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LIBERALISM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN LATE NINETEENTH- CENTURY GERMANY AND ENGLAND*

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ABSTRACT. *In the second half of the nineteenth century, local government was intrinsic to the nature of liberalism in theory and practice, beyond the specific national contexts of England or Germany. At an ideological and practical level, local government was integral to the liberals' concern for efficient and representative government. As long as liberals were unwilling to contemplate more redistributive state measures, local government became their central arena for social policy. Local involvement in primary education provided them with the ability to enable individual progress and self-fulfilment, while control of local income and taxation provided a further tangible yardstick against which liberal politics could be measured. The liberals' popularity in the urban sphere was enhanced through a distinctive rhetoric of civic pride. However, the appeal to community and belonging which this entailed remained illusory as long as liberals remained wedded to granting special political rights to property. Ultimately, the liberals' success and innovativeness in local government led to a 'nationalization' of their policies and concerns. In this way, local government contributed to the liberals' popularity from the 1870s, and underlined their ultimate failure.*

Local government was one of the most remarkable success stories of nineteenth-century liberalism. Between 1868 and 1896, the local authorities' expenditure in England and Wales rose by 150 per cent, far outpacing the population growth in towns over 2,500 inhabitants, which amounted to 58 per cent between 1871 and 1901.¹ In Prussia's five largest cities municipal expenditure exploded by 1,500 per cent between 1871 and 1910, more than three times the rate of these cities' still remarkable population growth of 430 per cent.² In

* I am grateful to Michael John for stimulating discussions about the nature of local government in Germany, as well as the AHRB whose generous research grant has boosted work on the final draft of this article. Most importantly, I am indebted to the late H. C. G. Matthew, who gave me critical help and characteristic encouragement on a first draft of this article only weeks before he passed away. This article is a tribute to his support.

¹ P. J. Waller, *Town, city and nation: England, 1850–1914* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 7–8; W. B. Odgers, *Local government* (London, 1899), pp. 31–2. Between 1890 and 1912, net local government expenditure met from rates and exchequer grants more than trebled. K. B. Smellie, *A history of local government* (London, 1946), p. 88.

² V. Berghahn, *Imperial Germany, 1871–1914* (Providence and Oxford, 1994), p. 312, table 37; H. Silbergleit, *Preußens Städte: Denkschrift zum 100jährigen Jubiläum der Städteordnung vom 19. November 1808* (Berlin, 1908), pp. 480–1.

England as in Prussia local government expenditure per head of the population doubled from 1883 to 1902.³ Liberals were primarily, though not exclusively, in charge of this expansion. For Germany, James Sheehan underlined the predominance of liberalism in urban government thirty years ago,⁴ and since then scholars have drawn attention to the remarkable innovativeness and flexibility of liberals in local government.⁵ In England, urban areas harboured much important liberal support often guided by nonconformist elites, while liberals in local government were pivotal instigators of urban reform.⁶

That liberals had a significant impact on local government has become fairly uncontested in recent years.⁷ Curiously, however, the success of urban liberalism has hardly influenced overall evaluations of liberalism's political viability towards the end of the nineteenth century. Historians have tended to consider liberals in local government in the context of the specific urban problems they encountered, in isolation from the factors and considerations which motivated liberals in state and national politics.⁸ The failure to consider urban liberalism in relation to liberalism at the state and national levels has been justified principally on three grounds. First, until 1918 urban liberals operated in distinctive political contexts, since their electorate was based on a different and restrictive franchise.⁹ Politics in the city was thus freed from the growing pressures of mass politics to which liberals were exposed at the state and national levels. Second, scholars have noted that liberal politics in local government was dominated by provincial commercial or even industrial bourgeois elites.¹⁰ Their interests were often sharply opposed to those of the metropolitan and landed elites who continued to dominate liberalism at the national level.¹¹ Third, the spectacular growth of the central state for much of

³ H. Matzerath, *Urbanisierung in Preußen, 1815–1914* (Stuttgart, 1985), p. 370.

