another grand hotel – the Eden – and then proceeded to

¹ Adlon, *Hotel Adlon*, 71.

² On the composition of the Freikorps, see Peter Keller, *“Die Wehrmacht der Deutschen Republik ist die Reichswehr”: Die deutsche Armee, 1918–1921* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), 51; Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, “Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923,” *Journal of Modern History* 83 (2011), 489–502.

³ “When Revolution Stalks Streets of Berlin,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 1919.

murder them both. These revenge killings introduced extreme political violence into Berlin's grand hotels, which became staging grounds in the transition from foreign war to civil war.

Rosa Luxemburg had arrived in Berlin on November 10, 1918, where she checked in to the Excelsior and got right to work with her co-revolutionary, Karl Liebknecht, who had been in town since late October. She wanted to be close to events and close to the presses recently seized for use as organs of the revolution. Until November 17 or 18, Luxemburg's hotel room at the Excelsior doubled as the Spartacists' headquarters. For Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and their opponents, Berlin's grand hotels would serve as sites of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary planning and execution.⁴

All but one of the hotels continued operations through the November 9 revolution, despite the dangers. On the 10th, shots rang out in the night "like an intermezzo" outside the Excelsior, according to the writer Harry Kessler, who was dining there.⁵ Upstairs, Luxemburg and Liebknecht might have heard the shots, too. The next morning, a firefight broke out around the Central-Hotel. From turrets and windows, by some reports even from the hotel's windows, machine-gun fire tore across the dawn, but nobody was hurt. When the shooting abated, pro-revolutionary soldiers entered the building and arrested several counterrevolutionary officers.⁶ There, and at other hotels, pro-revolutionary soldiers, before they left, charged managers with disarming all officers on the premises.⁷ For the most part, however, guests and staff carried on as usual, even when late morning brought more shooting near the Central, this time at Wolff's Telegraph Bureau, which the revolutionaries had already occupied. At some point, too, several revolutionaries occupied the Viktoria and Astoria cafés in Friedrichstadt. A person or group broke windows there and at Wertheim's department store, but they left the hotels intact.⁸

In the coming weeks (November–December 1918), huge crowds descended on the city center, where most of Berlin's hotels were located. Tens of thousands marched through on November 20 in the funeral

⁴ Elżbieta Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 233.

⁵ Harry Kessler, *Das Tagebuch, 1880–1937*, vol. 6, 1916–1918, ed. Günter Riederer (Stuttgart: Cotta, 2006), 629.

⁶ Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 58.

⁷ I found no evidence of a manager complying with this request.

⁸ Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 58–59.

cortege for fallen revolutionaries.⁹ Two days later, across the river and to the northeast of the hotels, sentries shot and killed two demonstrators at the Police Presidium. December brought an increase in violence.

The Kaiserhof stood most seriously exposed because of its location across from a focal point in revolutionary and counterrevolutionary action, the chancellery. In the late afternoon of December 6, soldiers and sailors forced Chancellor Ebert from his office and into Wilhelmplatz. Rows of revolutionary soldiers faced him in formation against the backdrop of the Hotel Kaiserhof. Nearby, another group of soldiers breached the Prussian parliament building and tried to arrest their own representatives. Spartacists demanding a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat demonstrated farther north; in an attempt to kill them all, government forces machine-gunned a crowded tram. They slew an estimated sixteen people and hurt eighty more, mostly bystanders. In response, revolutionaries and socialists organized a protest the following day. A crowd of thousands made its way through the hotel district and returned to the Kaiserhof after nightfall.

Demonstrations continued apace until the next explosion on December 24. At the palace and in its vicinity, artillery fire resounded at around 8 a.m. The government's soldiers were fighting bands of sailors who had been entrusted to protect important buildings in central Berlin but whose loyalty had come into question (Figure 4.1). By 11:30, the square in front of the city palace looked a wreck: tram lines down, rubble on the pavement, rows upon rows of broken windows and smashed muntins – smoke billowing from inside the erstwhile royal and imperial residence. By noon, the government's soldiers had lost the battle, a blow to the regime that cast doubt on its staying power.

Yet for all the fears among hoteliers and guests about the left, the real danger came from the right. By the end of January, the balance sheet would show that hoteliers, especially, only ever had the government's forces to fear. The revolutionary left, despite its soaring rhetoric, never tried to take ground from grand hotels. There is no evidence even to suggest that the Spartacists and their co-revolutionists had any interest in interfering with a single hotel. As damage to the city center and grand hotels escalated in January, with aftershocks later in 1919 and in 1920, almost all the attacks – and indeed all the devastating ones – came from

⁹ I have distilled the rest of this section – shifting the focus to grand hotels – from Mark Jones's meticulous reconstruction of the sequence of events from newspaper accounts, memoirs, police testimony, and official reports. See Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 58–59, 151, 167–68, 180–86.



FIGURE 4.1 Sailors on patrol on Friedrichstraße in front of the Central-Hotel, December 1918

Image credit: Scherl/Süddeutsche Zeitung

the right, not the left. In trusting the government's forces to protect commercial establishments in the central districts against bolshevist revolution, hoteliers and their class miscalculated.

In the three weeks after December 24, the failure of the government's soldiers to retake full control of the city center became apparent, and the revolution reached its crisis point, with Social Democrats committed to halting its progress toward bolshevism and the far left increasing its radical demands for the transfer of property and power to the working class. On Christmas Day, Karl Liebknecht and some 3,000 of his far-left supporters marched through central Berlin and took brief control of the Social Democrats' newspaper, *Vorwärts*, a frightening action, however inconsequential, from the perspective of the Social Democrats.

Funerals for the pro-revolutionary victims of the December 24 melee at the palace motivated perhaps the largest mass gathering to date, including supporters of almost every party, on December 29. Again, hundreds of thousands descended on the city center. The Social Democratic (moderate socialist) and German Democratic (left-liberal)

contingent converged at the chancellery and Kaiserhof. There, they chanted, "Down with bolshevism! Spartacus out!" and "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!"

The following week, on the night of January 5/6, Chancellor Ebert called on the crowd again, urging his supporters to meet at Wilhelmplatz, the site of the chancellery and the Kaiserhof, and protect it from the radical revolution that seemed to be underway. In what came to be known as the January Uprising, Spartacist and other anti-government actors took control of key sites: the *Vorwärts* offices, Wolff's Telegraph Bureau, four large publishing houses, and the printing facilities of the *Berliner Tageblatt*. At Wilhelmplatz, Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) addressed the crowd that Ebert had summoned: "This dirty mess has to be brought to an end," he pleaded. "We appeal to the entire people, especially those who are armed, the soldiers, that they remain available to the government." The listeners cheered and demanded weapons. Another speaker ascended the dais to tell women and children to go home, for "the work of the men has begun!"¹⁰ The Social Democrats' incitement to violence across the square had direct and devastating consequences for the Kaiserhof, now at the center of a literal turf war.

THE SACK OF THE KAISERHOF

On January 6 at 4 p.m., the speeches at Wilhelmplatz having come to an end, Harry Kessler took a room at the Kaiserhof. Inside, it was business as usual. Pages sat in a row in the vestibule, he wrote in his diary. The elderly cloakroom attendant took his coat. In the atrium, waiters served tea to the clientele, a smaller group than usual. At five, Kessler went upstairs to his room to write, and as he put pen to paper, he heard gunshots, then soldiers calling out on the street below. He heard them running down the pavement for cover, "then silence."

Some several minutes later, shots rang out again. To Kessler, this round sounded more explosive, like a real battle. When the firing died down, he left his room for information and found soldiers on the stairs. Guests and staff were collecting in the corridors and discussing plans of action in the event of a Spartacist takeover of the building. Rumors reverberated around the hotel: *The Spartacists have surrounded us on three sides; the Spartacists are planning to storm the hotel; the Spartacists have taken the entire city center.* "Because it looked as if the hotel could

¹⁰ Quoted in Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 186.

be completely cut off, I decided to go home,” Kessler wrote in his diary. Once outside, he heard more shooting and fled the scene.¹¹

There is no evidence to suggest that the Kaiserhof was ever under threat from the Spartacists or that the shooting came from guns other than those of the government’s own forces. The *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung* reported the next day that teenage boys had come to Wilhelmplatz with guns and started firing in front of the Kaiserhof at about the time Kessler heard the first shots, but we cannot know who these boys were or whether they even existed.¹² It is just as likely that the sound of gunfire far away caused the government’s stressed, excited, and trigger-happy soldiers to assume the worst and start firing into the night, beginning a vicious cycle that fed on rumor, impulse, and incitements to violence. Exaggeration of the threat from the far left likewise prompted the government to use whatever means available to lock down the city center.¹³

Shortly after Kessler’s departure from the Kaiserhof, the government’s soldiers there ejected the manager, the staff, and the guests. Having commandeered the hotel, the soldiers took posts in the guest rooms and fired on Spartacists – real or imagined – from the windows.¹⁴ Even as the neighborhood returned to normal after January 7, the Kaiserhof lay in a cordon sanitaire and continued to serve as a barracks for the government’s soldiers in the city center. “Government troops in the Kaiserhof, closed up and dark,” Kessler reported on January 8. He then made the short walk to the Fürstenhof, open for business but with its shutters down for protection. On the sidewalk, merchants plied their wares: cigarettes, malt candy, and soap. Despite Kessler’s sense that shooting could start again at any moment, peace prevailed.¹⁵

The uprising’s final curtain on January 11 restored normalcy to most places but not inside the Kaiserhof. There, the ranks of government soldiers had swollen to 1,200. Their commanders would not give up the hotel until the end of the month. In the meantime, their men broke most of the windows, wrecked textiles and furniture, and swung from chandeliers, which eventually came crashing down. They clogged toilets, bidets, and baths, flooding the building and damaging the floors, ceilings, and

¹¹ Harry Kessler, *Das Tagebuch, 1880–1937*, vol. 7, 1919–1923, ed. Angela Reinthal (Stuttgart: Cotta, 2007), 81.

¹² “Der Zug der Arbeitslosen,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, January 7, 1919.

¹³ Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 138.

