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## What is to be remembered: The struggle over street names in Berlin, 1921–1930

Street names, like municipal finances or garbage removal, would appear to be a topic of great importance for urban life – though not of any political or ideological consequence. Apparently what is involved is a purely municipal matter, of no national interest whatsoever.

Yet these presumably innocent names can develop into a political »football«, as it were; the question of which names can and should be permitted to appear on signposts can become a highly emotional issue. Street names are a well-known means, not only for preserving the urban past, but also for preserving national memory. By means of street names, the official historical image of a society becomes an inseparable component of the townscape: like monuments, they memorialize elements of social memory. The question as to what this memory consists of, in turn, is of first-degree political significance, due to the fact that it is bound up with the question of the prevailing form of government and idea of the nation.

This is true in respect to street names in general, and particularly to those in a capital city. The capital is the center of the political life of the nation; because of this, street names in a capital city have a particularly representative importance when compared with those of other towns and cities.

There was no lack in the 1920s in Berlin of monuments representative of the glory and grandeur of Prussia. Nonetheless, the Municipal Parliament only dealt once formally with this topic. On the other hand, the question of street names was repeatedly brought up for discussion between June 1921 and October 1930 in the Berlin Municipal Parliament. In addition, there were deliberations about this in the various district councils.

The point of contention was the image of history which was to be officially represented on the street signs of the capital. These deliberations had a twofold aspect: one element was ideological-political in nature, i.e., the question of what image of national memory was to be conveyed by these enamel signs. The second dimension was the »practical« question pertaining to multiple occurrences of the same name. This problem had arisen in the wake of the incorporation of Greater Berlin in October 1920 and the inclusion of certain



former suburbs with its urban boundaries.<sup>1</sup> These names, as speakers often emphasized, constituted a danger: they could be confused, and this could, for example, have a negative effect on postal delivery. However, even this supposedly practical problem had a political catch to it: many of the multiply recurring names preserved the memory of the Monarchy. In this way, the practical dimension of deliberations was linked with the ›political-ideological dimension of the problem.

The Berlin Municipal Parliament dealt with the question of municipal street names – but the real issue was that of the national memory. In this article, I will attempt to describe and analyze the political and ideological content and context of these deliberations, as well as their consequences. My hope is to shed light on a lesser-known aspect of the discussion about fundamental issues which dominated political life in Germany in the 1920s.

The Berlin street names had a special representative significance. This was bound up with the role of Berlin as the Prussian capital and, after 1871, simultaneously as the capital of the Empire. The Prussian kingdom had already recognized the political importance of municipal street signs quite early on. During the Wars of Liberation, the street signs of the three Prussian residential cities – Berlin, Potsdam and Charlottenburg (later incorporated into Greater Berlin) – were made state property. A Prussian Cabinet directive was issued on December 20th, 1813, according to which the street names in these cities were to be approved by the Prussian state. City Hall (*der Magistrat*) was supposed to recommend the street names; however, it was police headquarters (*das Polizeipräsidium*) – a state rather than municipal authority – which was to make the final decision in the name of the King, later the Emperor.

During the course of the 19th century, as a result of industrialization and the associated process of urbanization, Berlin underwent an enormous expansion. New streets were laid, new names appeared. The Prussian state had made use of its prerogative: the names selected specifically glorified the greatness of the Hohenzollern and the fame of the Prussian – and later German – military victories.

In November of 1918, the Imperial Family departed from the capital. The Republic was proclaimed. Despite the republican form of government, however, the traces of the Monarchy were visible on every street corner: in the form of the numerous street names which perpetuated the memory of the old regime.

Monarchy or Republic – these were the two horns of the dilemma in regard to the legitimate form of government and the guiding concept of the idea of the nation which dominated the political life of Germany in the 1920s. The struggle

<sup>1</sup> Dove (DDP), session on 16. 6. 1921, Protokolle der Verhandlungen der Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Berlin, (im Folgenden Protokolle), 1829

between the proponents of the Republic and those of monarchy was waged on the streets, in the newspapers and in the Reichstag – as well as in the nearby Berlin City Hall. In both places, there was a discussion underway which had national significance; yet deliberations in the Berlin Municipal Parliament constituted a local level of the national debate, even if it was a question of the capital of the Reich. Those participating were municipal politicians, little known outside Berlin. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that many of these men were later to play a significant role in national politics. Among these aldermen was, for example, Wilhlem Pieck, the head of the Communist faction and later the first president of the German Democratic Republic and Theodor Heuß, the first president of the Federal Republic, who was a representative of the Democrats in the Municipal Parliament from 1929 to 1931.

All national parties were also represented in the Greater Berlin Municipal Parliament. But the political power relations in the Berlin city parliament reflected the local social and demographic features of the capital. The predominantly Protestant religious background of the population was reflected in the relative weakness of the Catholic Zentrum party. Berlin was an industrial city, and this found political expression in the relative strength of the workers' parties. Up until 1922, the USPD was the strongest faction; after that the SPD became the strongest party, though the Communist KPD was not far behind. Only during the second legislative period, however, from October 1925 to October 1929, did the workers' parties have an absolute majority in the Municipal Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

The representative of the Zentrum, after the first round of deliberations, which took place in June 1921, expressed the view: »... durch Straßenschilder werden wir nicht die Frage der Monarchie oder der Republik entscheiden können.«<sup>3</sup> He did not mean to contend that the question being discussed was unimportant. Rather, he simply wished to point out that the Berlin Municipal Parliament was not authorized to decide which names should appear on street signs. After the end of the Monarchy, the Chief of Police in Berlin – in his capacity as a deputy of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior – was given official responsibility for matters pertaining to the naming of streets. The deliberations in the Municipal Parliament were basically nothing more than what the liberal paper »Berliner Tageblatt« called a »Schlag ins Wasser.«<sup>4</sup> The Prussian state, ruled by the SPD, had no need of the deliberations taking place in the Municipal Assembly.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the Prussian government could, when it wanted to, make good use of the Municipal Parliament's resolutions as a legitimization for decisions which had already been made. On the other hand,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hans J. Reichardt, Wahlen in Berlin 1809 bis 1967, in: Berliner Forum 7, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Session on 21. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1858.