⁴ J. Sheehan, 'Liberalism and the city in nineteenth-century Germany', *Past and Present*, 51 (1971), pp. 116–37.

⁵ T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866–1918: Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (2 vols., Munich, 1992), II, pp. 140–66, esp. p. 158.

⁶ For an overview, see D. Fraser, ed., *Municipal reform and the industrial city* (Leicester, 1982).

⁷ J. Sheehan, *German liberalism in the nineteenth century* (Chicago, 1978), esp. pp. 229–30; D. Langewiesche, *Liberalism in Germany* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 218–28.

⁸ Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, II, ch. ii.2b; H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, 1849–1914* (Munich, 1995), ch. 6.i.3. ⁹ Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 536–9.

¹⁰ Most notable in this regard is the scholarship that has emerged under the auspices of the 'Stadt und Bürgertum' project in Germany. See, for instance, T. Weichel, *Die Bürger von Wiesbaden: Von der Landstadt zur 'Weltkurstadt', 1780–1914* (Munich, 1997); R. Roth, *Stadt und Bürgertum in Frankfurt am Main: Ein besonderer Weg von der ständischen zur modernen Bürgergesellschaft, 1760–1914* (Munich, 1996); F. Möller, *Bürgerliche Herrschaft in Augsburg, 1790–1880* (Munich, 1998). For England, see B. M. Doyle, 'The changing functions of urban government: councillors, officials and pressure groups', in M. Daunton, ed., *The Cambridge urban history of Britain*, III: 1840–1950 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 298–9.

¹¹ R. J. Morris has shown how in the first half of the nineteenth century a middle-class rhetoric began to dominate the urban social and political discourse which was, amongst other things, anti-metropolitan and anti-aristocratic. R. J. Morris, *Class, sect and party: the making of the British middle class: Leeds, 1820–1850* (Manchester, 1990); Waller, *Town*, p. 23; Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 1269–70.

the twentieth century has led to a consensus about the inevitability of local government decline, even though the timing of this decline is subject to debate. For England, a number of historians have located the decisive shift in central–local relations in Lloyd George’s social reforms of 1908–11, as these contained an unprecedented degree of central involvement in social policy.¹² Others have argued that this transformation was new in a quantitative rather than qualitative sense, and note the seminal importance of the 1834 Poor Law Act in establishing the principle of state regulation over the locality.¹³ All the same, it seems clear that eventually, as urbanization and industrialization progressed, their negative effects could no longer be addressed at the local level and inevitably became a national concern. Similarly, scholars have pointed out that, from the turn of the century, German liberals abandoned obsolete ideals of the local community and directed their intellectual and political energies towards the central state.¹⁴

There are good reasons to doubt these generally accepted assumptions about the insignificance of local government in the nature of, and the prospects for, liberalism. First, beneath the narrative of central government expansion in the twentieth century local government showed a remarkable resilience and responsiveness. The decline of local government in the twentieth century was neither inevitable, as the examples of the US or Switzerland show, nor was it complete. In Germany, local government tended to fill the gaps left by national government during the First World War, the Weimar Republic, and in the immediate post-war years.¹⁵ And, even though there was no comparable civic tradition in England,¹⁶ the recent *Cambridge Urban History* serves as a useful

¹² M. J. Daunton, ‘Payment and participation: welfare and state-formation in Britain, 1900–1951’, *Past and Present*, 150 (1996), pp. 169–216; J. Harris, *Unemployment and politics: a study in English social policy, 1886–1914* (Oxford, 1972), esp. chs. 4–5; C. Bellamy, *Administering central–local relations, 1871–1919: the Local Government Board in its fiscal and cultural context* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 58–60.

¹³ D. Eastwood, *Governing rural England: tradition and transformation in local government, 1780–1840* (Oxford, 1994), esp. pp. 31–3, 92, 107, 182–3; M. Dupree, ‘The provision in social services’, in Daunton, ed., *Cambridge urban history*, esp. pp. 377–8.