¹⁴ Minutes of meetings of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, January 30, 1919, and March 24, 1919, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹⁵ Kessler, *Tagebuch*, 7:85–87.

walls. In the restaurant and café, they smashed china and glasses, broke up the tables, and stole all the silver. They ate everything in the kitchens and storerooms and quaffed all the wine. When they finally pulled out, taking most of the Kaiserhof's remaining property, they left a sopping wreck.¹⁶ The hotel never quite recovered.

Its ground floor reopened first, after several months, with cheaper replacements of its imperial-era furniture and finishes. The rest of the hotel required years of work and incalculable sums. Impossible to repair was the Kaiserhof's reputation. The owners tried to obscure the memory of its role in the atrocities of January 1919 with the help of an extraordinarily expensive advertising campaign, but the violence had broken the hotel's association with prestige and power. To make matters worse, when the state finally compensated the Berlin Hotel Corporation for damages to this, the crown jewel of its properties, the sum was too little, too late. The mark was so heavily devalued by 1922 that the payment amounted only to a few thousand prewar marks, not enough even to repaint the guest rooms.¹⁷ The government declined to pay for the damages its own forces had inflicted in pursuit of counterrevolution.

The only attacks reportedly launched from the far left in 1918–19 happened at the Central and the Bristol – if these attacks happened at all.¹⁸ The newspaper coverage is inconclusive, and no harder evidence survives. At any rate, if they are true, the stories tell of broken windows only. Compare that to the Kaiserhof, its sacking well documented, and the Eden, which hosted the most notorious atrocities of the whole uprising. There, on the night of January 15/16, amid witnesses and supporters, the government's soldiers beat Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg nearly to death and finished them off in revenge killings nearby.

OUT OF THE EDEN

The Eden Hotel fell under partial control of the Guard Division just after New Year's Day 1919. Unlike the Kaiserhof, however, the Eden functioned more as an officers' club and headquarters, with some allowances

¹⁶ Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, January 30, 1919.

¹⁷ Ibid.; minutes of meetings of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, October 8, 1919, October 18, 1919, March 3, 1920, March 30, 1920, September 16, 1920, and April 1, 1921, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹⁸ See Kurt Wrobel, *Der Sieg der Arbeiter und Matrosen: Berliner Arbeiterveteranen berichten über ihren Kampf in der Novemberrevolution* (East Berlin: Bezirksleitung der SED Groß-Berlin, 1958), 30.

made for the rank-and-file who served their commanders. Some of them became accomplices to murder on January 15/16. The staff stayed on, too, as did some of the guests, who became witnesses.

Liebknecht and Luxemburg arrived by car at the Eden Hotel on January 15. They had been arrested in their hideout in Wilmersdorf, a nearby district, and would be executed for their failed attempt to overthrow the government. The executioners of the Guard Division were convinced of Liebknecht and Luxemburg's guilt; they lived in a subculture of right-wing violence fueled by rage at the war's outcome and the outbreak of revolution in November.¹⁹ One such soldier confirmed the identities of Luxemburg and Liebknecht at the Eden before having them escorted to separate parts of the building.

Here the narrative sequence grows murky, with conflicting testimony and several lies circulating just after the event and in the weeks, months, and years since.²⁰ One version has it that Luxemburg was beaten once or twice over the head, put in a car, and shot in the head, and that Liebknecht escaped blows altogether. But a recent, exhaustive assessment of all the available sources by Mark Jones, who relies in part on accounts by hotel personnel that confirm the grisliest version of the story, reveals the Eden as a site of greater atrocity than that.

The grisly version would fit the pattern of escalating violence perpetrated by the government's counterrevolutionary forces. A few days prior, on January 11, government soldiers captured the occupiers of the *Vorwärts* offices, brought them to the Dragoon Barracks south of the city center, and set upon them with horsewhips and fists. Seven prisoners were shot dead – some in the face, and with such ballistic force as to obliterate their features. Of the hundreds of revolutionaries arrested, one received extra-special treatment: a Frau Steinbring, whom the government's soldiers mistook for Rosa Luxemburg. They began hitting her as soon as she came out of the *Vorwärts* building. They kicked her and bludgeoned her with their rifle butts. Only the intervention of an officer stopped the assault, a dress rehearsal for the real performance of January 15/16 at the Eden. Stage directions had

¹⁹ Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 235.

²⁰ Elisabeth Hannover-Drück and Heinrich Hannover, eds. *Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebkecht: Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 36–58; statement of Hermann Wilhelm Souchon, June 4, 1925, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 464, f. 45–46; report on the interrogation of Wilhelm Souchon, Landgericht II, Berlin, June 5, 1925, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 464, f. 50.

been posted all over town, in the form of signs urging Germans to “beat [the Spartacists’] leaders dead.”²¹

Liebknecht’s murder played out first. Two officers and a soldier brought him out of a side door to a waiting, open-topped car, but before they reached it, a mob of military men assailed him. The beating was severe and continued as Liebknecht got into a vehicle. A waiter, among others, saw someone climb onto the chassis and bludgeon Liebknecht one more time as the car made its way out. The driver proceeded to the Tiergarten, where Liebknecht received three shots at close range. The killers then delivered his body to the morgue as that of an unknown man.

Back at the hotel, soldiers led Luxemburg into the lobby, full of officers. “Beat her to death!” they cried, according to testimony by a soldier, but Luxemburg made it all the way to the revolving door before Otto Runge, one of Liebknecht’s assailants, brought a rifle butt down on her head, probably twice. And then, either at the door or just outside it, more assassins attacked. When they were done, Luxemburg lay bloody, broken, and dying. She had to be carried to the next conveyance, a small truck, and might already have been dead when the vehicle lurched into gear and someone shot her through the head. Luxemburg’s killers then drove to the nearby Landwehr Canal and tipped her over the railing.²²

The coverup began immediately, with Luxemburg and Liebknecht’s killers issuing statements early on January 16 (Figure 4.2). They claimed to have shot Liebknecht as he attempted an escape and to have seen Luxemburg get beaten and shot to death by a mob of her own comrades, the Spartacists, while the government’s soldiers tried in vain to save her. The problem for the story was that the assassinations had occurred in public and when the Eden Hotel was still open for business. Hotel staff and guests corrected the record in Berlin’s daily papers, adding to the confusion and mystery attending such lurid reports.²³

As the last building Luxemburg and Liebknecht ever set foot in, the Eden Hotel became an important site of anti-communist, anti-feminist, and anti-Semitic violence.²⁴ Later, the association proved to be a major

²¹ Volker Ullrich, *Die Revolution von 1918/19* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009), 48: “Schlagt ihre Führer tot! Tötet Liebkecht! Dann werdet ihr Frieden, Freiheit und Brot haben.”

²² Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 213–14, 236.

²³ Kessler, *Tagebuch*, 7:112; Hannover-Drück and Hannover, *Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebkecht*, 36–58.

²⁴ On anti-feminism and the demonization of Luxemburg in the revolutionary period, see Matthew Kovac, “Red Amazons? Gendering Violence and Revolution in the



FIGURE 4.2 At the Eden Hotel shortly after the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on January 15/16, 1919

Image credit: Franz Gerlach/Bundesarchiv (SAPMO), Bild Y 1-330-1485-76

public relations liability for the Eden's owners, who decided to claim in their promotional materials that the Eden had not even existed before 1922.²⁵ Better to hide the property's vulnerability to the vicissitudes of recent history, which had to be expunged if the Eden was to turn profits in the 1920s.

THE KAPP PUTSCH AND A DINING ROOM BRAWL

In March 1919, the government gained full control of the city center, but conditions in the grand hotels did not return to normal. The naval blockade continued into the summer, and food shortages persisted into the 1920s. Meanwhile, as demobilization proceeded, the labor market failed to absorb returning soldiers. Those released from foreign internment

Long First World War, 1914-23," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 20 (2019), 71, 78; Paul Fröhlich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action*, trans. Joanna Hoornweg (London: Pluto, 1994), 190.

²⁵ Promotional book for the Eden Hotel, n.d. (1920s), 9-10, in HAT Soz/420.

in 1919 and 1920 pushed unemployment rates even higher. Ostensibly good news for hoteliers, such high unemployment threatened their businesses in other ways. Economic dislocation bred social strife, which in turn shook the political status quo and compromised the security of the city center again.

In March 1920, Wolfgang Kapp, a nationalist politician, and Walther von Lüttwitz, a general, attempted a right-wing coup, and the city center erupted. On March 13, after the insurgents managed to occupy Friedrichstadt, where the government and grand hotels were located, the ousted cabinet called a general strike. Workers across the city abandoned their posts in support of the republic. By the evening on March 15, the lights were out. Then the gas and water supplies collapsed. Kapp and Lüttwitz's battalions stalked the streets in disarray, orders having failed to reach them from the central command since phones and cables were dead. Berlin as an urban system ceased to function, and four days into the strike, the coup foundered.²⁶ The moment of its failure occasioned a massacre in front of the Adlon.

George Renwick, a foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, was stationed at the Adlon on March 18, the day Kapp and Lüttwitz's army, in retreat, processed past the hotel to the Brandenburg Gate and out of town. "Huge crowds" gathered in front of the hotel to witness the sorry parade. From a corner window at the Adlon at 5 p.m., Renwick saw a group of civilians push their way into the hotel, but they departed moments later, voluntarily. The group passed back out the doors and turned left toward Pariser Platz, into a hail of bullets fired by one of Kapp and Lüttwitz's battalions in retreat.

Renwick then saw the onset of a mass panic. Many of "the people ... thickly packed on both sides of the Pariserplatz [*sic*]" ran in all directions. Others fell on their faces to protect themselves from bullets, or as a result of being knocked to "the muddy ground," Renwick explained. The soldiers now began to shoot from all sides of the square. "Suddenly, volley after volley rang out," remembered Leonard Spray, another American journalist on the scene. Artillery horses fled in terror with their loads, careering into the backs of fleeing civilians. Amid smoke and screams, survivors rushed toward side streets, doorways, and windows. Hundreds of people pushed their way into the editorial offices of the

²⁶ "Fünf Tage Kapp Regierung," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, March 28, 1920. The *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* was generous in this account, giving the putschists an extra day of rule.

