

ALLAN MITCHELL

Revolution in Bavaria, 1918-1919

*The Eisner Regime and the
Soviet Republic*



PRINCETON LEGACY LIBRARY

REVOLUTION IN BAVARIA

REVOLUTION
IN BAVARIA
1918-1919

The Eisner Regime
and the Soviet Republic

BY ALLAN MITCHELL

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

1965

Copyright © 1965 by Princeton University Press

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

L.C. Card: 65-10834

Publication of this book has been aided by the Ford Foundation program to support publication, through university presses, of works in the humanities and social sciences.

Printed in the United States of America
by Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey

For my parents
George and Jane Mitchell

P R E F A C E

IN WRITING this book my first concern has naturally been to keep my story straight. Necessity as well as convenience place at the center of it the man whom Arthur Rosenberg once called "the only creative statesman" to emerge in Germany during the revolutionary period. Although Kurt Eisner does not deserve that accolade, in my opinion, his personal fortunes did reflect both the possibilities and the limitations of the revolutionary situation in Bavaria. Yet this is not exclusively a political biography of Eisner. I have also attempted to examine the constitutional development of the Bavarian state, the role of the political parties, the appearance of the revolutionary councils, the condition of the economy, and even the weather. At the same time I have felt and tried to fulfill an obligation to relate the course of events in Bavaria to circumstances in the rest of Germany and in Europe as a whole.

Thorough research of the revolution in Bavaria has not been possible until recently. After May of 1919 the documentation of the preceding six months was placed in archives closed to all but a few men engaged in the hundreds of legal suits prosecuted during the next decade. Between 1933 and 1945 these archives were completely inaccessible to independent scholars. Not until the creation of the Bonn Republic, therefore, has the documentation become available. A great many documents have unfortunately been scattered or lost, but a notion of the collections which remain and which are now open to researchers may be gained from a perusal of the bibliography. I am indebted to the Director of the Bavarian State Archives, Professor Dr. Puchner, for his cooperation in making my investigation possible. Permission to use the Kautsky Archive was granted by Professor A.J.C. Rüter, Director of the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. Of the many librarians and archivists

PREFACE

who have given me their personal encouragement and professional help during the past few years, I want especially to acknowledge Dr. Ludwig Hollweck of the Münchener Stadtbibliothek and Dr. Bernhard Zittel of the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv.

Insofar as this study is an act of imagination as well as research, I owe a particular debt to the man who witnessed its inception—Professor Alfred Grosser of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris—and to the man who saw it through to completion as a doctoral thesis—Professor H. Stuart Hughes of Harvard University. In the course of revision several colleagues and friends have read individual chapters and enabled me to profit from their excellent suggestions: Klemens von Klemperer, Klaus Epstein, Guenter Lewy, Reginald Phelps, Istvan Deak, and Beate Ruhm von Oppen. I am grateful to all of them, but they will understand that the major share of gratitude belongs to my wife Ingrid who managed, sometimes literally, to type with one hand and hold off the children with the other.

Northampton, Massachusetts

June 1964

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
I. The Origins of Revolution	3
<i>Before the War</i>	5
<i>The War Years</i>	21
II. Kurt Eisner	34
<i>Eisner in Berlin</i>	35
<i>Eisner in Bavaria</i>	53
III. The November Revolution	75
<i>Reform or Revolt?</i>	76
<i>The Munich Putsch</i>	92
IV. Problems of Peace and Order	110
<i>Domestic Policy: the Initial Weeks</i>	111
<i>Foreign Policy: the Break with Berlin</i>	126
V. Council System and Cabinet Crisis	143
<i>The Councils of Soldiers, Workers, and Peasants</i>	145
<i>The Problem of Parliamentarianism</i>	160
VI. Party System and Bürgerwehr Crisis	176
<i>The Political Realignment</i>	178
<i>The Crisis of Christmas Week</i>	198
VII. The Statistics of Deterioration	212
<i>The Parliamentary Elections</i>	213
<i>The Economics of Unemployment</i>	230