¹⁴ The best introduction to the evolution of the relationship between central and local government is R. Koch, ‘Staat oder Gemeinde? Zu einem politischen Zielkonflikt in der bürgerlichen Bewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 234 (1983), pp. 73–96.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Ribhegge has argued, for instance, that an urban ‘renaissance’ took place in the nineteenth century which continued to provide Germany with critical democratic and liberal impulses throughout the twentieth century. W. Ribhegge, ‘Staat kommt von Stadt’, *Die Zeit*, 7 May 1993. The argument for the inherent administrative vitality and energy of German local government is central in H. Heffter, *Die deutsche Selbstverwaltung im 15. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1950). For a different view which emphasizes the way in which national conceptions had overcome localist approaches by the end of the nineteenth century, see Koch, ‘Staat oder Gemeinde?’, esp. pp. 93–4. See also W. R. Krabbe, *Die deutsche Stadt im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1989), pp. 165–73; N. Bullock, ‘Die neue Wohnkultur und der Wohnungsbau in Frankfurt am Main 1925–1931’, *Archiv für Frankfurter Geschichte und Kunst*, 57 (1980), pp. 187–208; B. Lieberman, ‘Testing Peukert’s paradigm: the “crisis of classical modernity” in the “New Frankfurt”’, 1925–1930’, *German Studies Review*, 17 (1994), pp. 287–304.

¹⁶ ‘Though the English have built the greatest towns the world has ever seen, they have always

reminder about the continued importance of local government well into the twentieth century.¹⁷ The decline of local government has neither been obvious nor inevitable.

Second, the local and state polities were closely linked. In the first-past-the-post systems used for national elections in both countries, even the most prominent MPs representing urban constituencies had to engage closely with the social and political hierarchy of the locality.¹⁸ Moreover, at a time when national government was still largely concerned with spending on defence, local government came to have a particular impact on people's lives through spending on education, drainage, libraries, public parks, and so on.¹⁹ Municipal expenditure, in turn, necessitated the growth of local taxation, whose regressive impact continued to bedevil those responsible for local government in both countries.²⁰ The expansion and politicization of local government activity from the 1860s occurred in conjunction with a rapid expansion of the urban electorate at national and local level.²¹ It is unthinkable that the urban voters' overall perception of liberalism could remain unaffected by the consequences of liberal action in local government.

Third, to contemporary liberals the importance of local government was never in doubt. At an ideological level, liberals in both countries such as Rudolf Gneist, Otto Gierke, Josef Redlich, T. C. Horsfall, and W. H. Dawson profoundly influenced each other in the belief that local government was a pivotal instrument for encouraging citizenship and community. At a practical level, Gladstone and other Liberals were deeply interested in local government as an institution of community and civic engagement.²² If successive liberal governments failed to pass a comprehensive reform of local government, it was not for want of concern, but precisely because so many diffuse interests were at stake. Even when central government did manage to pass a major piece of local legislation, notably the Prussian finance reform of 1891/3 and the English Local Government Act of 1888, its provisions were quickly rendered insufficient

exhibited a singular inability to organize, or even to understand, the true municipal life': *The Spectator*, 3262, 3 Jan. 1891, pp. 7–8. ¹⁷ Daunton, ed., *Cambridge urban history*.

¹⁸ An illuminating insight into the nature (and power) of local liberal elites (in this case Leeds) is S. J. Reid, ed., *Memoirs of Sir Wemyss Reid, 1842–1885* (London, 1905).

¹⁹ Between 1860 and 1880, 70 per cent of central government expenditure in Britain was spent on the armed services and on servicing the national debt. E. Biagini, 'Popular liberals, Gladstonian finance and the debate on taxation, 1860–1874', in E. Biagini and A. J. Reid, eds., *Currents of radicalism: Popular radicalism, organized labour and party politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 134–62, here p. 138.

²⁰ J. Palmowski, *Urban liberalism in imperial Germany: Frankfurt am Main, 1866–1914* (Oxford, 1999), ch. 6.