<sup>4</sup> Berliner Tageblatt, 22. 6. 1921.

<sup>5</sup> Weinberg (USPD), session on 21. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1859.



undesirable resolutions – which in part had also been supported by the Social Democratic faction – could simply be ignored.

The deliberations about street names were, at the same time, confrontational disputes between two opposed ideological views and political convictions. After the first session on June 16th, 1921, which was interrupted due to disturbances in the hall, the Assembly Chair warned: »Es gibt gewiß auf allen Seiten des Hauses, bei allen Parteien, heilige Empfindungen und Gefühle, die nicht ungestraft verletzt werden dürfen.«<sup>6</sup> Yet it was precisely these sentiments which – in part intentionally, but also simply because of the nature of the topic – were provoked and offended. Provocative statements angered people's feelings, and the tensions generated were expressed in much furious shouting and an jeering. The Chair had to intervene frequently to restore order in the hall. The representatives of the conservative parties demonstratively left the hall on two occasions. Once, as mentioned, a session was interrupted and the deliberations postponed.

The intensity of reactions surprised the representatives in the center of the political spectrum. After the session that was interrupted, a representative of the Democrats stated – and not without a touch of irony in respect to his own astonishment, that lacking was a knowledge of human nature; because what people were getting most excited about here, were »Schall und Rauch, Namen und dergleichen« – i.e., things which were totally unimportant.<sup>7</sup> The discussions were being conducted on two levels, which were not separate from each other: on the one hand, the struggle over the perpetuation of national memory – and thus over the idea of the nation; on the other hand, the battle regarding political issues of the day. The speakers utilized the rostrum to make their political convictions known. The Berlin newspapers reported regularly – and in comparatively great detail – about the deliberations; in this way, public awareness of the issue was fostered.

Among the various factions, the oppositional KPD distinguished itself in exploiting the Municipal Parliament for its own propagandistic and agitational purposes. The Communists were struggling both against the proponents of the Monarchy and the supporters of the bourgeois Republic. Among the latter were the Social Democrats. The Communist faction endeavored to present itself as the true representative of the revolutionary tradition and as the genuine heir to the old Social Democracy. It attempted to differentiate between itself and the SPD in order to achieve an image of its own.

The procedure of deliberations on the naming of streets and squares was as follows: each interested party to the deliberations – whether a faction or the Berlin City Hall – was permitted to submit a proposal. The Municipal Parlia-

<sup>6</sup> Weyl (USPD), *ibid.*, 1848

<sup>7</sup> Dove (DDP), *ibid.*, 1856.

ment had to vote on whether the proposal should be rejected, or should be directed on to the proper committee for further consideration. In the committee, various aspects of the proposal were then dealt with and clarified, at times with the help of representatives from the municipal authority. The committee was authorized to modify the proposal. Then the original – or modified – proposal was submitted to the Municipal Parliament plenary for discussion and a vote. However, even as a formal resolution of the Municipal Parliament, it was legally nothing more than a recommendation to the state authorities.

Four sessions of the Berlin Municipal Parliament dealt with the question of perpetuation of the memory of the Monarchy by means of street signs. Sessions on June 16th and 21st, 1921, a session in 1922 (the protocols of which are unfortunately unavailable), a session on February 2nd, 1926 and one which was concluded in April of 1927 were dedicated to this question. Three sessions were dedicated to the question of the commemoration of important statesmen of the Republic by the instrumentality of street names. In March of 1925, the Municipal Parliament deliberated on the question of the public commemoration of the memory of Friedrich Ebert; in April 1927, it dealt with the memorialization of Hugo Preuss; in October 1929 and February 1930, it deliberated on the public remembrance of Gustav Stresemann. In these latter two sessions, the important question of commemoration of the 1866 Prussian victory over Austria was also discussed.

There were a total of four sessions which dealt with the question of the public memorialization of the Monarchy. The proceedings in 1921 and 1926/27 were initiated by the Communist faction, which proposed changing all monarchistic street names. Proceedings in 1922 and 1926 were initiated by the Social Democratic faction, which proposed a demonstrative change in the name of »Königsplatz« in front of the Reichstag into »Platz der Republik«. According to the proposal submitted in June 1921 by the Communists, the Municipal Parliament was to decide on changing the »Namen solcher Straßen und Plätze ... deren Bezeichnung an das alte militaristisch-monarchistische System erinnert.«<sup>8</sup> This radical proposal was modified and toned down in committee. According to the modified proposal, those names which appeared more than once should be changed and, secondly, the »monarchistic-Byzantine« street names should be eliminated.