Lokal-Anzeiger, while “the hall of the Adlon Hotel was transformed until it looked like a hospital ward,” according to Renwick. Several wounded were brought in and placed on divans to be attended by doctors and nurses, probably guests of the hotel who had volunteered their services. Two of the victims turned out already to be dead and were laid on the floor.²⁷ This was the second spate of violence to visit the Adlon that month. On March 6, 1920, a prince of Prussia had attacked representatives of the French government during dinner in one of the hotel’s public dining rooms.

In early 1920, many of the highest-level delegates of the Entente Commission, charged with reckoning Germany’s reparations obligations, had found accommodation at the Adlon. At the same time, the Adlon was becoming the favorite spot for the losers of recent events: the royals, major and minor, and their associates, especially military men like Kapp and Lüttwitz. Many of these archconservatives resented the presence of the Entente Commission and sought insidious ways to show displeasure. By early March 1920, the situation in the Adlon was explosive.

On the night of March 6, diners filled the hotel’s main restaurant. Most of them were German, but a small party of French nationals – two Frenchmen in town with the commission and one of their wives – had been seated on the terrace, near the table of Prince Joachim Albrecht of Prussia, a cousin of the deposed emperor. At some point, the orchestra struck up and began to play “Deutschland über alles,” just as it did every night in compliance with a standing request from the prince. A soprano began an impromptu performance, and soon almost everyone in the room was standing. The French guests remained seated. As the music swelled, Prince Joachim cried to the French, “Aufstehen!” (“Stand up!”). As the crowd hushed and turned to face him, Joachim repeated himself: “Aufstehen!” Others began to shout the same – “Aufstehen! Aufstehen!” – until the music died down.²⁸

Seeing that the French meant to defy him, Joachim hurled a saucer at their table. Other diners followed suit. A wine bottle fell behind the

²⁷ George Renwick, “Junker Farewell a Berlin Tragedy,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 1920.

²⁸ Statement of Alfred Körner (sommelier) March 11, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039; statement of Prince Victor Salvator of Isenburg, March 8, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039, f. 5; statement of Alexi von Harfeld, March 8, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, f. 7; statement of Richard Augur, March 8, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039, f. 20; statement of Wilhelm Back (waiter), March 11, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039; statement of Georg Seiser (waiter), in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039, f. 17.

chair of one of the Frenchmen, a champagne flute into the seatback of the other. En masse, men and women in evening dress began to ascend the steps to the terrace to assail the foreigners. The one woman in the French party managed to escape unscathed, the headwaiter having spirited her out just in time. The two men had less luck. Members of the mob began to pummel them about the head, face, and torso. One of the Frenchmen succeeded somewhat in defending himself, though he was hit many times. Eventually, a waiter managed to drag him from the room to safety. Alone, the second Frenchman faced the brunt of the attack. He was pulled out of his chair and thrown to the floor, whereupon his fellow diners kicked him in the back and sides. Two men pulled him up and held him fast by the arms so that others could take turns delivering blows. He would at times manage to free his arms to guard his abdomen, but then a volley of punches to the face would knock him from his feet. His attackers kept pulling him up from the floor to begin again. They also tried to pull his hair out. Eventually, mercifully, they let him go. Bleeding, his dinner jacket torn, his tie ripped, and his cigarette case and money stolen, he reconvened with the other members of his party in the safety of the directors' office, where Lorenz and Louis Adlon, the father and son, apologized profusely for what had happened.²⁹

Such a scene had never played out in a grand hotel in Berlin. The image of this descent into barbarity in the finest public dining room in the country, occupied by over a hundred men and women in evening dress and jewels, was great fodder for the press. Louis Adlon himself referred to the event as a "scandal."³⁰ What had been like a second Berlin residence to the royal family in prewar years was by 1920 a terrain that required violence to defend. The prince's ejection from the premises (he was arrested shortly after the attacks) mirrored his cousin Wilhelm's disgrace sixteen months prior.

There were enough accounts from disinterested observers of the brawl – particularly lower-ranking waiters and hapless diners – for the police to complete a full investigation. All the royals or aristocrats interviewed

²⁹ Ibid.; statement of the victims, a Captain Rougevin and a Captain Klein, March 7, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039, f. 36–38; statement of Louis Adlon, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039; statement of Oberleutnant Wilhelm Bartels, March 8, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 358-01, Nr. 2039, f. 15.

³⁰ "Prince Joachim, Ex-Kaiser's Cousin, Attacks French Party in Berlin Hotel," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1920; "Germany Disavows Joachim's Actions," *The New York Times*, March 20, 1920.

vigorously denied the charge that the prince had had anything to do with the disturbance, but damning testimony from the prince's waiter and from several people seated nearby, as well as the testimony of the victims, pointed to the prince's guilt. The state prosecutor eventually charged him with incitement to violence and culpability in the crime of assault, for which he was ultimately fined 500 marks – a slap on the wrist.³¹

The events of March 6 at the Adlon signaled the vulnerability of foreigners and cosmopolitans even in the city's most rarified venues. Now more than a year in the past, the end of the war had not returned conditions to normal. Equipose between cosmopolitan and nationalist imperatives had not returned, nor had the stability of social relations specific to the grand hotel hierarchy. On the contrary, conditions for grand hotels and more generally, for social, economic, cultural, and political life in Berlin, were more poisonous than they had been in generations. Into the 1920s, grand hotels would figure as crucibles in which tensions reached the breaking point, arenas where groups with irreconcilable differences contested one another's right to enter and enjoy, as well as to profit from, or simply earn a living within, the city's economy of elite hospitality.

STRIKES

In light of the Kaiserhof sacking, the Eden murders, and the Adlon massacre and dinner brawl, hoteliers' visions of the future were grim in 1919/20. At the meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation on January 30, 1919, one member stated the obvious. Since the "outbreak of the revolution," business had dried up. In addition to the dangers of going out and traveling during an incipient civil war and amid widespread street fighting, Germans' lower incomes and the continuation of the wartime blockade made it "impossible" to resume the "luxury services of former times." Wilhelm Rüttnik, member of the board of the Berlin Hotel Corporation and general manager of the ruined Kaiserhof, tendered a solution: to dissolve the accommodation concession entirely. After some discussion, the directors opted for exploratory steps toward other sources of revenue, in this case in the form of a five o'clock tea dance. "With amusements like these," Rüttnik reasoned, "we might again find at least a modicum of profitability."³² Yet the

³¹ "Hohenzollern Prince Fined for Assault," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1920.

³² Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation of January 30, 1919, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

main problem from the hoteliers' perspective was the workforce, not the violence or the blockade or the impoverishment of the clientele. The very day of the occupation of the Kaiserhof, the rest of Berlin's hotels had also descended into chaos. Effective January 6, 1919, the city's waiters were on strike.³³

Leaders of the Union of Hospitality and Gastronomy Workers (Verband der Gastwirtsgehilfen) coordinated the strike and demanded the abolition of tipping as well as the institution of a weekly wage of 90 to 130 marks, the immediate implementation of an eight-hour workday, and a prohibition on firing a waiter without the express approval of the union. The issue of tipping had been fraught since before the war but came to a head now that custom had collapsed and with it a waiter's chance of earning enough in tips to feed himself.

Das Hotel, the leading trade publication for hoteliers, described unruly crowds at restaurants across the city. The fashionable Café Keck fell to demonstrators who destroyed all the breakables, "from plates to champagne coolers." The Adlon's restaurant was one of the few to remain open during the strike, thus prompting a demonstration of 1,500 waiters and their sympathizers in front of the hotel, according to *Das Hotel*. Some members of the crowd apparently even forced their way into the restaurant; as the dining room filled with demonstrators, patrons made for the exits. The publication reported that the demonstrators "thrashed" a diplomat and "violently attacked" either Lorenz or Louis Adlon.³⁴

In increasing numbers, hoteliers responded to the strike, which *Das Hotel* called "this terror," by trying to move together against the strikers. Occurring at the same time as the January Uprising (early January 1919), the waiters' strike became another example of a world turned upside down and a case in point for the argument that forces of the liberal order should come together and crush the radicalism of workers-turned-activists. Echoing language from pro-government speeches during the uprising, Ernst Barth, still chairman of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, told a reporter for *Das Hotel* that he believed it was the "duty" of all hoteliers to come together "in solidarity."

³³ On confrontational labor politics after World War I, see Petra Weber, *Gescheiterte Sozialpartnerschaft – Gefährdete Republik? Industrielle Beziehungen, Arbeitskämpfe und der Sozialstaat: Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich, 1918–1933/39* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010), 179–90; Sean Dobson, *Authority and Upheaval in Leipzig, 1910–1920: The Story of a Relationship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 189ff.

³⁴ "Kellnerausstand in Berlin," *Das Hotel*, January 10, 1919.

Ernst Rachwalsky, managing director of the Interest Group for the German Hospitality and Gastronomy Trades (Interessenverband für deutsche Gastwirtsgewerbe), which represented the hoteliers and restaurateurs in negotiations with the Union of Hospitality and Gastronomy Workers, urged a punishing form of collective action on the part of owners: Close every restaurant for the duration of the strike to produce infighting between waiters who wanted to return to work and waiters who did not. Although the shuttering of restaurants and cafés large and small proceeded almost without exception, the strategy failed.³⁵ Hoteliers and restaurateurs' balance sheets could not sustain the closures. On January 10 and 11, just as the January Uprising was meeting its atrocious end, the Association of Berlin Hoteliers gave in. It notified hotel employees, by means of large placards, of the hoteliers' decision to abolish tipping for waiters and non-waitstaff, raise wages to make up the difference, and shift almost everyone to an eight-hour day. To cover the expense, restaurant prices would go up 20 percent.³⁶

Within four days, the Union of Hospitality and Gastronomy Workers had gotten what it wanted. By January 15, 1919, the agreement would come into force at every hotel except the Kaiserhof, which was still out of its owners' control and in the process of being sacked by the government's forces.³⁷ Soon, kitchen workers got their due. On March 26 and 27, 1919, in Frankfurt, the Coalition of Hoteliers' Associations of Germany (Verband der Hotelbesitzervereine Deutschlands) and its member organizations, including the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, met with various service workers' unions to standardize wages for kitchen staff across the Reich. The talks succeeded. The standardization of wages ushered in what *Das Hotel* called "a new era for the German hotel industry."³⁸

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Beschlüsse des Vereins Berliner Hotelbesitzer," *Das Hotel*, January 24, 1919. The eight-hour working day had become the law of the land for industrial workers on November 23, 1918, and extended to most other workers, including white-collar employees, on March 18, 1919. See Ben Fowkes, trans. and ed. *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A Selection of Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 21–22. On labor unions' efforts to get the eight-hour day enshrined in law, see Gerard Braunthal, *Socialist Labor and Politics in Weimar Germany: The General Federation of German Trade Unions* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1978), 255–56.