²¹ In England, this was due to the extension of the franchise, whereas in Germany the introduction, at a national level, of freedom of movement withdrew the basis for traditional and restrictive local citizenship rights. Doyle, 'Changing functions of urban government', pp. 301–2.

²² H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875–1898* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 168–70; Biagini, 'Popular liberals'.

by the changing needs and spiralling demands of local government. For its dynamism, complexity, and sheer magnitude, the town mattered, and with it the way it was governed.²³

The following section establishes the ideological importance of local government in nineteenth-century liberalism. Thereafter, the liberal practice of local government is considered through a comparative analysis of the most prominent liberals engaged at the juncture between local and national politics in England and Germany, Joseph Chamberlain and Johannes Miquel. The article's comparative perspective allows a much more accurate appreciation of the nature of liberalism beyond a particular national context. The analysis focuses on England and Prussia, states that had a pivotal impact on perceptions of local government in their respective nations.²⁴ In this way, it also offers a contribution to persistent debates about the 'peculiarities' of Britain and Germany, which are often asserted, but only too rarely proven. The most trenchant analyses about liberalism in Germany and Britain still date back to the height of the *Sonderweg* debate,²⁵ but little comparative work has been done on more recent historiographical concerns, for instance about the nature of political cultures, identity, and the relationship between different levels of government.²⁶

This article asserts that liberalism cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of its local government dimension. In England and Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, the social and political problems inherent in rapid urbanization and industrialization were problems for local government first and foremost. Moreover, the relative weakness of the central state in the nineteenth century left liberals in national and state politics relatively little room for political manoeuvre. It was left to liberals at the local level to develop comprehensive, innovative, and regulatory policies for social welfare, the labour market, education, and public health. From the second half of the nineteenth century, the viability of liberalism was contingent upon its performance in local government.

²³ Dauntton, ed., *Cambridge urban history*; H. Laski, ed., *A century of municipal progress, 1835–1935* (London, 1935).

²⁴ In Britain, local government legislation was different for England and Scotland. In Germany, local government was a state matter, and Prussia is taken as representative due to its size, its complexity, and the model function it acquired with the promulgation of the Civic Ordinance in 1808. In this article, references to the 'state' and 'national' levels both refer to Westminster, while in the German case they distinguish the individual state levels from the national, federal polity.

²⁵ D. Langewiesche, ed., *Liberalismus im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1985); G. Schmidt, 'Liberalismus und soziale Reform: Der deutsche und der britische Fall, 1890–1914', *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 16 (1987), pp. 212–38; J. Breuilly, *Labour and liberalism in nineteenth-century Europe: essays in comparative history* (Manchester, 1992).

²⁶ J. Palmowski, 'Mediating the nation: liberalism and the polity in nineteenth-century Germany', *German History*, 19 (2001), pp. 573–98.

I

Local government was neither intrinsically nor originally wedded to liberalism. In Germany, the tendency of absolutist regimes to take away power from the localities was reversed in 1808, with the introduction of Heinrich vom Stein's Civic Ordinance.²⁷ This cornerstone of the Prussian reform era was introduced for practical reasons, principally to strengthen the efficiency of local administration at the expense of Prussia's stifling bureaucracy. Its aim was also to further the identification of the cities' social elites with the existing Prussian state, and to facilitate the raising of local revenues.²⁸ Subsequently, support for local government developed across the political spectrum, as the Civic Ordinance inspired conservatives, liberals, and radicals alike. A conservative like Friedrich Karl von Savigny supported local government as a palliative for bourgeois participation in the governance of the state.²⁹ By contrast, moderate liberals such as Robert von Mohl, or the more radical Karl von Rotteck welcomed local self-government, because it provided the bourgeoisie with its own political sphere free from state interference.³⁰ The limitations local government imposed upon the state bureaucracy equally found general support. Liberals viewed the bureaucracy as a reactionary tool used by governments that were unaccountable to constitutions or the popular will. By contrast, to conservatives like Carl Bertram Stüve the bureaucracies were far too progressive, for instance as agents of economic change. They looked to local self-government as an ally in their opposition to the freedom of movement and the abolition of guilds.³¹ Precisely because 'self-government' came to have so many diverse and often contradictory connotations its frequent use in the demands of the 1848 Revolution shows that it had acquired a wide appeal which was not limited to a particular movement.³²

Nor was local government an inherent preserve for liberalism in England. As with Prussia's Civic Ordinance, the motives behind the Municipal Corporations Reform Act of 1835 were practical first and foremost.³³ The Act

²⁷ A. Krebsbach, ed., *Die Preußische Städteordnung von 1808* (1808; reprint, Stuttgart, 1957).