The term »Byzantine« appeared in the committee as a magic formula accepted by all parliamentary factions. It was used to refer to names »lacking any historical interest«<sup>9</sup> – except that the proponents of the Republic and the supporters of the Monarchy understood this to be mean quite different things. Among such street names were those which constituted an exaggerated per-

<sup>8</sup> Session on 16. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1828

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



petuation of the memory of members of the royal family. As an example, mention was made of the streets in Karlshorst that had been named after the six children of Wilhelm the Second.<sup>10</sup>

The intention to eliminate monarchistic street names was intended to be a demonstration of political will. In this regard, the representative of the USPD stated: »Wir wollen doch verlangen, daß in den Straßennamen des neuen Berlin . . . dem Umstande Rechnung getragen wird, daß sich immerhin einiges geändert hat.«<sup>11</sup>

There were different views present among the three workers' parties – the USPD, the SPD and the KPD – regarding the question on how radically one should proceed in respect to the public memorialization of the Monarchy. The USPD representative gave assurances that his political friends did not wish to go as far as the former regime had done.<sup>12</sup> The representative of the SPD stated that names such as Friedrich-Wilhelm the Second or Wilhelm the Second – which reminded one of the reaction – should disappear. In his view, however, one should not go too far: »Wir haben selbstverständlich nichts dagegen, daß es eine »Hohenzollernstraße« gibt« – because this name would be of »historical interest«.<sup>13</sup> As far as the militaristic names were concerned, he emphasized – in contrast to the Communist position: »Wir haben ausdrücklich gesagt: nicht alles, was an die militärische Vergangenheit erinnert, soll beseitigt werden.«<sup>14</sup> The Communist speaker was uncompromising. In his view, all names perpetuating the memory of the old regime should be eliminated. The Communist representative linked the question of public commemoration with the historical responsibility for the so-called »Schmach«. In his own words: »Kapitalismus, Monarchismus und Militarismus haben uns ins Elend gebracht und deswegen müssen wir sie beseitigen, deswegen müssen wir auch die Namen ausmerzen, die nur irgendwie an diese Verbrechen und Verbrecher erinnert.«<sup>15</sup> Among such »criminals«, the person mentioned most was the last emperor. Both the Communists and the Social Democrats directed sharp attacks against him. The Communist speaker called him a »coward«, an »actor« and »deserter«. In this spirit, the Social Democratic representative suggested that names such as »Wortbruchstraße« (Treachery Avenue) or »Deserteurstraße« should be used.<sup>16</sup>

The view of the representatives from the conservative DNVP and the DVP was, as expected, quite different. For them, recollections of the Monarchy and

<sup>10</sup> Loewy (SPD), session on 16. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1838.

<sup>11</sup> Weinberg (USPD), *ibid.*, 1832.

<sup>12</sup> Weinberg, *ibid.*, 1831.

<sup>13</sup> Loewy (SPD), *ibid.* 1838.

<sup>14</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>15</sup> Hoffmann (KPD), session on 21. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1851.

<sup>16</sup> Loewy (SPD), session of 16. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1838.

the Hohenzollern were a »sehr stolze Erinnerung«,<sup>17</sup> and the old names should, in keeping with this view, be preserved. They also knew what – and who – bore responsibility for the »Schmach«: namely the Revolution, the Republic and its proponents. To quote them: »... nur dadurch, daß sie unsere Armee von hinten erstochen haben, erst dadurch ist der Krieg verlorengegangen.«<sup>18</sup> This assertion was not new. Nonetheless, its mention aroused stormy indignation in the left ranks of the assembly. At this point, proceedings were interrupted. The representative of the German Nationals also attempted to present objective arguments – which could also be accepted by the confirmed opponents of the Monarchy – over and beyond the confrontations over history. He pointed out that basically such names were hardly even noticed or given much attention. He also alluded to the circumstance that many of these names were actually quite normal, everyday names, such as Friedrich, Wilhelm or Augusta. He also referred to the enormous costs involved in such name changes – an aspect, by the way, likewise mentioned by the speaker from the USPD.

In the vote taken on June 21st, 1921, the Municipal Assembly accepted the modified proposal. According to this, the »monarchistic-Byzantine« street names were to be eliminated. However, this resolution was ignored by the authorities. Six years later, on April 7th, 1927, an almost identical resolution was passed once again by the assembly. This resolution requested City Hall »alle Straßennamen innerhalb Groß-Berlin, die an das frühere monarchische Regime erinnern, durch andere, der neueren Zeit entsprechende, zu ersetzen . . .«<sup>19</sup> During the session held on April 7th, the German National Party alderman warned his colleagues: »Sie können beschließen, daß die alten historischen Erinnerungen aus den Straßennamen verschwinden. Aber sie schaffen damit die Geschichte nicht aus der Welt.«<sup>20</sup> Yet that admonition, it turned out, was superfluous, as became clear later on. This resolution, like its 1921 predecessor, remained nothing more than an empty declaration of intention, without any visible consequences.

The Berlin press reported extensively about the deliberations of June 1921. The sensational bit of news was the »Wild Commotion in Municipal Parliament«, as a headline blared. In addition, the ideological content of the session's deliberation was naturally also commented on. The conservative »Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger« maintained that it was a radical leftwing proposal »der mit den äußeren Erinnerungszeichen an die große deutsche Vergangenheit aufräumen wollte.«<sup>21</sup> The Communist »Rote Fahne« was of the view that the conservative representatives had transformed the proceedings into a »Hur-

<sup>17</sup> Kirchner (DNVP), *ibid.* 1834.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem.*, 1833.

<sup>19</sup> Amtsblatt der Stadt Berlin, 68, Nr. 16, 17. 4. 1927.

<sup>20</sup> Koch (DNVP), session on 7. 4. 1927, Protokolle, 302.

