

Robert Michels

4 August 1908; Heidelberg

handwritten letter

AFLE Turin, estate of Robert Michels, Caps. Max Weber, fasc, 60

Heidelberg 4/8 8

Dear friend,

1.^a I have *yet* to take action on the matter regarding Fischer.¹ I haven't been able to do so. I just intend to print the passage of "Did you for just one moment..."¹⁾ until the *end* if you permit it or *if* this seems right to you, and to add some glosses *on my part*. *Here*, the letter unleashed scornful guffaw about F[ischer] |:(especially the end):|and a storm of indignation.-

2.^b Your latest work in the archive² has found *much* acclaim here, it was mentioned to me several times. I thought it was *very* correct and good in the *critical* part. But oh - how much resignation will you still have to endure! For me, concepts such as "will of the people, "*true* will of the people" etc. have already ceased to exist a long time ago. They are *fictions*. It is precisely as though one wanted to speak of a "will of the boot consumers", which must determine the *way* in which the shoemaker should set up his technique²⁾ There are *two* possibilities. Either: 1) "my kingdom is not of this world"³ (Tolstoy, *or* a syndicalism *thought* through to its *conclusion*, which is *nothing more* than

- 1) With omissions, of course (...) What, for instance, is the point of the sentence "apart from other life circumstances" and other empty phrases – or should I omit the ending? But precisely the latter is so *naïve*! Maybe I could just indicate it *in terms of content*.
- 2) The shoe consumers do know where the shoe *pinches* them, but *never^c*: how it should be made *better*.

a German original: underlined twice.

b German original: underlined twice.

c *nicht > niemals*

1 cf. Michels' letter from 25 June 1908, above, p. 596, note 1

2 Die oligarchischen Tendenzen der Gesellschaft. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Demokratie, in: AfSSp, Vol. 27, Number 1, 1908, pp. 73-135.

3 John 18,36

the sentence “for me, the ultimate goal is nothing, the *movement* is everything”⁴ translated into the *revolutionary-ethical*, |: *personal*:| sphere, but which *you*, too, of course, *do* not think through to its conclusion!³) – or: 2) the *affirmation* of culture (i.e. *objective* culture that manifests itself in *technical* etc. “achievements”) combined with *adaptation* to the sociological conditions of *all* “technology”, be it |:economic,:| political or of any other kind (these phenomena would be embodied *to the highest degree*^d precisely in “collective societies”). In the *second* case, all talk of “revolution” is a farce, *every* thought of *removing* the “domination of man over man [“] by means of *any* social system, *no matter how* “socialist”, of forms of “democracy”^e, *no matter how* ingenious, is a *utopia*. But your own critique in this matter does not go far enough. A person who wants to live as a “modern individual”, even if only in the sense of having his newspaper every day, railways, electricity etc. etc., gives up all those ideals that you dimly envisage, as soon as he in general has to leave the ground of revolutionism for its own sake, without any “goal”, even without the conceivability of a “goal”. You are a thoroughly honest fellow and will subject yourself – and this is demonstrated by the timid approaches in your article - to the critical reflection that long ago led me to this way of thinking and has *therefore* branded me as the “bourgeois” politician, at least as *long* as the little one *can* desire in that role does not recede into an infinite distance.-

Finally^{f3.g} Your manuscript has arrived.⁵ I read it and I do not have any objection

3) I will probably write *about that* one day.

d <grade> **e** <*mehr*> **f** <3> **g** German original: underlined twice

4 The expression derives from Eduard Bernstein and is found in his article: *Der Kampf der Sozialdemokratie und die Revolution der Gesellschaft. 2. Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik*, published in: *Die Neue Zeit*, 16, Vol. I, Number 18, 1897-98, pp. 548-567; the quotation on p. 556: “I openly admit that I have very little interest for and sense of what is commonly understood as the ‘final goal of socialism’. This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing at all to me, the movement is everything. And by movement I mean both the general movement of society, i.e. the social progress, and the political and economic agitation and organization to bring about this progress.”

5 In this context, Weber probably refers to a work by Michels about: *Universität und Sozialismus*. On a handwritten list of Edgar Jaffé of contributions for the AfSSp from 1 November 1908 (ZStA Merseburg, rep. 92, estate of Werner Sombart, Number 17, sh. 159-160), “Michels, Rob.: *Universität und Sozialismus*” is recorded as number 12 in the section of the manuscripts contained. The article has not appeared in the AfSSP. There is no evidence of the manuscript itself in the AFLE Turin, estate of Robert Michels.