²⁸ Heffter, *Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 91–2; R. Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* (reprint, Munich, 1989), pp. 560–73; H. Obenhaus, *Anfänge des Parlamentarismus in Preußen bis 1848* (Düsseldorf, 1984), pp. 46–51.

²⁹ K. F. v. Savigny, 'Die Preußische Städteordnung', *Historisch-politische Zeitschrift*, 1 (1832), pp. 389–414; Heffter, *Selbstverwaltung*, p. 216.

³⁰ Heffter, *Selbstverwaltung*, p. 181; E. Ramin, 'Die Geschichte der Selbstverwaltungs-idee seit dem Freiherrn vom Stein' (D.jur. thesis, Münster, 1972), p. 79; E.-W. Böckenförde, *Die deutsche verfassungsgeschichtliche Forschung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1961), pp. 176–80.

³¹ G. A. Pope, 'The political ideas of Lorenz Stein and their influence on Rudolf Gneist and Gustav Schmoller' (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1985), p. 177; M. L. Anderson, *Windthorst: Zentrums-politiker und Gegenspieler Bismarcks* (Düsseldorf, 1988), pp. 44–7; Heffter, *Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 197–9.

³² Heffter, *Selbstverwaltung*, pp. 291–4.

³³ W. J. M. Mackenzie argues that, before 1835, the concept of 'local government' did not even exist in England. W. J. M. Mackenzie, *Theories of local government* (Greater London Papers, 2, London, 1961), p. 7.

aimed to reduce the tory partisanship of existing local corporations, to ensure public order, and to integrate new commercial wealth into the political realm.³⁴ The first principled debate about the nature of local government did not develop until the 1840s, in response to Edwin Chadwick's inquiries into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of 1842, which directly addressed the question of hygiene and health in the cities.³⁵ The Benthamite proponents for central legislation led by Chadwick condemned local government on the grounds that it was corrupt and incompetent.³⁶ The defenders of local government spearheaded by Joshua Toulmin Smith, on the other hand, argued that national legislation would infringe upon the principles of self-government, and thus be unconstitutional. Pitting 'teutonic' ideals of local 'self'-government against notions of Roman-centralist rule, true local government would itself lead to the liberal values of self-respect and self-control.³⁷ Social reform (and thus an increase of local rates to pay for it)³⁸ was thus dispensed with, and replaced by, the ideal of self-government. Once again, it is extremely difficult to attach exclusive political labels to this debate.³⁹ Through his particular appeal both to the status quo and his traditionalist perception of the constitution, Toulmin Smith attracted the support of many tory, whig, and radical ratepayers alike.⁴⁰ In England and in Germany, then, urban local government legislation in the first half of the nineteenth century responded primarily to practical need rather than ideological design. In turn, support for (or rejection of) enhanced local government in towns and cities cut across party lines.

From the middle of the nineteenth century local government became increasingly a liberal concern. The new social elites that had gained political power in the cities were, by definition, more likely to sympathize with the party of 'progress', in preference to the party of the establishment. In northern English towns, liberal dissenting elites usually became formidable and well-organized rivals to the traditional tory elites of the old corporations.⁴¹ In Germany, the most striking example is Württemberg, where local government

³⁴ D. Fraser, 'Municipal reform in historical perspective', in Fraser, ed., *Municipal reform*, pp. 1-14, here pp. 4-5.

³⁵ J. Prest, *Liberty and locality: parliament, permissive legislation, and ratepayers' democracies in the nineteenth century* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 24-36; Mackenzie, *Theories of local government*, pp. 9-12.