<sup>21</sup> Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 17. 6. 1921.



rapatriotische Kundgebung». <sup>22</sup> The liberal »Berliner Tageblatt« regarded the whole matter as a »Streit um leere Worte« due to the limited authority of the Municipal Parliament. Moreover, the paper was of the view that »damit in der Sache selbst nicht das geringste geändert wurde. Eine ganz kleine Reform, die der Bevölkerung eine materielle Verbesserung bringt, ist mehr Wert als aller Streit um die Straßennamen.« <sup>23</sup>

The Social Democrats, in contrast to the Communists, did not want a general »mopping-up« action in regard to the Berlin street names. Their goal was only one single change in name, but one which would have the greatest possible demonstrative effect: the renaming of the »Königsplatz« in front of the Reichstag into »Platz der Republik«. The square had been so named in 1864 in memory of Friedrich the First. Later the Victory Column and the Bismarck Monument were erected there, as well as – indeed – the German Reichstag. In view of the role of the Reichstag in the political life of the Republic, this square was of great national significance.

Supported by City Hall, the Social Democrats tried to get this proposed renaming passed for the first time in 1922. The balance of forces in the assembly at that time, where the bourgeois camp had the majority, thwarted this direct attack on the Monarchy's memory. Four years later, in February 1926 – only a few months after the Berlin elections – a second attempt was undertaken. This time, the left factions had an absolute majority in the assembly. The Social Democratic representative who presented the proposal noted with satisfaction, that the »Berliner Einwohnerschaft in übergroßer Mehrheit republikanisch gesinnt ist.« <sup>24</sup>

The Social Democratic member also emphasized in his speech that this square was suited like none other to bear the name »Platz der Republik«. He was referring not only to the representative importance of this square, but also to the historical memory associated with it: namely the proclamation of the Republic. In his words: »... denn der »Königsplatz« hat bei der Ausrufung der Republik eine historische Bedeutung und wird sie behalten ... solange Deutschland eine Republik sein wird.« <sup>25</sup> But the new name did not only have the function of keeping alive the memory of those events. The new name was also intended to be a demonstration of political will, because »die Berliner Bürgerschaft endlich ein Recht hat, auch öffentlich sich zur Republik zu bekennen.« <sup>26</sup>

The highpoint of the confrontation were the attacks directed against the Republic. The speaker of the DNVP stated that »die Republik es nicht

<sup>22</sup> Die Rote Fahne, 22. 6. 1921.

<sup>23</sup> Berliner Tageblatt, 22. 6. 1921.

<sup>24</sup> Czerninski (SPD), session on 2. 2. 1926, Protokolle, 122.

<sup>25</sup> Idem.

<sup>26</sup> Idem.

verdient, an dieser hervorragenden Stelle schon heute um ihre Verdienste verewigt zu werden.« <sup>27</sup> However, not that, in his view, the Republic did not have any merits: among those he mentioned were the Versailles Peace Treaty and the »Ausbeutung Deutschlands durch die Entente«. The DVP speaker was not so decisively opposed to the »Platz der Republik«. He stated: »Es könnte sich schon einmal eine Gelegenheit finden, wo man für einen Platz der Republik sorgen könnte.« <sup>28</sup> Though some other square, of course, should be renamed – not the representative »Königsplatz«. The DNVP spokesman, by the way, expressed an original idea: namely to give this public square the name »Siegesplatz« (Victory Square). Whereupon a Communist representative shouted over to him: »Wo habt Ihr denn gesiegt?« <sup>29</sup>

It was a stormy session. The vote by call taken two days later was what especially underscored its importance. The Social Democratic proposal was passed 121 to 81. Voting in favor were the Social Democrats, the Communists, the Zentrum Party representatives and the eight Democratic members of the Municipal Parliament. As expected, the DVP and DNVP voted against the proposal. <sup>30</sup> A few weeks later this renaming was carried out.

The session was reflected in press reaction. In the right-wing papers, expressions appeared such as »Die Roten toben sich aus«, »ein Kultur- und traditionsloser Bildstürmerei«, »kitschiger Republikanismus«. The Republican press supported the counterattack by the Republic. The »Berliner Tageblatt« noted objectively that »auch der neue Staat einen Anspruch darauf hat, daß seiner im Stadtbild der Reichszentrale gedacht wurde.« <sup>31</sup>

Another aspect of the discussion regarding the perpetuation of historical memory by means of street names was the question of the public commemoration of statesmen of the Republic in the city. The Berlin Municipal Parliament concerned itself with the official memorialization of three personalities: Hugo Preuss, the father of the Weimar Constitution; Friedrich Ebert, the Social Democratic leader and first president of the Republic; and Gustav Stresemann, the leader of the DVP, the former Chancellor and important Foreign Minister. The latter two had been honored by state funerals in the capital.

Hugo Preuss – the father of the Weimar Constitution and a Democratic Minister of the Interior in 1919 – did not play an important role in national politics in later years. Despite his abilities and merits, he ended his political career in the Prussian State Assembly as a representative in the Democratic faction. He died on October 9th, 1925. Already that following February, a Social Democratic representative was considering naming a street after him.

<sup>27</sup> Koch (DNVP), *ibid.*, 123.

<sup>28</sup> Schwarz (DVP), *ibid.*, 125.

<sup>29</sup> Session on 2. 2. 1926, Protokolle, 124.

<sup>30</sup> Gemeindeblatt der Stadt Berlin, 67, Nr. 7, 14. 2. 1926.

<sup>31</sup> Berliner Tageblatt, 6. 2. 1926.