CONTENTS

VIII.	The End of the Eisner Regime	242
	<i>The Radical Threat</i>	243
	<i>The Ides of February</i>	258
IX.	The Second Revolution	273
	<i>The Interregnum</i>	275
	<i>The Hoffmann Administration</i>	290
X.	The Soviet Republic	304
	<i>The "Pseudo" Soviet Republic</i>	305
	<i>Communist Rule and Civil War</i>	318
	Conclusion	332
	Postscript	337
	<i>The Communist View of the Bavarian Revolution</i>	337
	Bibliography	347
	Index	363

I L L U S T R A T I O N S

Map 1: Bavaria in 1918	<i>facing pages</i> 5
Map 2: Munich in 1918	92
Kurt Eisner I.	109
Kurt der Kleber	208

REVOLUTION IN BAVARIA

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I. Archives

- BGS** Bayerisches Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Munich
BHS Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich
IISG Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis,
Amsterdam
LC Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
NA National Archives, Washington, D.C.

II. Newspapers

- RF** *Rote Fahne* (Berlin)
MRF *Münchener Rote Fahne*
NZ *Neue Zeitung*
MP *Münchener Post*
MZ *Münchener Zeitung*
MNN *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*
MAA *Münchener-Augsburger Abendzeitung*
BK *Bayerischer Kurier*
BV *Das Bayerische Vaterland*
BSZ *Bayerische Staatszeitung*
MGZ:B *Münchener Gemeindezeitung: Bekanntmachungen*
MGZ:S *Münchener Gemeindezeitung: Sitzungen*

III. Political Parties

- KPD** Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
(German Communist Party)
VRI Vereinigung Revolutionärer Internationalisten Bayerns
(Union of Revolutionary Internationalists of Bavaria)
BBB Bayerischer Bauernbund (Bavarian Peasants' League)
USP Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei
(Independent Social Democratic Party)
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
(German Social Democratic Party)
DDP Deutsche Demokratische Partei
(German Democratic Party)
NLB Nationalliberale Landespartei in Bayern
(Bavarian National Liberal State Party)
BMP Bayerische Mittelpartei
(Bavarian Middle Party)
BVP Bayerische Volkspartei
(Bavarian People's Party)

IV. Council Bodies

- MAR** Münchener Arbeiterrat
(Munich Workers' Council)
MSR Münchener Soldatenrat
(Munich Soldiers' Council)
RAR Revolutionärer Arbeiterrat
(Revolutionary Workers' Council)