whatsoever to the printing in the “archive”, regardless of whether I “agree” or not. As you may think, I do *not* on several grounds and I am in *very strong* disagreement with many parts. Some details: p. 18: the concept of “respectability” *corresponds* to ours “socially” etc. – p. 19 The *penalty* account of the party is *tiny* compared to the things faced by our bourgeois fathers and grandfathers in the struggle against^h absolutism. In this respect, Fritz Reuter⁶ is *typical*. P. 31 It is *incorrect* to say that the *students* were *not* interested in the freedom of teaching (Austria, Munich⁷, etc.) P. 34/5 Confraternities – at the risk of your saying: “pro domo”: - the programme of the conf[raternities] *never* had *any* affinity to socialism or purely rationalist democracy. Up to mysticism, it was always primarily “national”. Their “programme” has been *fulfilled* – is it their fault that they now no longer have to fight for *this* programme? *Far* more important |: and truly characteristic:| in their case is the approval of *sexual* libertinism since 1877/8.⁸ – To say that universities *today* are politically “*more unfree*” than they were *prior* to the confraternity movement is an absolutely incorrect hyperbole which, like some similar things, greatly *weaken* the impression of what is said. They *are* unfree, and this is *my* opinion, too. But they *used to be even more so*. P. 36: There “are reservations” against *this form* of cooperation (between non-confraternity students and workers). From a party bureaucratic point of view, this is alarming already in terms of the wording, and even more so in substance! There will *always* be reservations against a “machine” (in the American sense: -

h O: German original: für

6 In the course of the persecutions following the so-called “Frankfurt putsch” on 3 April 1833, the later famous Mecklenburg dialect writer Fritz Reuter had been arrested in Berlin on 31 October 1833 as a member of the Jena fraternity. In the court ruling, which came only three years later, he was initially sentenced to death for attempted treason. This judgment was then converted into a prison term of 30 years. He was released in 1840. Cf. the article by Boëß, Frith Reuter, in: ADB, Volume 28, 1889, pp. 319-327.

7 Here, Weber presumably refers to students’ activities in Vienna and Munich during the 1848 revolution.

8 Here, Weber probably alluded to the so-called “maxim of chastity”, which was applicably in most – but not all – fraternities. This maxim was, however, abandoned/suspended by most fraternities as early as in 1872, not as late as in 1877/78. Cf. Heer, Georg, *Geschichte der Deutschen Burschenschaft*, Volume 4: *Die Geschichte in der Zeit der Vorbereitung des zweiten Reiches, im zweiten Reich und im Weltkrieg* (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Geschichte der Burschenschaft und der deutschen Einheitsbewegung. Ed. by Paul Wentzke. Volume XVI). – Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung 1939, p. 14 and p. 37.

by the way, have you read James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth*,⁹? You *should* do that!), if *non-party* members want to do something to *their* liking. – In my opinion, the comments on *Schwarz* and also on *Biermann*¹⁰ have only provided these nulls with publicity. Rosa Luxemburg as an “pride” |:of the university:|, - I am afraid that this will be ridiculed, and *justifiably* so, because I cannot agree with you about this. She is a phonograph, show me *one* independent *thought* of hers. Of course, there are colleagues who do not have one, *either*, - but they are no “pride”. – “Tactical concessions on the grandest scale” for *Kautsky*! A *very* dubious concept! If I, for once, identify with my colleagues here – then “*we*”, *too*, use similar terms where we, from your point of view, “diplomatise”. P. 106: It does *not* follow from Fischer's letter that *socialists* who choose not have their children baptized are outlaws¹, but that this is true for *everyone* who fails to do so. And that's the way it *is*: This was the *only* reason for the cause célèbre of major Kauffman's¹¹ non-confirmation in Berlin, and K[auffmann] was very far from socialism. You remove the whole *punch line* from this matter. According to Fischer, those who are 1) “conspicuous” socialists, -) do not have their children baptized, - 3) do not live up to the |: ethical standards:| of their *Vizewirth* [T.N. – the landlord's representative] are *disqualified*. This is how *I* will phrase the issue. –

You know that I regard your comment on *Morocco* as a *distortion*. If we were, for instance, attacked^k for including of the article, then I would perhaps declare this also publically for *my* person –

I German original: outlaw's j German original: Kaufmann k German original: attackiert l <mein>

⁹ Bryce, James, *The American Commonwealth*. Second Edition Revised. 2 vols. - London and New York: Macmillan 1890; cf. the letter to Michels from 26 March 1906, above, p. 57, note 4.

¹⁰ Michels had probably quoted a work by Hermann Schwarz: *Der modern Materialismus als Weltanschauung und Geschichtsprinzip*. - Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1904; as for Weber's attitude towards Wilhelm Eduard Biermann, cf. the letter to Richard Graf Du Moulim-Eckart from 4 May 1907, above, p. 287 ff.