Later on, a proposal was submitted for renaming the »Neue Wilhelmstraße« and its extension, the »Luisenstraße«, in the center of Berlin. The last reading of this session took place in April 1927.

The public memorial to the memory of Hugo Preuss was also to be, at the same time, the honoring of his life work, namely the Weimar Constitution. The arguments brought up for and against a public memorialization of Preuss were principally related to the Constitution, which was a central pillar of the republican form of government. The views regarding this question appeared to be familiar ones. Nonetheless, during the deliberations there were interesting, occasionally unexpected statements and remarks.

The speaker of the Democratic faction expressed his faction's pleasure and gratitude for the fact that the assembly was honoring the creator of the Constitution in this manner in old Berlin.<sup>32</sup> Because of the Constitution which he had created, the representative continued, Preuss deserved »den Dank der Lebenden und aller kommenden Geschlechter.« These remarks were not unexpected; it could also be expected that the speaker would not mention how Preuss' career had ended. On the other hand, the Communist speaker surprised the house with his highly laudatory comments both on Preuss and the Constitution. These words of praise, however, were complemented by a severe condemnation of the realities of Weimar democracy. In his own words:

»Obgleich er einer der fähigsten Köpfe war, konnte er nie Reichsabgeordneter werden, weil das Durchführen der wirklichen Konsequenzen, Demokratie, wie er sie auffaßte, dem Kapital und den Geschäftsmachern des Kapitals natürlich manche Summe gekostet hätte, die sie nicht opfern wollten.«<sup>33</sup>

It was also no surprise when the speaker from the German National faction expressed his doubts as to the historical importance of Preuss and the Constitution. In regard to the Constitution, he stated: »das Verfassungswerk, weswegen wir diese Straße verliehen bekommen sollen, ist keineswegs abgeschlossen und steht geschichtlich in seiner Bedeutung noch nicht so fest, daß er zu einer solch hervorragenden Stelle in dem Straßennamen zu werden verdient.«<sup>34</sup> Surprising, on the other hand, was his original interpretation of the Constitution and of Preuss' contribution to it. In his view, the Constitution had been Bismarck's life work, while the contribution made by Preuss was subject to criticism. In particular, criticism was voiced, playing on the name Preuss, about »was dieser Preuße und preußische Abgeordnete Herr Preuss in die Reichsverfassung hineingebracht hat, nämlich was er damit dem Lande Preußen und den Ländern an Rechten genommen hat ...«<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that the speaker from the

<sup>32</sup> Merten (DDP), session on 7. 4. 1927, Protokolle, 300.

<sup>33</sup> Bartz (KPD), *ibid.*, 304.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 301.

German National faction did not bewail the abolition of the Monarchy, but rather the curtailing of the rights of the constituent states, in particular, those of Prussia. The reduction in the position enjoyed by the state of Prussia within the national Reich appeared to him to be more important than the republican form of government, which was not even mentioned. Moreover, by his wordplay on »Preuss« and »Prussian«, he indicated that Preuss had betrayed his Prussian homeland. Naturally, such a man did not deserve to have a street named after him in the Prussian capital.

The proposal to change the names of »Neue Wilhelmstraße« as well as the »Luisenstraße« into »Hugo-Preuss-Straße« did not only meet with the opposition of the conservative wing in the Municipal Parliament. There was also opposition from businesses and institutions located there. This resistance to the proposal was not necessarily political; it was bound up more with the practical aspects of name-changing. The German National faction underscored this opposition, in order to thwart this unwelcome attempt to rename the street. Most of the opposition was directed toward the renaming of the »Luisenstraße«, and the Democratic faction was already prepared to renounce this stretch of pavement because, as it stated, what was important was not the length of the street. The modification proposal calling for the dropping of »Luisenstr.« from the proposal was rejected 101 to 90.<sup>36</sup> This resolution, however, was not implemented by the relevant responsible authorities. Instead, a bridge over the River Spree in Tiergarten was named in 1928 after the father of the Weimar Constitution.

Friedrich Ebert died on January 25th, 1925. As early as the following March 5th, the Social Democratic faction in the Municipal Parliament proposed renaming one of the thoroughfares as »Friedrich-Ebert-Straße« in commemoration of the deceased President. The question was dealt with by the assembly on March 31st. Two proposals were on the agenda. According to the German National faction's proposal, a thoroughfare should be named after Ebert; the Social Democratic proposal called for the renaming of the »Budapester Straße« and »Sommerstraße« in the heart of Berlin after Friedrich Ebert.

It is worth noting that the German National faction supported the honoring of Ebert. Perhaps this was a sign that the bitterness that marked the first years of the Republic had subsided. It appeared that the political and economic situation had stabilized. The great debates, so it seemed, were a part of the past. This evident agreement on the part of the pronounced opponents of the Republic was significant in that, by so doing, the Social Democrat Ebert, the founder of the Republic, was given recognition as a personality possessing national importance.

<sup>36</sup> Session on 7. 4. 1927, Protokolle, 305. See also: *Amteblatt der Stadt Berlin*, 68, Nr. 16, 17.