³⁷ E. Kiefer and H. Bieget, "Nottarif im Berliner Hotel- und Gastwirtsgewerbe," *Das Hotel*, January 17, 1919.

³⁸ "Der erste Reichstarif im deutschen Hotelgewerbe," *Das Hotel*, April 4, 1919.

And yet, labor relations remained stormy. Strikes broke out again in May 1919.³⁹ Disputes with “our more than 2,000 employees,” Aschinger’s Incorporated reported in its 1919 annual report, “have not settled down even for a second.”⁴⁰ The language here fits a pattern. Since the end of the war, the board of Aschinger’s had used hyperbole to get the point across to shareholders that the workers needed to be brought to heel. Rising wages threatened “to attain undreamed-of dimensions and will serve in the end to bury” the business, read the annual report for 1918 (drafted in April and May of 1919).⁴¹ Wages for 1918 had imposed a total cost of 3,273,578 marks, while the sum of all dividends did not exceed 120,000. The situation had been “uncommonly favorable” to the workers, Aschinger’s top brass reasoned.

Many white-collar employees agreed and took sides against the workers. The Combined Associations of Hotel Employees (Hotelangestelltenverbände), the umbrella organization for various associations of clerks, accountants, salesmen, procurers, and management staff, had made its position clear on the pages of the *Deutsche Gastwirte-Zeitung* back in February 1919.⁴² The Combined Associations of Hotel Employees wanted nothing to do with what they and their employers called, again, the “terror” tactics of hotel workers. The best thing to do was to have white-collar employees join their own unions, which would use “Christian” principles to exorcise the workers of their bolshevism.⁴³ This anti-Bolshevik, anti-labor rhetoric had echoes in the liberal and right-wing pro-government newspapers, which responded to strikes, such as the general strike of March 3–7, 1919, with increasing militancy.⁴⁴

In their 1919 report (written in early 1920), Aschinger’s directors weighed in on the government’s labor policy. If the reduction of unemployment was the aim, they argued, then the state would have to freeze wages and force workers’ acquiescence. The report went on to claim that the survival of grand hotels and related businesses depended on workers

³⁹ “Vereinsnachrichten: Verein Berliner Hotelbesitzer,” *Das Hotel*, May 18, 1919.

⁴⁰ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1919, drafted in 1920, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 635.

⁴¹ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1918, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 635.

⁴² “Hotelangestelltenverbände gegen den Terror,” *Das Hotel*, February 7, 1919.

⁴³ *Ibid.* On Christian labor unions and the Stinnes–Legien Agreement (November 15, 1918), see William L. Patch Jr., *Christian Trade Unions in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1933* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 36–37; on Christian unions’ anti-socialism, see the same volume, 47–49.

⁴⁴ Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 259–64.

“merely recognizing that their movement for higher wages must be kept within the bounds of what is bearable.”⁴⁵ Wages and salaries had indeed increased. The total expenditure on payments to staff for the year 1920 topped 18 million marks, up from 8.5 million in 1919 and 3.5 million in 1918.⁴⁶ What the board did not recognize, or refused to recognize, in its arguments against the workers, was that inflation, mounting since 1914, easily outstripped this increase in wages and salaries.⁴⁷

Agreements about wages started to fall apart in 1921, and not only because inflation threatened to wipe out the recent raises. On May 25, 1921, the *Berliner Tageblatt* reported that both employers and some waiters were in the process, however quietly, of rolling back the abolition of tipping.⁴⁸ This illicit yet widespread practice of accepting tips resulted in another strike on October 1, 1921.⁴⁹ *Das Hotel* accused union leaders of exhibiting a “flippancy without parallel.” Were their “eyes closed” to the weakness of the industry and the paucity of its resources? Yes, it seemed: The strike was nothing more than the invitation to a “trial of strength.” A victory for the workers, should the hoteliers and restaurateurs surrender, would prove pyrrhic, according to *Das Hotel*. No industry and therefore no jobs would be left.⁵⁰ Stalemate ensued; the strike lasted weeks.

In some cases, to offer a tip was to stake a position against the workers’ movement, socialism, and the republic. In October 1921, Prince Joachim Albrecht, who was allowed back into the Adlon after having been arrested the year before for assaulting the French delegates to the Entente Commission, tried to force his waiter to accept a tip. Cyril Brown of *The New York Times* tried it, too, and met the same “adamant refusal.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1920, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1162.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 30–35.

⁴⁸ “Die Gesellschaft für soziale Reform und das Trinkgeldproblem,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, May 25, 1921.

⁴⁹ “Die ‘schlagenden’ Argumente der streikenden Gastwirtsgehilfen,” *Das Hotel*, October 14, 1921.

⁵⁰ “Gastwirtsgehilfenstreik in Berlin,” *Das Hotel*, October 7, 1921. On an important exception, among many, to this anti-labor stance among business owners, see Werner Plumpe, “The End of World War I,” in *Business in the Age of Extremes: Essays in Modern German and Austrian Economic History*, eds. Hartmut Berghoff et al., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41.

⁵¹ Cyril Brown, “Berlin Waiters, Striking for Higher Pay,” *The New York Times*, October 4, 1921; “Lifts Ban on Joachim,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 1920. On the leniency of the judiciary in cases of right-wing criminality, see Anthony McElligott, *Rethinking the Weimar Republic: Authority and Authoritarianism, 1916–1936* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), especially chapters 5 and 7.

The situation was almost explosive. Reports abounded of union saboteurs who punished strikebreaking by sneaking into hotels at night to hang threatening signs and steal or destroy property, food, and wine.⁵² *Das Hotel* hoped that these retaliatory actions would be a “wake-up call to everybody” and show that such strikes could not go on unabated.⁵³

Yet the strike did go on. By its third week, scarcely any hotel rooms could be found in Berlin. Where one did happen to be available, the traveler might contend with “strikers driving guests from the hotels, sometimes with violence.” The Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune* recounted breathlessly the experience of two American women who, after “a week in the Kaiserhof without food, light, or heat ... [,] were forced to flee from the hotel” all the way to Paris.⁵⁴

By this point in 1921, Berlin’s hotels already presented the preconditions for the eventual crisis of German democracy, the collapse of the Weimar Republic. A propertied class – the hoteliers – established close associations among each other to control labor by whatever means necessary. These associations would turn into cartels and other illiberal formations. Meanwhile, the leaders of the working class seized the moment to tip the balance in their favor. And finally, the petty bourgeoisie, the white-collar employees, adopted radical language and a radical tone that took issue not with the machinations of their betters but with the exertions of their inferiors. Fearful of downward social mobility and unsure of how to respond to the political culture of the new republic, these white-collar employees of the lower middle class turned increasingly to the splinter parties of the radical right.⁵⁵

⁵² “Sabotage in Berlin’s Hotels,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 1921.

⁵³ “Die ‘schlagenden’ Argumente der streikenden Gastwirtsgehilfen.”

⁵⁴ “Berlin Waiters’ Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, Paris edition, October 20, 1921.

⁵⁵ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 156–58, 233; Thomas Childers, “The Social Language of Politics in Germany: The Sociology of Political Discourse in the Weimar Republic,” *American Historical Review* 95 (1990), 332–33. On the “negative self-definition” of the *Mittelständler*, somewhere between proletarian and bourgeois, see Eley, *From Unification to Nazism*, 237–38; Benjamin Lapp, *Revolution from the Right: Politics, Class, and the Rise of Nazism in Saxony, 1919–1933* (Boston: Humanities Press, 1997), 136–83; Michael L. Hughes, *Paying for the German Inflation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 48–50, 107–9. On the historiography concerning the Nazis’ social base, see Frederick L. McKittrick, *From Craftsmen to Capitalists: German Artisans from the Third Reich to the Federal Republic, 1939–1953* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 12–14; Patch, *Christian Trade Unions, 199–201*.

RIGHTWARD DRIFT

However tenaciously hoteliers attempted to cling to laissez-faire liberalism, in their political statements, they began to drift to the right. The mainstream of their politics between 1919 and 1924 flowed into a synthesis of anti-republicanism and National Liberalism. Anti-labor liberalism had been easier to sustain in the prewar period, when the Social Democrats had scant access to power, than it was now, with the Social Democrats in control of a governing coalition of left-center parties. In this new era, hoteliers supported the Social Democrats so long as they cracked down on worker militancy, a “grave danger,” one hotelier wrote, against which everybody had to “stick together” – to defeat “these radicals” and their “terroristic principles.”⁵⁶ “The world war may have ended,” read an opinion piece of August 1919, “but the war of Germany with itself has yet to find its end.”⁵⁷

Many men of the hotel industry made clear whose side they were on. A lawyer writing for *Das Hotel* in January 1921 referred to the economy under state control as the “sword of Damocles ... hanging over the head of every hotelier and restaurateur” in Germany. Or, if not a sword over the head, the managed economy was a shackle around the ankle, heavy and “unbearably” tight.⁵⁸ In this sense, hoteliers perceived the outcome of the war as having little to do with the present economic peril, which they believed was the product of larger, more obscure forces acting on a fledgling republic, pushing it toward illiberal economic policies that had to be stopped.

This logic, which associated the republic and unseen forces behind it with Germany’s present woes, extended to foreign relations. The rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and subsequent ancillary agreements became an increasingly popular position among hoteliers – disadvantageous agreements for which hoteliers blamed the republic alone. Here, liberalism entered the conversation, for revision would usher in an era of free trade, and only through free trade – that is, the self-correcting capacity of the free market – could inflation be halted.⁵⁹ Yet this liberalism expressed itself in the treaty-revisionist terms of the anti-republican right.