³⁶ E. Chadwick, 'The New Poor Law', *Edinburgh Review*, 63 (1836), pp. 487-537; H. J. Hanham, ed., *The nineteenth-century constitution* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 384.

³⁷ J. Toulmin Smith, *Local self-government and centralization: the characteristics of each; and its practical tendencies as affecting social, moral and political welfare and progress* (London, 1851), pp. 49-50.

³⁸ J. Redlich and F. Hirst, *Local government in England* (2 vols., London, 1903), II, p. 414.

³⁹ For a contrasting view, which emphasizes the importance of Toulmin Smith in the development of a liberal orthodoxy on local government by the 1850s, see Hanham, ed., *The nineteenth-century constitution*, p. 372.

⁴⁰ Contrast his 'radical' insistence that 'All law must spring from the people, and be administered by the people' (Toulmin Smith, *Local self-government*, p. 21) with his concern for the integrity of the constitution. See also J. Burrow, *Whigs and liberals* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 146-8.

⁴¹ D. Fraser, *Power and authority in the Victorian city* (Leicester, 1979), esp. pp. 23-6, 52-3, 86-7.

became the principal focus for liberal bourgeois opposition against the conservatives in charge of politics at the state level.⁴² In both countries, the liberals' policies of economic progress in industry and commerce, and their ideological commitment to thrift and self-help, gave them increasing appeal in the city. This coincided with growing urban representation in the national parliaments, especially through the Second and Third Reform Acts in Britain, and the equal manhood suffrage for the German national parliament from 1871. The phenomenon of the rapidly urbanizing city and its implications for public health and morality thus became particularly pressing for liberals.

In addition to these practical considerations, the speed with which the nature and size of the city changed turned into an ideological concern for a political movement intrinsically engaged with the nature of the state and its internal organization. The role of local government in an evolving body politic became pivotal to distinctly liberal conceptions of local government in Germany and Britain. From the 1860s liberals in both countries grounded their faith in local government in a similar basic proposition, that in an increasingly complex world local government was crucial to ensuring a more harmonious society. In Germany, it was especially through the works of Rudolf Gneist that local 'self-' government became firmly anchored to liberal concerns. For Gneist, the model of the English gentry's willing assumption of public duties under the aegis of local government was the principal reason why local 'self-' government ought to be encouraged in Prussia. Local government became the educational corrective to the irresponsibilities and excesses of Prussian Junkerdom. If it were endowed with comprehensive decision-making powers, local government would engage the Junkers and educate them in the service of state and society.⁴³

Gneist's perceptions of rural England had little practical value for the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing cities of England and Prussia. Moreover, his aristocratic ideal of 'self-' government was not readily compatible with the more radical traditions of the pre-March era which looked to self-government as the preserve of a democratic common weal in opposition to the authoritarian elements in the Prussian state.⁴⁴ However, in the Prussian political context the ingenuity of Gneist's model lay in shaping a theory that was acceptable to the political establishment, but whose implications of local autonomy became a cornerstone of liberal politics in the urban context. His view of local government as a preserve of educated social elites struck a chord among liberals traditionally uneasy with the concept of mass democracy.⁴⁵ It reinforced liberal notions of

⁴² R. Waibel, *Frühliberalismus und Gemeindewahlen in Württemberg (1817–1855): Das Beispiel Stuttgart* (Stuttgart, 1992).

⁴³ The best and most important summary is R. Gneist, *Geschichte und heutige Gestalt der englischen Communalverfassung oder des Selfgovernment* (Berlin, 1863), pp. 1211–398.

⁴⁴ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 8 July 1867 (1. Blatt).

⁴⁵ K. Luig, 'Soziale Monarchie oder soziale Demokratie – Beobachtungen zur Staatslehre von Rudolf von Gneist (1816–1895)', *Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte*, 111 (1994), pp. 464–81, here pp. 472, 474.

legitimacy and monarchy, but could also be moulded sufficiently to support more radical demands of local government autonomy. Among the majority of liberals in theory and in practice, Gneist's Anglo-centric positioning of local government as the facilitator of, and educator to, responsible and enlightened government in an authoritarian state maintained its ideological predominance until the 1890s.