But this apparent general and non-partisan consensus soon proved to be deceptive. The conservatives had no objections to naming a street in the capital after Ebert; on the contrary, they had also submitted such a proposal. However, they did have reservations as regards the way and manner in which his memory was to be commemorated. The issue was not whether Ebert's public memory should be perpetuated, but rather which street should bear his name. It is no accident that the proposal put forward by the German National faction ignored this important aspect. The Social Democrats, in contrast, made a concrete proposal: the streets passing by the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag were, in terms of their proposal, to bear Ebert's name. In this way, the importance of the deceased President was to be underscored; this was also stated quite openly by the Social Democratic representative: »Wir haben eine Straße gewählt, die auch eine gewisse politische Bedeutung hat, weil sie in der Nähe alter historischer Stätten sich befindet ...«<sup>37</sup>

But the rightwing representatives could not accept that. They avoided launching an open attack against Ebert and his historical role. Instead, they tried to change the selection of streets to be renamed. The Volkspartei representative also had a positive proposal in regard to the street to be renamed: »Manche meiner Freunde hätten es lieber gesehen, wenn eine andere Straße nach Ebert benannt würde, etwa die »Französische Straße«« Filled with satisfaction, he continued: »Es wäre dadurch zum Ausdruck gekommen, daß wir ganz gern die »Französische Straße« los wären ...«<sup>38</sup>

The Communists were the only ones who were vehemently opposed to having a street named after Ebert. For them, the deliberations were an opportunity to settle scores with the SPD and with Ebert himself. The Communist speaker emphasized that Ebert »dazu beigetragen hat, die deutsche Arbeiterschaft in das Sklavenverhältnis, in dem sie sich jetzt dem deutschen Kapitalismus gegenüber befindet, hineinzuführen.«<sup>39</sup> This was the justification for the Communist rejection of the proposal. The Communist representative attacked the Social Democrats and expressed the view that if the Social Democrats had the courage to call themselves a workers' party, they should also assume responsibility for their policies and their consequences. He had a practical proposal in this regard: not to name a street after Ebert, but rather some welfare institution, such as a refuge for the homeless.<sup>40</sup> In this way, he argued, the responsibility of the Social Democrats for social conditions in Berlin would be given expressive embodiment.

<sup>37</sup> Loewy (SPD), session on 31. 3. 1925, Protokolle, 289.

<sup>38</sup> Hallensleben (DVP), *ibid.*, 288.

<sup>39</sup> Dörr (KPD), *ibid.*, 287.

<sup>40</sup> *Idem*, 288.

On April 2nd, 1925, the assembly decided to rename the »Budapesterstraße« and »Sommerstraße« as the »Friedrich-Ebert-Straße«. This resolution was implemented. However, in order not to lose the old name »Budapester Straße« completely, the first section of the Kurfürstendamm, between the »Auguste-Viktoria-Platz« (after 1945: »Breitscheidplatz«) and the »Corneliusbrücke«, was renamed »Budapester Straße«. Due to this peculiar compromise, even today that central boulevard in West Berlin begins with the number 11 ...

Aside from the Communists, all factions in the Berlin Municipal Parliament were in agreement that Ebert's memory should be honored by naming a street after him. The memorialization of Stresemann was rejected both by the Communists as well as the German Nationals. Apparently a paradox: why the Social Democrat Ebert *yes*, but the conservative Stresemann *no*? There was a very important difference between the Ebert and Stresemann. Ebert – although the founding father of the Republic – had very little to do with the shaping of national policies. Stresemann, on the other hand, had determined the foreign policy of the Reich and was involved in the political questions of the time. The deliberations provided the radicals, both on the left and right, with a golden opportunity to settle scores as far as his foreign policy was concerned. The German National representative asserted that it was not a question of honoring Stresemann as a person and individual – but was rather a question of Stresemann's policies. He considered his policies responsible for the catastrophic situation prevailing in Berlin and throughout the Reich.<sup>41</sup> The speaker of the National Socialist faction – which had 13 representatives in the assembly as a result of the elections held on November 17th, 1929 – emphasized the anti-Stresemann position of his party. He termed Stresemann's approach a »Verklavungspolitik«.<sup>42</sup>

The Communists, for their part, pointed to the enslavement of the German working class. They viewed Stresemann as »einer der ärgsten Feinde der deutschen Arbeiterschaft«. In their eyes, he was »ein typischer Vertreter der deutschen Bourgeoisie.« They contended that he had been the architect of the new German imperialism, and also directly attacked his foreign policy. The conclusion to be drawn was clear: »Das deutsche Proletariat lehnt alle diese Ehrungen von bürgerlichen Staatsmännern und Wirtschaftlern – und wie dieses ganze Volk heißt – einfach ab.«<sup>43</sup>

Over against this total rejection on the part of the DNVP and the Communists, representatives of four factions supported the proposal for naming a street after Stresemann: the DVP, whose leader he had been, the Social Democrats, the Catholic Zentrum and the Democrats. It is noteworthy that not a single Social

<sup>41</sup> Döring (DNVP), session on 6. 2. 1930, Protokolle, 163.

<sup>42</sup> Neemann (NSDAP), *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>43</sup> Dröll (KPD), *ibid.*, 162.



Democratic representative sought to justify his party's support for honoring Stresemann's memory. The representative of the Zentrum noted simply: »Wir stehen auf dem Standpunkt, daß eine Persönlichkeit wie der verstorbene Stresemann einer Ehrung durch die Stadt würdig ist.«<sup>44</sup> The representative of the DDP described Stresemann as »ein Staatsmann im Dienste des Vaterlandes«.<sup>45</sup>

The total and almost bitter rejection by the German Nationals was founded in part on a reason that had nothing to do with Stresemann and his policies. Immortalizing Stresemann was only one side of the coin. The other side was the dispute regarding a prominent commemorative focus in historical memory: the 1866 Prussian victory over Austria and its public commemoration in Berlin in the form of the street name »Königgrätzer Straße«. This name was given in 1867 to immortalize the Prussian victory in Bohemia. Thus, the name was a symbol of Prussian »Little Germany« orientation, which had triumphed four years later with the formation of the Bismarck Empire.