⁵⁶ “Kellnerausstand in Berlin.”

⁵⁷ “Mit- und nicht gegeneinander,” *Das Hotel*, August 1, 1919.

⁵⁸ “Das schiefe Gleis unserer Zwangswirtschaft,” *Das Hotel*, January 21, 1921.

⁵⁹ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1921, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 636. On liberals and the politics of reparations, see Andrew Williams, *Liberalism and War: The Victors and the Vanquished* (New York: Routledge, 2006), especially chapters 3 and 6.

On July 12, 1920, Heinrich Kreuzer, chairman of the so-called Hotel Trust Cooperative (Hoteltreuhandgenossenschaft), in his address to the first annual meeting of the Coalition of Hoteliers' Associations of Germany, pulled together the strands of anti-republicanism and National Liberalism. Identifying a litany of disasters and blunders that had brought the hotel industry to its knees, Kreuzer told everyone who was to blame:

The people, who have no understanding [of the problem], as well as the government and the municipalities, who sit by in silence as one fine hotel after the other is stripped of its identity, are all guilty. It is they who will be held responsible if in the foreseeable future the German hospitality and travel industries collapse and thus forfeit every competitive advantage to foreign countries, which never could have happened in the old days.⁶⁰

Examples in recent months had indeed proved the indispensability of the hotel industry to German culture, society, and politics. After all, hotels had accommodated and continued to accommodate delegates to the Entente Commission meetings, where the details of reparations were hammered out. National and international business likewise depended on the capacity of Berlin's grand hotels to accommodate investors, salesmen, and money carriers. But fewer examples supported the belief that responsibility for the hotel industry's woes lay primarily with the Weimar state and society.

Kreuzer's was an accusation that took its cues from the legend of the "stab in the back" (*Dolchstoßlegende*), then making rounds among right-radicals, conservatives, and other Germans, positing that proponents of the illegitimate republic had undermined the army and lost the war for Germany. Thereafter, Jewish, socialist, and effeminate republicans had disgraced the German people by signing the "war guilt clause," had degraded the German state by dismantling the military, had dismembered the German nation by ceding territory, and had crippled the German economy by agreeing to pay reparations in cash, gold, and kind.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Transcript of a speech given in Berlin by Heinrich Kreuzer, managing director of the Hotel Trust Cooperative, at the First Executive Convention of the Coalition of Hoteliers' Associations of Germany in Düsseldorf, December 7, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 893.

⁶¹ See George S. Vascik and Mark R. Sadler, eds. *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), especially chapter 8. See also Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration: Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg, 1914–1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2003); Sally Marks, "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918–1921," *Journal of Modern History* 85 (2013), 635; Corey Ross, "Mass Politics and Techniques of Leadership: The Promise and Perils of Propaganda in Weimar Germany," *German History* 24 (2006), 188.

And now, Kreuzer charged, these internal enemies had trained their sights on the grand hotels of Berlin. In 1920, Kreuzer's was an extreme position for a hotelier to take. By the end of 1923, it was commonplace. The war having cut short their forty-year commitment to liberalism and cosmopolitanism, hoteliers embraced increasingly conservative and xenophobic explanations for the postwar disaster as their worldview swung ever further toward the anti-republican right.

Against this trend, some hoteliers nonetheless clung to the vestige of prewar liberalism that emphasized the capacity of the free market to correct all imbalances. "Experience teaches us," argued Richard Weser, the chairman of the board of Aschinger's Incorporated, "that free trade alone is capable of delivering the necessary quantities of foodstuffs, cheaply and unspoiled, to where they are wanted." The problem, he felt, was not shortage itself but the regulations imposed to mitigate it. The tendency of raw materials rationing and wage-setting to increase the cost of domestic goods was threatening to do "monstrous damage" to the German economy, he warned. Regulation of domestic production gave the advantage to foreign suppliers – and here Weser would have meant Germany's old foes. This time, the way to beat them was not to dig in but to reach out. Let the world market determine prices and Germany would prosper; turn its back on the world and on free trade and nothing could "save our national economy."⁶²

Yet the German government was not the only party responsible for the interruption of free trade. The Entente, having declined to disband, continued its blockade, "view[ing] us still as opponents in the field," according to the annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1920. The report went on to complain about Entente members "casting us, whom they hate ... as the counterpoint to their humanitarianism, to their love of freedom and justice." The Entente had not considered the "consequences of this line of thinking": continued hostility and the danger of another war.⁶³ A contributor to *Das Hotel* took the same view when he complained about the deleterious effects of the symbolic "action" (*Akt*) at Versailles.⁶⁴ Like so many of his compatriots, he refused to use the document's title phrase, "Treaty of Peace."

As German businessmen, liberal and otherwise, Berlin's hoteliers found themselves in a difficult position. Wanting to get on with the

⁶² Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1920.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ "Der Friede und die internationale Hotelindustrie," *Das Hotel*, July 11, 1919.

West and restart international streams of custom and credit, they would have advocated for the settlement of the reparations question at once. In other words, reparations and the Treaty of Versailles would be the cost of doing business with France, Britain, and the others. Yet, as Germans in Germany, Berlin's hoteliers were subject to an extensive campaign of misinformation about the treaty, reparations, the nature of the peace, and the reality of defeat.⁶⁵ In the main, hoteliers added to the confusion by agreeing and arguing in public that reparations would bankrupt Germany and therefore should not be paid. In reality, these hoteliers were prolonging their own pain, having lost sight of their original priority, the resumption of normal relations with Britain, France, and the United States.

Between 1918 and 1924, bitter recriminations against Germany's erstwhile foes became a common feature of hoteliers' comments, annual reports, and editorials for *Das Hotel*. In his opinion piece for that publication, Harry Nitsch, an authority in the field of advertising in the hotel industry, singled out the French for special opprobrium.⁶⁶ To him, Germans telling their downtrodden and pessimistic compatriots to summon "our people's inner strength and efficiency" to pay up – to find "Germany's star," to submit to the "healing power of Reason" – was not only useless but also un-German; indeed, it was a prototypically French thing to do, a pragmatic, cynical, yet foolhardy approach to negotiations that rested on a delusion. The worship of reason and the belief in the nation's capacity to overcome all challenges captured the spirit of the French Revolution in the days "of Robespierre and Danton," Nitsch argued.⁶⁷ Railing against the French machine state while praising the German genius for freedom had become current as early as the 1790s, shortly after the Reign of Terror. In offering this familiar opposition, Nitsch lent a historic and spiritual importance to the question of reparations.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Marks, "Mistakes and Myths," 644.

⁶⁶ Nitsch's book appeared in 1927 under the title *Das Hotel- und Gastgewerbe: Moderne Propaganda-Methoden* (Düsseldorf: Floeder, 1927). By 1933, the same press (Friedrich Floeder Verlag) was printing Nazi propaganda, such as *Das Ehrenbuch des Führers: Der Weg zur Volksgemeinschaft* (The Führer's Book of Honor: The Path to the National [Aryan] Community) by Heinz Haake (1933).

⁶⁷ Harry Nitsch, "Die neue Zeit: Einführung und Ausblicke," *Das Hotel*, November 7, 1919.

⁶⁸ On the origins of this German vision of French civilization, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1–7ff.

Nitsch had nothing to offer in the way of advice, however, and could propose no way out. Deliverance from the present disaster depended on a change of heart among the alleged authors of Germany's misfortune in Paris and London, he suggested. They were the culprits. Other hoteliers extended these assignments of guilt to the Weimar coalition parties, especially the Social Democrats who, as Kreuzer put it in the speech to his colleagues, had sabotaged the German economy by abetting the Entente's program of extortion.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, many hoteliers saw the pitfalls of expressing widespread resentment of Germany's enemies. After all, former foes made for reliable guests flush with foreign currency. As soon after the war as January 1919, a contributor to *Das Hotel* asserted that hoteliers must be "neutral," or at least appear to be neutral, in all matters including foreign relations. "The visitor of those nationalities" made to feel unwelcome here will prefer to "clear out and stay away." Moreover, deprivations resulting from the continued blockade needed to be hidden lest they evoke uncomfortable feelings of guilt among French and British guests. Guests, when in the hotel, should forget the unpleasantness. They "would not like to see that the hotel industry suffered acutely because of the war, nor indeed that it still suffers from the effects of the war, nor that it is because of these effects that not every wish of the traveling public can be fulfilled to satisfaction." Still, the writer recognized that some acknowledgment of the difficulties would be in order, perhaps a nicely worded notice about postwar scarcity.⁷⁰

SCARCITY, CONSPIRACY, CRIMINALITY

Hoteliers' rightward drift happened in the context of poor labor relations and mounting shortages of materials and fuel. Scarcity was most severe during mass strikes, but at no time before 1924 did the pressure on supplies quite relax. Hoteliers had not expected the continuation of the blockade much past the armistice. Even after it lifted, cooks lacked adequate supplies of flour, butter, sugar, milk, meat, and potatoes into 1920 and in some cases beyond. With cream deliveries intermittent, guests often had to take their coffees black. In September 1919,

⁶⁹ Transcript of a speech by Heinrich Kreuzer, December 7, 1920. On the politics of reparations in the German People's Party (Deutsche Volkspartei, successor to the National Liberal Party), see Raffael Scheck, *Mothers of the Nation: Right-Wing Women in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 34. See also Lothar Gall, *Walther Rathenau: Porträt einer Epoche* (Munich: Beck, 2009), 223.