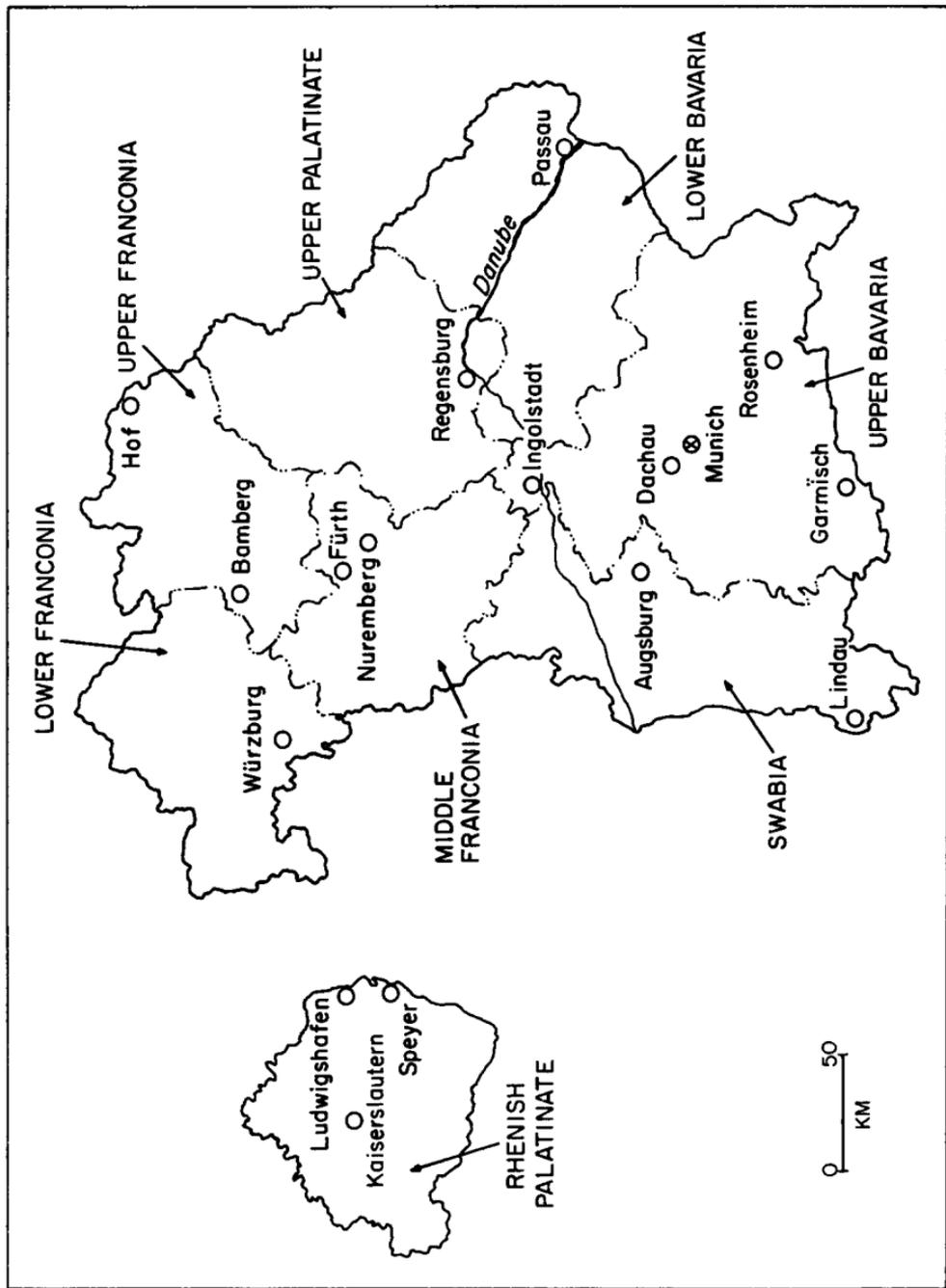
CHAPTER I

The Origins of Revolution

IT HAS usually been said of the 1918 revolution in Bavaria, as of the German revolution in general, that it was the result of a collapse rather than a seizure of power. There is no reason to resist this view except that it may provide an excuse to avoid the difficulties of locating the sources of revolution. Bavaria was no doubt suffering in November of 1918 from a temporary political insanity. But anarchy in itself does not explain the revolution unless one knows how a hiatus of public authority occurred, who was prepared to take advantage of it, and by what means a new order was imposed. By surveying the background of the revolution, it should be possible both to put the actual coup d'état in perspective and to determine more precisely its origins.

Bavarian history in the nineteenth century began with the foundation of the monarchy and ended with its dissolution. This is to fix the chronology of the century before 1918, not its main theme. The revolution did terminate the monarchy, but more importantly it continued social and political developments already well advanced. For most of the century—excepting the three decades before 1848—the Bavarian monarchs were dominated by a ministerial and bureaucratic oligarchy. After 1890 a transition began toward the establishment of parliamentarianism. This was achieved in all but constitutional law by 1912. The revolution was to change the law and to secure a parliamentary system based on political parties. In this sense, far from being an aberration from tradition, the revolution came as a concluding episode in the accomplishment of reform.

If one can find a certain logic in this, the Bavarian revolution was still not without its incongruities. Measured by the usual standards of the nineteenth century, industrialization and urbanization, the state had experienced a remarkably



THE ORIGINS OF REVOLUTION

lethargic development. Rural, parochial, and predominantly Roman Catholic, Bavaria seemed to offer an unlikely setting for political insurrection. Moreover, Social Democracy in Bavaria was the most moderate, the most outspokenly reformist representative of Socialism in all of Germany. It is virtually impossible, in fact, to locate anything which might properly be considered a radical movement in Bavaria before 1918. Yet Bavaria was the first of the German states to become a republic and the last to be released from the grip of radicalism. This is a curious and, in many respects, a tragic story. The handbooks and textbooks of Bavarian history invariably lament the passing of the monarchy rather than celebrate the founding of the republic. The purpose here is to do neither, but to reconstruct the story and to evaluate the consequences.