British liberals, too, emphasized the educative function of local government, but they considered this in very different ways. In the evolutionary system of British government, the German notion of an abstract state removed from society was entirely redundant. In Britain there could be no question in principle about the interaction between local and central government, because these were essentially and historically the same.⁴⁶ That is why John Stuart Mill, who brought urban government firmly into the liberal domain, considered local government in such close relation to parliament. The limited purview of local government minimized the risk of expanding political responsibility to lower orders in society. Local government was uniquely suited to providing political education, and in this manner helped assuage his fears of mass politics.⁴⁷ Writing twenty years later, G. C. Brodrick also endorsed local government as a 'national school of civil liberty'. In line with other university liberals, Brodrick was concerned to achieve a closer and more appropriate relationship between the representative institutions of the state and the popular will. For this aim, local government had an important function. Brodrick envisaged local government as an intermediate between the state and the individual citizen which would strengthen the constitution as a whole.⁴⁸ To British liberals, local government came to occupy an important position in principle as a way of strengthening community and communal identity, and this was expressed in very practical terms in a commitment to encourage urban financial autonomy and self-sufficiency.

To British liberals, there was one other concern closely tied to local government, that of efficiency. Urban growth with its associated problems of poverty and migration, and especially the seemingly uncontrollable increase of rates and the amount of local debt, crystallized the quagmire of competing and overlapping authorities of local government. For instance, in 1877 the urban area of Liverpool was administered by a total of forty-eight often overlapping local authorities, including two municipal councils, three boards of guardians and eleven local boards of health.⁴⁹ In 1882, a total of 28,822 local authorities

⁴⁶ H. Preuß, *Staat Recht und Freiheit: Aus 40 Jahren Deutscher Politik und Geschichte* (Tübingen, 1926), pp. 50–2.

⁴⁷ J. S. Mill, 'Considerations on representative government', in J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, On liberty, Considerations on representative government* (London, reprint, 1972), ch. 15, esp. pp. 378–9.

⁴⁸ G. C. Brodrick, 'Local government in England', in J. W. Probyn, ed., *Local government and taxation in the United Kingdom* (2nd edn, London, 1882), pp. 5–88, here p. 87. For the relationship between the university liberals, and Brodrick in particular, and Mill's ideas, see C. Harvie, *The lights of liberalism* (London, 1976), pp. 150–62.

⁴⁹ W. Rathbone, *Local government and taxation in England and Wales* (London, 1883), p. 10.

existed in England and Wales, which levied eighteen different kinds of rates.⁵⁰ The difficulty of efficient administration was clear for all to see, but it was the liberals and radicals who came to demand a greater pooling of authorities in the hands of the municipal councils, at the expense of the counties – an issue that came to a head in Salisbury's 1888 Local Government Act.⁵¹ At issue was also what kind of property should be subject to taxation. Liberals complained that urban improvements were paid for by rents passed on to urban dwellers, but that the benefits of higher property values accrued to homeowners, who were often rural landowners.⁵²

Efficiency in local government was important for its own sake, but it was also inextricably linked to the national polity. From the 1870s and especially during Gladstone's second administration, the great Liberal reform projects were seriously hampered by the amount of parliamentary time that had to be devoted to an ever growing number of private and local Acts. A more efficient and accountable local government would enable the Imperial Parliament to delegate more powers, and in this way become more efficient itself. It is no coincidence that the local government reforms of 1835 and 1888 followed on the heels of the franchise reforms of 1832 and 1884/5 respectively.⁵³ Local government was an integral part of the liberal concern for representative government.