⁷⁰ "Der Hotelgast der neuen Zeit," *Das Hotel*, January 31, 1919.

managers reported a perilous shortage of coal, as well. To keep people alive through winter, the state imposed limits on the consumption of gas, electricity, water, and certain foodstuffs. Only later in 1920, when poultry, fish, game, meat, and potatoes came off rationing, did hoteliers observe a turning point for the gastronomy side of the business.⁷¹

Throughout the difficult period, however, there remained one shortage that turned out to be a major advantage to Berlin's hoteliers. In April 1919, *Das Hotel* reported that the "lack of housing" had resulted in "a severe state of emergency" in the capital. "Thousands of people without apartments" were coming to the hotels for relief, and most hotels, at full capacity, were turning people away.⁷² In October 1919, Ewald Kretschmar, manager of the Bristol, responding to government proposals to force the conversion of hotels into apartment houses, beseeched city officials to recognize that the acute shortage of apartments had produced an equally acute shortage of hotel rooms.⁷³ As the magistrate moved to compel the sale of many of Berlin's small and medium-sized hotels, a group of hotel and restaurant staff held a protest against the disappearance of their workplaces. The protest, at the headquarters of the Teachers' Union (Lehrervereinshaus) on April 29, 1921, descended into chaos and effectively stopped the magistrate from taking any further action.⁷⁴ Still, the specter of requisition remained present. In October 1921, a new law enabled the municipality of Vienna to claim a full quarter of the city's hotel rooms for use as apartments.⁷⁵ Increasingly, in Vienna as well as Berlin, chefs de reception had to act as gatekeepers, explaining to guests time and again, and with increasing insistence, why no rooms could be made available today, tomorrow, or even at any near-future date.

The shortage of apartments and rooms, a result of underinvestment in residential real estate and the closure of so many hotels during the war, ensured the survival and even profitability of many hotel businesses.⁷⁶ The gift of full occupancy saved most of Berlin's grand hotels

⁷¹ Report of the managing directors to the board of directors of the Hotel Management Corporation, January 13, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 225-01, Nr. 2; annual reports of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1919, 1920, and 1921; "Kohlennot und Polizeistunde," *Das Hotel*, September 12, 1919.

⁷² "Die Hotels und die Wohnungsnot," *Das Hotel*, April 18, 1919.

⁷³ "Hotelnot," *Berliner Tageblatt*, October 4, 1919.

⁷⁴ "Protest" (editorial), *Das Hotel*, May 6, 1921.

⁷⁵ "Requisition von Hotels," *Neues Wiener Journal*, October 30, 1921.

⁷⁶ See Thomas Koinzer, *Wohnen nach dem Krieg: Wohnungsfrage, Wohnungspolitik, und der Erste Weltkrieg in Deutschland und Großbritannien, 1914-1932* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 24-28, 233-48.

from closure in the face of the labor and materials crisis.⁷⁷ Room rates stayed high – so high, in fact, that guests threatened to call the Anti-Profiteering Office (Wucheramt). Hoteliers responded by developing a blacklist. At a 1922 meeting of Berlin’s hoteliers, attendees decided to notify each other, by means of a circular letter, of guests who had ever threatened to call the authorities. Moreover, they promised to bar anyone who “otherwise makes difficulties for the hotelier and restaurateur.”⁷⁸ In hotel restaurants, management called on headwaiters to observe guests’ demeanor and to take in hand anyone disgruntled enough to threaten the house with exposure to the authorities for any perceived infraction, usually having to do with pricing. If the exchange between headwaiter and guest soured, the restaurant manager would be called. In December 1922, five people identifying themselves as “long-time guests” of the Fürstenhof complained to head manager Franz Kessels that his colleague in the restaurant had “harassed us” and otherwise exhibited “improper behavior” (*ungebührendes Verhalten*), all on account of a breakfast bill.⁷⁹

Upstairs, hoteliers learned to be creative, accommodating more and more guests with fewer and fewer resources. Kessels decided to convert the Fürstenhof’s extra bathrooms to bedrooms, but finding funds for the furniture became difficult as prices continued to rise.⁸⁰ On September 1, 1922, he reported to his boss, Chief Corporate Officer Hans Lohnert of the parent company Aschinger’s Incorporated, that the Fürstenhof was now in the position of having to turn away even the most important and loyal guests. The bathroom conversions, as well as the use of six small single rooms as doubles, no longer sufficed. Kessels was now preparing to make doubles out of the rest of the singles, and that meant finding extra blankets, sheets, pillows, and beds “of any kind.” To increase the number of beds, he had chaises longues broken down and reassembled to lie flat.⁸¹

The task was not made easier by the fact that “*so much bedding has been stolen recently.*”⁸² Further difficulties ensued as inflation and

⁷⁷ Annual reports of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1921.

⁷⁸ Minutes from a confidential meeting of the Berlin Hotels Commission (Kommission der Berliner Hotels), Group A and B, November 7, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁷⁹ Ferdinand Goldschmidt, G. Meyer, and three other guests of the Hotel Fürstenhof to the management of Aschinger’s Incorporated, December 15, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁸⁰ Kessels to Lohnert, May 17, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁸¹ Kessels to Lohnert, September 1, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁸² Emphasis in the original: Kessels to Lohnert, September 1, 1922.

shortages mounted and especially after corporate officers rescinded managers' purchasing authority. Managers now had to write to a corporate officer for permission, which slowed the process of procurement. To buy as few as ten telephones, for example, Kessels had to send a formal letter to the managing directors of Aschinger's Incorporated.⁸³

At the nexus of the shortages of goods, space, and currency, hotels attracted the sustained attention of the Anti-Profitteering Office. In the popular imagination, too, hotels stood for the evils of hoarding and price gouging. *Das Hotel* reported in 1921 that a good number of "thoughtless newspaper readers" believed sensationalist reports of "extortionate pricing" (*Wucherpreise*) in hotels and were being swayed by fiery opinion pieces that called for immediate "state intervention."⁸⁴ Some hoteliers responded that the recent spate of trials of profiteers amounted to a witch hunt that aimed simply to destroy the hotel industry once and for all.⁸⁵ Not only hotels but also individual hoteliers and restaurateurs came under investigation. According to *Das Hotel*, in May 1921, the owner of a restaurant in Frankfurt was called before the court for having charged 54 marks for two portions of lobster mayonnaise, 50 marks for two rump steaks, 8 marks for two portions of fried potatoes, and 14 marks for two servings of bread and butter. The court found the restaurateur guilty and sentenced him to three days in prison and a fine of 1,500 marks.⁸⁶

Hotel corporations also had to dispel rumors, some of them true, that the grand hotel industry was making purchases on the black market.⁸⁷ On January 13, 1920, the board of the Hotel Management Corporation met to discuss the urgent matter of "pending proceedings ... against hotels, and in particular against ours, for alleged offenses against the so-called 'Decree on Illicit Trade.'"⁸⁸ But without access to basic necessities, hoteliers wondered what to do. They were losing business to nearby pubs (*Kneipen*), which, as small gastronomy enterprises, were not under the same rationing regime as grand hotels, nor did pubs seem to attract the attention of the authorities. Where grand hotels "were forced"

⁸³ Kessels to Lohnert, August 18, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁸⁴ "Die Preise der Hotels und die Öffentlichkeit," *Das Hotel*, June 24, 1921.

⁸⁵ "Kampf der deutschen Hoteliers und Wirte gegen die Wuchergerichte," *Das Hotel*, December 19, 1919.

⁸⁶ "Drei Tage Gefängnis und 1500 Mk. Geldstrafe," *Das Hotel*, May 3, 1921.

⁸⁷ Diary entry of March 27, 1919, in Kessler, *Tagebuch*, 7:211.

⁸⁸ Report of the managing directors of the board of directors of the Hotel Management Corporation, January 13, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 225-01, Nr. 2.

(*zwangsweise*) to offer coffee without milk, bread without wheat, tea without sugar, and pastries without butter, pubs next door leveraged the luxury and lure of the real thing.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, pricing was becoming increasingly complicated, a result of the tendency toward industry-wide agreements among hoteliers. In 1922, they all decided to charge one price for Germans and another price for foreigners. As of October 18, a single room at the Fürstenhof, for example, would be 1,000 marks for Germans and 3,000 marks for foreigners.⁹⁰ In late October, Berlin's hoteliers met again to increase room prices among the city's grand hotels and, for foreigners, peg those prices to the US dollar; under this scheme, Germans would receive a discount of around 25 percent.⁹¹ Then, on November 7, a smaller group of hoteliers – industry leaders only – met in secret to deal with the sensitive issue of pricing by nationality which, as things stood, disadvantaged ethnic Germans resident outside Germany, whether in Austria, Switzerland, or territories ceded to France and newer states in Central and Eastern Europe. After a long discussion, the hoteliers landed on ethnicity as a better distinction than nationality. Ethnic Germans still resident in ceded territories would enjoy the price for all other Germans (except Austrians who, even if they were ethnically German, at first were to get half the foreign rate but lost the advantage in the last round of talks). For purposes of pricing, therefore, German hoteliers chose not to recognize the new map of Europe. Any ethnic German resident inside the borders of Germany as they had been in 1914 was entitled to a discount. Everyone else, “*without exception,*” would be charged the foreigners' price on the dollar basis.⁹²

Hoteliers tried to keep the price differences a secret but failed. At the front desk, chefs de reception were supposed to inquire about nationality before giving the rate, a move that aroused suspicions. In the restaurants, a waiter likewise had to ask for patrons' nationalities before handing them the correct menus. Tables of mixed ethnicity could therefore

⁸⁹ “Das schiefe Gleis unserer Zwangswirtschaft.”