¹¹ In July 1901, William II had refused to accept the election of Berlin city council Gustav Kauffmann as second major of Berlin who was a member of the Free-minded People's Party, which attracted much attention at that time. Kauffmann was rejected because he had had to submit his resignation as lieutenant of the guard territorial force due to his political activities for the German Progress Party after a disciplinary action in the year 1882. Cf. ZStA Merseburg, German secret civil cabinet, 2.2.1., Number 14500. Yet there is no evidence of an influence of Kauffmann's failure to baptize his children on this decision.

in a considerate manner, of course, - at the risk that your party press will then think of me as a “coward”. Yet this is certainly my view. But as I said, *no* word needs to be changed, as far as *I* am considered. I am *quite certain* about the *effect* of the article: = *O^m*! as far as “our” people are considered. There is too much narrowness towards the opponent, however splendid the things it may otherwise contain. In order to *be effective*, it would have to be *much* cooler, much more contained and – in some respects – also more historically accurateⁿ. Anyone who has *experienced* these things – as I do – knows that the change did not come from the year 1870 but from the year 1877/8. You cannot say Everything, either: The reason for *me* |:e.g.:| not to become a social democrat (i.e. |: not an “academic” within the party:| *ordinary soldier*) unless *everything* was reduced to broken pieces – *suffrage coup^o*, for instance!¹² – is 1) my *absolute* skepticism towards the creed, -2) my *intellectual* contempt of the “leaders” |: *political*:| *talent*. Who will want to be governed by birdbrains like Bebel, - once *political* standards are used, - or by Quarck^p, to whom Cavour’s description: “a heart of gold, but ...” (You know!)¹³ is applied without his having Garibaldi’s qualities in other respects? I *do not*, despite my greatest *personal* respect for both men. Where do we have *one single political* capacity, one single fellow beyond just the level of Fischbeck or Liebermann and all the rest? Nowhere. Yet that *same* feeling dominates the circles of “academics” *in general*. It is *this feeling* to reverberate back to the youth, - because it is difficult to conceal. Bebel’s *assemblies* in Freiburg, and those of Bernstein here

m German original: underlined twice **n** German original: Zutreffender **o** alternative reading: *Wahlrechtsraub* [T.N. - deprivation of the suffrage] **p** German original: Quark

12 Allusion to coup d’état plans fostered in government circles at times with the aim of eliminating the existing democratic Reichstag suffrage.

13 What is meant here is Massimo d’Azeglio’s remark about Garibaldi: “vous savez: ‘cœur d’or, tête de buffle!’”, quoted in Robert Michels, *Die Beziehungen Giuseppe Garibaldis zum Sozialismus*, in: *Dokumente des Sozialismus*, Volume 5, 1905, p. 277. The quotation in: d’Azeglio, Massimo, *L’Italie de 1847 à 1865. Correspondance politique. Accompagnée d’une introduction et de notes par Eugène Rendu.* – Paris: Didler 1867, p. 177. The wrong ascription of the expression to Cavour may stem from the fact that Weber thought about the eponymous title of an article by Treitschke citing this phrase: Treitschke, Heinrich v., Cavour, in: idem, *Historische und Politische Aufsätze. Fifth extended edition, Volume 2. Die Einheitsbestrebungen zertheilter Völker.* – Leipzig: S. Hirzel 1886, pp. 243-402; *ibid.*, p. 368: „But as far as the talent of the dictator (i.e. Garibaldi) is concerned, the crude phrase: a heart of gold but the head of a buffalo! cited by Azeglio is absolutely applicable”

were *packed* with students.¹⁴ But what about the result? A shrug of shoulders about this kind of “brav’ général”.¹⁵ Can you actually demand something different? That’s enough, - I do not expect your essay to have any *effects at all*, but *I* will be *in favour of* the printing.

My best wishes to you! How is your dear wife? Have you completed your essay for the V[erein] f[ür] Soz[ial-] Pol[itik] [T.N. - social policy association], after all? *Where will you go on holiday?* I will stay *here* until September and then spend three weeks in Westphalia.

Best of luck,

Yours

Max Weber

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| *Translated from German to English by Sarah Fleissner*

14 Weber refers to Bebel’s speech “Über die Sozialdemokratie und die bürgerliche Gesellschaft” delivered in Freiburg on 21 May 1896, cf. Freiburger Zeitung, Number 116 from 22 May 1896 p. 2 as well as Bernstein’s speech about „Die kulturelle und wirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Arbeiterbewegung“ delivered on 18 December 1904 in Heidelberg, cf. Heidelberger Zeitung, Number 297 from 19 December 1904, first sh. p. 1. Since Weber’s name is not mentioned in the contributions to the discussions on Bebel’s and Bernstein’s speeches that followed, one may assume that he did not hear the lectures himself.

15 The expression referred to French general Boulanger is found in a verse from the chanson “En revenant de la revue” created in 1886: “Moi j’faisais qu’admirer/Not’ brav’ general Boulanger”. Cf. Chastenet, Jacques, La république des républicains 1879-1893 (Histoire de la troisième République, vol. II). – Paris: Librairie Hachette 1954, p. 181.