The Prussian, »Little Germany« connotation of the old name did not find favor in the eyes of the Social Democrats, who had a national, pan-German ideology. In their view, this public memorial to the victory had to be removed. This idea was broached as early as 1925, during deliberations on Ebert's public memorialization. On that occasion, the Social Democratic representative noted: »Wir waren der Meinung, daß es jetzt vielleicht an der Zeit sei, die Erinnerungen an einen Krieg zwischen zwei deutschen Stämmen zu beseitigen, da wir doch hoffentlich einmal dazu kommen werden, das Großdeutschland zu bilden.«<sup>46</sup> The topic was discussed later on the District Assembly in Kreuzberg. At that time, the Social Democrats proposed renaming this street »Österreichstraße«. It is worth noting that signatures against this plan were collected from more than 1000 residents of the street and passed on to the responsible authorities.

The opportunity to be rid of this unpleasant historical reminder and to transform the »perhaps« of 1925 into certainty came on October 24th, 1929 in the deliberation regarding the naming of a street after Stresemann. The intention of the government, which had been made public as a result of the proposal by City Hall, was to rename the »Königgrätzer Straße« as »Stresemannstraße«.

An interesting question here is: why did the government try to link these two different historical memorials? One possible answer is that this was an intentional attempt by the governmental authorities to force the DVP to agree to the elimination of the unwanted memorialization. If that indeed was the intention,

<sup>44</sup> Anton Schmidt (Zentrum), *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>45</sup> Heuß (DDP), *ibid.*, 161.

<sup>46</sup> Loewy (SPD), session on 31. 3. 1925, Protokolle, 288.

then this clever maneuver was crowned with success. The DVP representatives, who were occupied with defending the honoring of Stresemann's memory against attacks from the right, completely avoided the question of the commemoration of Königgrätz. This upset the German Nationals, who then were the sole proponents of a memorialization now doomed to possible oblivion. A German National representative appealed to his colleagues from the ranks of the People's Party: »Wir haben Front zu machen gegen solche Dinge.«<sup>47</sup> As already mentioned, the vehement opponents of this intention were the German Nationals. This party was dedicated to preserving the memory of Prussia. During the first session, on October 24th, 1929, a German National representative averred:

»Wir sehen in dem Namen Königgrätz ein Symbol aus Deutschlands größter Vergangenheit . . . Wir wünschen, daß das Andenken an diese große Vergangenheit in dem Volk nicht erlischt, sondern in dem Namen der Straße erhalten bleibt.«<sup>48</sup>

At the next session, on February 6th, 1930, another German National representative stated:

»Ich halte es eines Volkes nicht würdig, daß es sich seiner Geschichte, der großen Taten des Volkes, schämt. Wir Deutsche und Preußen haben allen Grund, auf die Taten unserer Väter, auch auf die Taten, die sich mit dem Namen Königgrätz knüpfen, stolz zu sein. Und wir sind stolz.«<sup>49</sup>

The National Socialists stated only that what was involved was a »republican conspiracy«.

The representatives of the KPD and the DDP were in favor of eliminating the public memorialization of the 1866 victory. The Communists used the opportunity to attack the Social Democrats, because they wished to exchange one undesirable name for another. Nonetheless, the Communist speaker declared: »Wir werden dafür kämpfen, daß die »Königgrätzer Str.« geändert wird.«<sup>50</sup> The representative of the Democratic faction was less militant. He stated merely that he did not know whether the memory of 1866 was one »ausschließlich der Freude und Stolz«.<sup>51</sup>

The DVP was principally interested in the public memorialization of Stresemann. When it became clear that the linking of »Stresemann« and »Königgrätz«, as had been proposed by City Hall, could only harm matters, the party faction made another proposal: namely to rename two streets in Tiergarten as »Stresemannstraße«. It was a close vote, and the proposal was adopted 109 in favor to 101 opposed. However, the responsible authorities were of a

<sup>47</sup> Döring (DNVP), session on 6. 2. 1930, Protokolle, 164.

<sup>48</sup> Seelmann-Eggebert (DNVP), session on 24. 10. 1929, Protokolle, 961.

<sup>49</sup> Döring (DNVP), session on 6. 2. 1930, Protokolle, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Fritz Lange (KPD), session on 24. 10. 1929, Protokolle, 961.

<sup>51</sup> Heuß (DDP), session on 6. 2. 1930, Protokolle, 165.



different view, and soon after – despite this resolution – the »Königgrätzer Straße« was renamed »Stresemannstraße«. Thus, the public memorialization of the events of 1866 disappeared after all from the register of Berlin street names.

An additional type of memorialization which was repeatedly brought up in discussions was the memory of the revolution. Understandably, this matter was raised solely by the Communists. Given the balance of forces in the assembly, they had no chance of implementing their views and desires regarding such a public memorialization in the capital. Nevertheless, the Communist faction presented names which, in its view, were suitable for the street signs of Berlin. These names were intended to portray the revolutionary heritage and give its expressive embodiment.