⁹⁰ Price list of the Hotel Fürstenhof, October 9, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁹¹ Minutes from a confidential meeting of the Berlin Hotels Commission, Group A and B, October 22, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

⁹² Emphasis in the original: Minutes from a confidential meeting of the Berlin Hotels Commission, Group A and B, November 7, 1922. On Germans and Austrians, see Erin R. Hochman, “Ein Volk, ein Reich, eine Republik: Großdeutsch Nationalism and Democratic Politics in the Weimar and First Austrian Republics,” *German History* 32 (2014), 29–52. On immigration in the Weimar Republic, see Jochen Oltmer, *Migration und Politik in der Weimarer Republik*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

compare prices. This practice, and guests' dishonesty about their nationalities, put the headwaiter in the uncomfortable position of asking to see passports before the cashier could compute the bill. In cases of indeterminate or suspect ethnicity, headwaiters had to adjudicate and execute procedures of discrimination accordingly.⁹³

More and more guests were pretending to be who they were not. The master criminal Wilhelm Blume, "one of the most refined and scrupulous murderers in the last decade," according to police, checked into the Adlon under the name Baron von Winterfeldt on New Year's Day 1919 and then robbed and strangled a money carrier there. Blume had already distributed leaflets around most of the city's banks warning of the Spartacists' plans to confiscate all assets by January 4. The leaflets advised depositors to withdraw their money and hide it at home (the better for Blume to steal it and dispatch the owners).⁹⁴ Even after the end of the January Uprising in 1919, criminals found new opportunities to use the political situation to their advantage.⁹⁵ At the Grand Hotel Alexanderplatz on February 21, 1919, two men dressed as a counter-revolutionary soldier and civilian entered through the front door and announced themselves as agents of the state in search of Spartacists on the run. Then, the two men robbed a guest of 8,000 marks. In the same week and at the same hotel, a civilian and an armed man in an army uniform came on a mission to find a certain salesman, Zokolowski of Łódź, who was wanted, they said, on charges of trading chocolate on the black market. Management showed the soldier and civilian to Zokolowski's room, where they seized one of his suitcases containing 20,000 marks as "evidence," and then, after a tussle, shot and wounded him. Although hotel employees managed to apprehend the counterfeit soldier, the civilian got away.⁹⁶

⁹³ Minutes from a confidential meeting of the Berlin Hotels Commission, Group A and B, November 7, 1922.

⁹⁴ File summary in the Central Register for Murder Cases (Zentralkartei für Mordsachen), n.d., in LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030-03, Nr. 1712; interview transcripts for Richard Blackburn (chef de reception); Max Zingel (servant); Minna Leber (maid); Hugo Neubauer (page); and a waiter named Flocker, in LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030-03, Nr. 1714. Cf. Vicki Baum, *Menschen im Hotel* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2002), 12, first published in serial form in 1929.

⁹⁵ Although the murder rate increased in Germany after World War I, it was still low compared to the United States at the same time, according to Sace Elder, *Murder Scenes: Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 21.

⁹⁶ "Die Schadenersatzfrage bei Plünderung und Raub in Hotels," *Das Hotel*, February 21, 1919.

Across the Reich, in fact, all sorts of criminals attacked hotels and their guests. In May of 1919, the wine merchants J. Langenback & Sons, of Worms, gave notice to *Das Hotel* of a “female swindler” making the rounds at hotels and restaurants, posing as a saleswoman for the firm and taking money for goods that she said would be delivered at a later date.⁹⁷ In the face of staggering losses of their own and guests’ property, hoteliers throughout Germany took a radical step. They began to renege on the promise to guests, which had been commonplace in the prewar period, that their property would be safeguarded.⁹⁸ In the summer of 1922, Kessels notified guests upon registration that the Fürstenhof no longer accepted responsibility for items lost or stolen.⁹⁹ Notices in the rooms were more elaborate. In German, English, and French, they explained that “on account of present conditions, we are forced ... to refuse all responsibility for personal effects.” For a fee, safes would be made available. Furthermore, guests now had to carry a “room card to be shown upon request when asking for room keys” at reception.¹⁰⁰ *Inspectricen* (female inspectors), one for each of the guest floors, were to keep watch over linens and other vulnerable items belonging to the hotel.¹⁰¹ Not only did the Fürstenhof and other houses roll back their commitment to securing guests’ property, they also stepped up their commitment to protecting their own property, even if this required spying on guests.

INFLATION TO HYPERINFLATION

Criminal activity, scarcity, strikes, and violence put Berlin’s grand hoteliers in a weak position on the eve of the Weimar Republic’s first economic catastrophe, the hyperinflation of 1923. Despite full occupancy, conditions had failed to improve since 1918, and as the situation worsened, corporate officers had to find new explanations for shareholders. Annual reports after 1918 became increasingly dismal. Revenues were shrinking, and board members stressed that it was on account of the weak economy, and not on account of mismanagement, that dividends had to be curtailed. Blaming the business cycle rather than structural

⁹⁷ “Warnung!” *Das Hotel*, May 9, 1919.

⁹⁸ “Die Haftpflicht bei Raubanfällen in Hotels,” *Das Hotel*, September 5, 1919.

⁹⁹ Registration card for a room at the Hotel Fürstenhof, n.d., ca. 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹⁰⁰ Notice to guests of the Hotel Fürstenhof, n.d., ca. 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹⁰¹ Kessels to Lohnert, September 1, 1922.

weaknesses of the business model also reinforced the perception that in this economy, any alternative was as bad as the other: Shareholders, the reports' principal audience, might as well keep the shares they already had. Authorities constituted a secondary audience for the annual reports. If officials could be convinced of the industry's plight, they might lay off hotels for a while. These conflicting messages to different audiences produced reports that contradicted themselves and confused the issues as the corporate board of directors tried at once to deflect blame, downplay some weaknesses, and exaggerate others.

Das Hotel warned of the "total collapse of our economy" as early as December 1919, yet hoteliers found some surprising advantages in inflation.¹⁰² One was in the opportunity to pay off prewar loans with post-war marks. The Berlin Hotel Corporation announced in July 1919 that it would pay its 1911 obligations of 5,218,000 marks in full, at a small fraction of their prewar value, by October.¹⁰³ Other corporations tried for the first time to raise money by selling shares on the open market. One of them, the Esplanade Hotel Corporation, in going public on May 16, 1919, picked up a new majority shareholder who promised to save the hotel from insolvency.¹⁰⁴

In 1920, however, as new liabilities mounted, Aschinger's and others considered taking out new mortgages on their properties, but credit was too tight.¹⁰⁵ Typical was the predicament of the Kaiserhof in 1921, still in disrepair two years after the government's forces had sacked it. Apparently saddled with a hopeless case and thus without access to credit, the Kaiserhof's owner, the Berlin Hotel Corporation, discussed raising money through the sale of shares in order to add two stories to the building, which could be filled with cheap guest rooms to allow the business better to capitalize on being at full occupancy. The scheme came to naught.

Some corporate chairmen, such as Richard Weser at Aschinger's, ventured cautious optimism in annual reports of 1920 and 1921. Healthy reserves, the result of "conservative budgeting" in the years of full occupancy, might help businesses overcome most difficulties.¹⁰⁶ These reserves

¹⁰² "Kohlennot und Polizeistunde."

¹⁰³ "Hotelberichte," *Das Hotel*, July 25, 1919.

¹⁰⁴ "Hotelberichte," *Das Hotel*, May 30, 1919.

¹⁰⁵ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1920; minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, September 16, 1920.

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, April 1, 1921.

could now cover the costs of capital improvements delayed since 1914. But Weser's optimism was misplaced. By 1922, as prices for goods and labor reached dizzying heights, the board began to channel its reserves into seizing every opportunity of "filling our stores." By the beginning of 1923, what reserves remained were worthless.

For hoteliers, the emergency had become evident back in March of 1922, when bookkeepers started to register inflation by the day, after a year of particularly fast rising prices. As machinery and furniture wore out, the money was not there to repair them. In the spring of 1922, for example, the cost of replacing the water tanks at the Kaiserhof was 670,000 marks "and rising." The final settlement for damages from the sacking of the hotel, received about the same time, came to one-third of that sum.¹⁰⁷ "Extraordinary increases in operation costs" ensued as a result of rapidly rising expenditures on labor, laundry, and coal.¹⁰⁸ By September 30, 1922, runaway gas prices were already causing bills for cooked meals to change multiple times a week.¹⁰⁹

When the Entente Commission declared Germany to be in default on its reparations payments and the French and Belgians occupied the Ruhr in early 1923, the worst finally happened. To counter the inflationary effects of its policy of passive resistance to French and Belgian efforts at extraction, shutting down much of the German economy in the process, the German government printed more and more money. The currency collapsed, bringing down with it Berlin's hospitality industry.¹¹⁰

Hotels' official price lists could not be reprinted fast enough. From February 1, 1923, Aschinger's Incorporated added to the frenzy by changing the menus without any advance warning.¹¹¹ Overnight, prices for coal would rise 160 percent; soap, 200 percent; and laundry, 350 percent.¹¹² In mid-March, taxes followed suit, now climbing "not only

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, March 2, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹⁰⁸ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1921.

¹⁰⁹ Kessels to Lohnert, September 30, 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹¹⁰ See Conan Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 290; Gerald D. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 669ff.; Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, *The German Inflation, 1914-1923: Causes and Effects in International Perspective*, trans. Theo Balderston (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986).

¹¹¹ Beverages price list of February 1, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹¹² Price list sent from the Association of Laundry and Linen Services of Greater Berlin (Verband Groß-Berliner Wäsche-Verleihgesellschaften), February 27, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

from month to month but from week to week – no, day to day, even.”¹¹³ Profits withered and then disappeared.

Workers, managers, and their corporate bosses became overwhelmed. Letters from Kessels to Lohnert from the week of January 15, 1923, point to chaos. On January 16, Kessels pleaded with Lohnert to find funds to fix the flagpole over the main entrance, which was drooping to the breaking point.¹¹⁴ Two days later, Kessels importuned Lohnert for money to mend the kitchen roof, which leaked buckets of water every day, and to hire an exterminator to dispatch the rats in the guest-level pantries, the dumbwaiters, and the elevators, the baseboards of which had been “nibbled” to splinters.¹¹⁵ The letters also indicate infighting among Aschinger’s different branches. The company’s café concessions, independent of the hotels, had apparently made off with the Fürstenhof’s hors d’oeuvre trucks.¹¹⁶ As an acknowledgment of the new reality, Kessels dispensed with the cash economy altogether when, in advance of a business trip, he asked Lohnert for a box of cigars, a few dozen small bottles of cognac, and 100 napkins so that he might bribe “corrupt police officers and officials” along the way.¹¹⁷

Compensation became an even bigger problem under hyperinflation. Many white-collar employees had to be rewarded for extra time and effort, including the chief buyer for the Hotel Management Corporation, whose job it was to source supplies for all the company’s hotels, including the Bristol and Central-Hotel, and gastronomy concerns, including the Kranzler and Bauer. The board agreed to give him a bonus equaling 60 percent of his April wages. But how much money would that be, exactly? By the board’s own estimate: 23 million marks.¹¹⁸ Other employees had to be let go; there was not enough cash on hand to pay them. The cost of leasing telegraphs, for example, had consumed the wages of the Fürstenhof telegraph girl, so the corporate office ordered that her post be eliminated.¹¹⁹ Staff who remained at the hotel saw their real wages dwindle by the hour. The Fürstenhof’s musicians started going from table to table asking guests for money. Such “pestering”

¹¹³ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1922, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 636.