Before the War

By some reckoning Bavaria is the eldest of the German states and one of the most venerable of all European political formations. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the House of Wittelsbach could already look back to more than eight hundred years as the leading family of what is now called *Altbayern*. But the elevation of the Bavarian Elector Maximilian Joseph to the title of King of Bavaria in 1806 was not so much the culmination of some evolutionary process as the direct result of Napoleonic diplomacy. It was the personal discretion of the French Emperor which placed an ally rather than a relative on the throne and then determined that Bavaria should balance Jerome Bonaparte's Kingdom of Westphalia at the southeastern extremity of the Confederation of the Rhine. By the terms of this arrangement Bavaria was nearly doubled in size through the acquisition of adjacent lands in Franconia and Swabia. And King Max was not ungrateful: he remained loyal to France until October of 1813, when he concluded the Treaty of Ried with the Allies. The results of this agreement, which guaranteed the territorial integrity of his kingdom, were then ratified two years later in

THE ORIGINS OF REVOLUTION

the Vienna peace settlement. If the new form of the Bavarian state had initially been a convenience of French hegemony, it was one which Napoleon's opponents were willing to perpetuate. With the formal addition of the Rhenish Palatinate in 1816 Bavaria was even granted a stake, along with Prussia farther down the Rhine, in the containment of France. Despite Max's long devotion to his benefactor, therefore, he emerged from the Congress of Vienna with *Neubayern* intact and securely established among the sovereign states of Central Europe.¹

This is to exaggerate the actual importance of the monarch. As everyone knew, Max reigned while his first minister governed. It was the Count Montgelas who had instigated the financial, judicial, and administrative reforms necessary to convert a family holding into a modern bureaucratic state. The "constitution" which he drafted and released with the royal seal in 1808 carefully stipulated that "several ministries can be united in a single person." In the execution of the affairs of the monarchy, Montgelas was literally a one-man majority, holding three of the five ministerial positions himself. Bavaria's age of enlightened despotism thus came late and abruptly, the work of a single minister within a single decade.² For all his ability, however, Montgelas had a number of counts against the longevity of his ministry. Precisely because of his previous achievements, he was too closely associated with the Napoleonic order; sharing the sentiments of liberal anti-clericalism, he was less than ideally suited to be the servant of a Catholic monarchy; and having bent every

¹ The authoritative study of Bavarian history to the end of the nineteenth century is that of Michael Doeberl, *Entwicklungsgeschichte Bayerns* (3 vols.; Munich, 1908-1931). The best recent examination of the period before the Congress of Vienna is by Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy: The Contest with Napoleon 1799-1814* (Princeton, 1963).

² Walter Schärfl, *Die Zusammensetzung der bayerischen Beamten-schaft von 1806 bis 1918* (Munich, 1955), 5.

THE ORIGINS OF REVOLUTION

effort toward a centralized state, he was increasingly opposed by those who valued class privilege or local autonomy more than administrative efficiency.

In 1817 Montgelas resigned. Within a year most of the characteristic features of his policy were reversed. A concordat with Rome restored harmonious relations with the Church; the new and (so it would still seem a century later) permanent constitution of 1818 specified that "each of the five state ministries will be occupied by a single minister"; and the promulgation that same year of a *Gemeinde-Edikt* provided the municipalities with a legal check to administrative centralization. But the constitution formally retained one essential plank of the Montgelas construction: "the highest executive position is constituted by the combined ministers of state." Apart from the apparent intention to prevent the dominance of a single cabinet member, this clause was ambiguous. When Ludwig I succeeded Max in 1825, however, he immediately let it be known how the constitution was to be interpreted: the role of the ministers, he announced, was "definitely only advisory."³ Whereas Montgelas had observed the letter of the constitution and violated the spirit of the monarchy, Ludwig was a monarch to the letter and violated the spirit of the constitution. As the King said: "In Bavaria it is not the minister who rules, but the monarch; and I take exact account, as is well known to every one of my subordinates, of whatever occurs."⁴

For more than twenty years Ludwig both reigned and governed. To do so he labored compulsively over the slightest details of policy and administration. He frankly regarded the preceding era as "anti-monarchist," and he consciously attempted to rectify his father's dependence in foreign and domestic affairs. Bavaria's poverty of natural resources and minority of Protestants reinforced Ludwig's personal inclination to preserve the rural and Catholic character of his state. It

³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴ Doeberl, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, III, 126.