During the session on June 16th, 1921, which had dealt with names of the Monarchy, the USPD representative pointed out that there were world-famous Germans, such as Heine and Marx, after whom no street had been named in Berlin.<sup>52</sup> At the next session, the Communist representative argued that Berlin needed a »Luxemburgstraße«, a »Bebelstraße« and a »Liebknechtstraße« – maybe along with a »Trotzkiplatz«.<sup>53</sup>

These were only theoretical suggestions, and did not result in an official proposal. In later years, the Communist faction – which had grown much stronger in the meantime – proposed to name streets after revolutionary heroes, generally parallel to deliberations on other renamings. Communist proposals remained at the periphery of the discussion. It is noteworthy that the other factions hardly even addressed themselves to the Communist arguments and accusations. They were simply ignored.

During the deliberations on February 2nd, 1926, when the question was debated regarding the renaming of the »Königsplatz« »Platz der Republik«, the Communists demonstratively proposed renaming this square »Platz der Revolution«.<sup>54</sup> Their reasoning was that the historical memory of the events of January 1919 was bound up with this public square. With the name »Platz der Republik«, on the other hand, the Social Democrats wished to honor the memory of the events of November 1918. The Communist proposal was rejected by all the other factions in the house.

In the late 1920s, Karl Liebknecht was declared to be the principal martyr of the German Communist movement. When the Committee for Streets and Public Squares dealt with the question of naming a street after Stresemann, the Communist representatives proposed the name of Karl Liebknecht. This proposal was rejected; however, the Communists did not drop their idea of having a street named after Liebknecht. In reaction to the rejection by the

<sup>52</sup> Weinberg (USPD), 16. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1831.

<sup>53</sup> Hoffmann (KPD), session on 21. 6. 1921, Protokolle, 1854.

<sup>54</sup> Säbel (KPD), session on 6. 2. 1926, Protokolle, 123.

other factions, the KPD representative warned: »Sie lehnen damit nicht das Gedächtnis ab, daß Karl Liebknecht beim deutschen Proletariat hat, das Gedächtnis an diesen großen Vorkämpfer, diesen großen Führer, den sie zwar morden konnten, der aber unter uns lebt . . .«<sup>55</sup>

The memory of Sacco and Vanzetti was also to be honored by naming a central public square after them. On September 29th, 1927, the Communist faction proposed renaming »Wilhelmplatz« as »Sacco-Vanzetti-Platz«.<sup>56</sup> This proposal was a demonstration of political will; in so doing, the Berlin Communists presented themselves as the true representatives of progressive tradition. All participants were clear about the fact that it was a political demonstration. During the deliberations, the Communist representative was the only one who took the rostrum, although his speech was repeatedly interrupted by at times very furious jeers and shouts. As expected, the proposal was rejected.

The renaming of streets and the tearing down of monuments are part of every revolutionary upheaval. In this way, the break with the past is made visible; the signal is given that a new historical era has begun. Of equal importance is the fact that this also serves as a means – simple but highly effective – for settling scores with the old regime.

However, none of this took place during the events of November 1918 in Berlin. Only in later years did the Municipal Parliament deal repeatedly with the question of the historical memory that was etched into the image of the townscape. On the one hand, it was a question of the public memorialization of the Monarchy; on the other, the honoring of important statesmen of the Republic by the naming of central thoroughfares in their memory was what was at issue. The deliberations were often stormy. The arguments advanced gave clear expression to the opposed views regarding the legitimate form of government and conception of the nation in Germany.

The lively debates in the Municipal Parliament are indeed noteworthy when one recalls that this body was unable to influence the actual official renamings. This shows, among other things, that the politicians were quite conscious of the political significance of public memorialization as reflected in the names of streets.

The actual changes in the official list of streets in the capital were another matter. In the heart of Berlin, a few streets bore the names of the prominent men of the Republic. Most other streets, however, continued to memorialize the Monarchy. In this way, a deceptive juxtaposition of Monarchy and Republic appeared in the Berlin townscape; the official list of streets in the capital presented a false and misleading historical continuity – one which did not mesh with political reality in the Weimar Republic.

<sup>55</sup> Dröll (KPD), session on 6. 2. 1930, Protokolle, 162.

<sup>56</sup> Fritz Lange (KPD), session on 29. 9. 1927, Protokolle, 636.



It was the Prussian governmental authorities who had not agreed to the proposal of the Municipal Parliament, submitted twice, to eliminate the public memorials to the Monarchy. Not that the Prussian authorities were unable to eliminate those public memorializations which they considered undesirable. The example of the renaming of »Königgrätzer Straße« against the expressed resolution adopted by the Municipal Parliament demonstrates that this was indeed possible. As far as the public memorialization of the Monarchy was concerned, republican Prussia contented itself with a single yet demonstrative renaming: that of »Königsplatz« into »Platz der Republik«. Though this, by the way, occurred only eight years after the proclamation of the Republic. Beyond that move, the authorities refused to take further steps in this direction.

I have not dealt with that question within the confines of this article. All I can do here is to call attention to it and to the public absence of a demonstrative »mopping-up operation« to purge the German capital of commemorative reminders of the Monarchy. Perhaps there was a desire not to provoke the enemies of the Republic. However, the absence of such a historical coming-to-terms with the old regime was, at the same time, another demonstration of the weakness of the Republic.

This striking reserve on the part of the Republic stands in sharp contrast to the resolute determination with which the Nazis went about eradicating public commemorative reminders of the Weimar Republic which they so despised. Only ten days after the Enabling Law of March 20th, 1933, the »Platz der Republik« was given back its former name. Shortly after that, the other renamings were carried out. In point of actual fact, there were very few republican street names compared with the thousands of names commemorating the Monarchy. But that was not the crux of the matter: by their swiftness to act, the new rulers expressed their determination and confidence. The Republic – which clearly did not venture such a break with the past – was lacking in both these qualities.