¹¹⁴ Kessels to Lohnert, January 16, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹¹⁵ Kessels to Lohnert, January 18, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹¹⁶ Kessels to Lohnert, January 19, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹¹⁷ Kessels to Lohnert, April 16, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174; Lohnert to Kessels, April 18, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, May 30, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹¹⁹ Müssigbrodt to Kessels, March 1, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

must stop under all circumstances, Lohnert wrote to Kessels. Longtime American guests, angered by the scene, had decided to check out and cancel their lavish farewell dinner, such as it would have been under the circumstances. Disciplined just short of being fired, the musicians had their hours reduced and were told that they would be dismissed without compensation should they ever go “begging” again.¹²⁰

If begging did not work, then stealing would. When, in February 1923, 5,000 marks went missing from a package containing 1,169,257 marks, the Fürstenhof management first blamed Fräulein Klüger, a cashier. She denied any wrongdoing and pointed to all the other people who had laid hands on the money en route to its final depository. These included the head cashier, Fräulein Klückmann, the clerk, Herr Pfitzner, and finally the bookkeeper, Herr Werth. At any rate, as the value of 5,000 marks approached zero, the matter soon would not be worth pursuing.¹²¹ In the end, morale was more important than a few stolen marks, especially considering recent, cost-prohibitive increases in the premiums for a riot insurance policy.¹²²

In April, upward pressure on wages and salaries exploded. Managers threw money at staff and workers with abandon.¹²³ On April 14, 1923, the chairman of the Hotel Management Corporation, on behalf of the Berlin Chamber of Commerce (Handelskammer zu Berlin), sent waiter Fritz Haas the customary notice of congratulations on twenty-five years of service to the Central-Hotel. The “certificate of honor” came with no less than 50,000 marks in cash, which would lose much of their value by sunset.¹²⁴ In fact, in four days, 50,000 marks would not have bought five napkins, now costing 12,000 marks apiece.¹²⁵

The board of the Hotel Management Corporation looked for cuts everywhere and then took drastic measures. Plans materialized early for alterations that might reduce costs. In April 1923, the board discussed shrinking the hotel kitchens to accommodate fewer machines and workers. Without any way of reckoning the cost of these alterations, however,

¹²⁰ Corporate management of Aschinger’s Incorporated to the management of the Hotel Fürstenhof, August 21, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹²¹ Report on money missing from the Fürstenhof, February 8, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1174.

¹²² Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, April 23, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹²³ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1922.

¹²⁴ Managing directors of the Hotel Management Corporation to Fritz Haas, waiter at the café of the Central-Hotel, April 14, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225-01, Nr. 150.

¹²⁵ Lohnert to Kessels, April 18, 1923.

the board suspended its decision and looked instead to the simpler project of fixing the roof, a much more pressing problem, at the cost of “several hundred million.” On this proposal, too, the board reached no conclusion, and discussion moved to linens and how to replace them.¹²⁶ In May, out of desperation for cash, the board of the Berlin Hotel Corporation decided unanimously to sell all foreign currency and apply the proceeds to the purchase of textiles, goods, and wine.¹²⁷ Since the onset of hyperinflation, the strategy had been to “settle up every day,” including with guests, and then put every bit of the proceeds immediately toward laying in supplies. Hoarding was now so common that the Berlin Hotel Corporation referred to the practice without euphemisms in its annual report.¹²⁸

It became impossible to keep account of inventories as the stores filled and emptied so fast. In fact, when Price Waterhouse came to audit Aschinger’s Incorporated, owner of the Fürstenhof, a few years later, they found that the “schedules relating to the Inventories of Merchandise at Hand on January 1, 1924, have been mislaid.”¹²⁹ Had they been available, if indeed they had ever existed, the inventories would not have shed any light. Money values meant nothing. Where it was necessary to reckon in cash, firms did so with little sense of what the money was worth or would be worth in a few hours.

Aschinger’s Incorporated had tried in early 1923 to fashion its own imaginary “Goldmark,” expressed in British pounds, for valuing assets and inventories but had little success with this solution.¹³⁰ The books still conveyed nonsense. For other assets, the corporation used gold. Dividends received a different treatment, with corporate accountants using several modes of translation for the values of a prewar mark, a present-day mark, a 1918 mark, gold bullion, and the exchange rate of marks to US dollars.¹³¹ With stabilization and a new temporary currency in late 1923 and then the introduction of a new permanent currency, the reichsmark, the following year, hoteliers were able to catch their breath and shifted their attention to a different, related problem – taxes – and this, with a bitterness borne of the experience of hyperinflation.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, May 30, 1925, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹²⁸ Annual report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation for 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1048.

¹²⁹ Audit report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation and “Geka” Corporation (Geschäfts- und Kontorhaus AG) for 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 626.

¹³⁰ Minutes of a meeting of the board of directors of the Berlin Hotel Corporation, June 20, 1923, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1046.

¹³¹ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1922.

It had been the terrible result of a policy that no one felt ready to excuse, pursued by a government that few would find cause to forgive.¹³²

TAXES AND RECKONINGS

In the midst of hyperinflation, tax rates had indeed reached astronomical proportions. The accommodation tax for foreigners in early 1923 was 80 percent (40 percent for Germans). Along with all the other taxes, the resulting payments pushed hoteliers' and restaurateurs' contributions up to about 50 percent of all revenue. The worst of these taxes abated in 1924 but stayed higher than prewar levels. Sales tax now entailed an accommodation tax, a 10 percent state tax, a tax on wine, an additional tax on sparkling wine, and a tax on profits. The state also collected on bonds, mortgages, ground rent, and land use. And finally, there was the tax on commerce in the state of Prussia.¹³³

Even before the hyperinflation, Aschinger's Incorporated predicted that taxes would result in the demise of the hotel industry. The accommodation tax, then higher for foreigners, would keep American and other investors from visiting Germany. Such taxes on commercial hospitality, the board argued, would surely sink "the whole of our national economy." To the people's detriment, then, the hotel industry suffered – and worse than any other industry, "not one" of which was "saddled with so many and such heavy taxes," as the hoteliers saw it.¹³⁴ Complaints like these spilled easily into demonization of the republic, the "tax hydra" that reached farther and wider by the day.¹³⁵ But after the hyperinflation, this hyperbolic language around taxes became more common among hoteliers.

A second set of complaints, also contending that the republic was singling out the hotel industry for punishment, revolved around the institution of the Price Auditing Bureau of Greater Berlin. In July 1924, the Association of Berlin Hoteliers wrote to the magistrate in protest against the bureau's recent decision to compel the reversion of room prices to their prewar values, since such prices failed to account for the tax rate and cost of living having gone up 40 to 60 percent since July 1914.¹³⁶

¹³² On stabilization and new taxes, see Holtfrerich, *German Inflation*, 301–3.

¹³³ Annual report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation for 1923.

¹³⁴ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1922.

¹³⁵ Georg Persisch, "Gegen die Steuerhydra," *Das Hotel*, December 12, 1921.

¹³⁶ Association of Berlin Hoteliers to the Price Auditing Bureau of Greater Berlin, July 30, 1924, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2390, f. 108; Annual report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation for 1923.

Moreover, the “incessant pestering of our members by your officials’ pointless inquiries” was taking up valuable time and energy. The Association of Berlin Hoteliers also wrote to the Office of Statistics (Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin) to complain that questionnaires issued by the Price Auditing Bureau exhibited flaws in procedure. In the association’s words, “the Price [Auditing] Bureau has neither the competency nor the prerogative” to conduct its own surveys, which should be the exclusive purview of the Office of Statistics.¹³⁷

These exchanges point to hoteliers’ two-pronged strategy when dealing with state and municipal regulations. First, complain to the relevant authority about the unfairness and deleterious effects of the policy in question; second, contact a rival authority that might intercede to your benefit. Increasingly, hoteliers, hotel corporations, and hotel industry combinations tried where possible to complicate, confuse, and frustrate the state’s efforts to extract revenue from commercial hospitality. As these instances of evasion and protest mounted, they converged with anti-republican currents in hoteliers’ thinking and actions.

CONCLUSION

In the Weimar Republic’s early years, 1919–1923, hoteliers in the main buried their prewar affiliations with the National Liberal Party and embraced the language and politics of conservatism and even right radicalism. They did so in the context of quotidian disasters that befell Berlin’s luxury hospitality industry. With the advent of peace, material and labor shortages got worse, not better. High crime, inflation, hyperinflation, and the effects of a decade of underinvestment stripped veneers in the metaphorical and literal sense. Labor relations deteriorated as hospitality workers awakened to their collective power and the swift efficacy of direct action. They joined demonstrations on bloodstained pavements many times in the course of the successive tumults of the early Weimar period: revolution, communist revolt, counterrevolution, and a failed coup d’état. For these political, social, and economic dislocations, many hoteliers blamed foreigners, workers, labor organizers, and the republic itself – that is, almost all the scapegoats of the anti-republican right. But in resorting to anti-republican tropes, Berlin’s hoteliers compromised and then broke their commitment to the reinstatement of the liberal culture

¹³⁷ Association of Berlin Hoteliers to the Price Auditing Bureau of Greater Berlin, July 30, 1924.

on which grand hotel society had depended. The expensive practices of elite cosmopolitanism, which depended on everyone else submitting to class domination, no longer functioned amid widespread conflict among classes and nations in the first five years of peace.

Hoteliers thus compromised their liberal commitments. The language of their annual reports, trade publications, and internal memos in the early 1920s developed a semantic affinity to the anti-republicanism of the right. Hoteliers' incorrigible pessimism regarding the economy, society, and polity, in turn, would one day make them willing to countenance the destruction of the republic and its replacement with an authoritarian regime.