During the 1860s and 1870s, then, local self-government became a distinctively liberal concern. Indeed, liberalism was uniquely suited to this golden age of urban government in the decades before 1900. An emphasis on local diversity was difficult to deal with for collectivist socialism, and it was not easy to address in principle by conservatism with its emphasis on rural harmony, king, and country.⁵⁴ In the words of the Liverpool tory Thomas Hughes, who was to become lord mayor in 1887, there was simply no 'connection between Conservative principles and the general policy of sewage and roadmaking'.⁵⁵ By contrast, with its close links to the Protestant, commercial, and industrial bourgeoisie, and with its inherent emphasis on self-

⁵⁰ E. Hart, *Local government as it is and as it ought to be* (London, 1885), p. 21.

⁵¹ J. P. D. Dunbabin, 'The politics of the establishment of county councils', *Historical Journal*, 4 (1963), pp. 226–52. For an evaluation of the 1888 Act, see J. Davis, 'Central government and the towns', in Daunton, ed., *Cambridge urban history*, pp. 269–71.

⁵² J. Noble, *Local taxation: a criticism of fallacies, and a summary of facts* (London, 1876); R. Van Baerle, *Die Lokalverwaltung von England und Wales, ihre Ausgaben und Einnahmen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der lokalen Besteuerung* (Freiburg, 1910), esp. pp. 140–7.

⁵³ For contemporary reflections on this link, see Hart, *Local government*, p. 24.

⁵⁴ The difficulty of Conservatism to respond positively to Chamberlain's local government agenda may have done much to add to the Edwardian 'Crisis of Conservatism'. J. Davis, *Reforming London: the London government problem, 1855–1900* (Oxford, 1988), esp. pp. 185–95. Chamberlain was thus forced to adopt a markedly more cautious tone vis-à-vis local government in J. Chamberlain, 'Municipal government: past, present, and future', *The New Review*, 61 (1894), pp. 649–62. On Edwardian conservatism, see E. E. H. Green, *The crisis of conservatism* (London, 1995).

⁵⁵ P. J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868–1939* (Liverpool, 1981), p. 83.

help, political education, and community, no political philosophy was as predisposed to local government as liberalism.⁵⁶ This was particularly important when liberal concepts of the *Volk* in Germany, or the community in England, became challenged at the national level. In the locality, a common weal was much easier to manufacture and identify, and its concerns were much easier to address in practice. Local government acquired a unique and crucial function as a political educator and moderator in an age of rapid political and social transition. Such a view could accommodate even important differences in perspectives between liberals. Most German liberals considered local government largely as a mediator between an authoritarian state and society, while British liberals were ultimately guided by moral concerns about the effect of good government on the individual within society.⁵⁷ Yet in both countries liberals were in no doubt that the locality was an integral part of their overall concern for good government.

II

In England, it is difficult to think of a more prominent exponent of the liberal ideal of local government than Joseph Chamberlain. His radical pretensions notwithstanding, he fully agreed with Mill and Brodrick that local government was an important facilitator of constitutional and social harmony. What made Chamberlain so important in the liberal worldview, however, was Chamberlain's successful response, as mayor, to the liberal preoccupation with local government efficiency. In Chamberlain's view, a streamlining of local authorities was critical not just because greater powers for a single body induced able men to participate in that body, but because it would 'lead directly to a double economy – of governing material, and of the cost of administration'. Ideally, local government would avoid waste and administrative confusion. The role of central government, in turn, was akin to that of a parent company which would supervise and publish annual local government returns to maximize accountability and transparency.⁵⁸

In Germany, the most prominent liberal engaged in local government was Johannes Miquel. He not only became the authority on local government

⁵⁶ The importance of key concepts of self-help, education (*Bildung*), efficiency, and community for liberalism as evident in the works of Mill and Green is outlined in M. Freedon, *Ideologies and political theory: a conceptual approach* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 144–54, 178–89.

⁵⁷ On the importance of the concept of 'community' in British liberal thought, see Freedon, *Ideologies and political theory*, pp. 185–9.

⁵⁸ J. Thackeray Bunce, 'Municipal boroughs and urban districts', in J. W. Probyn, ed., *Local government and taxation in the United Kingdom: a series of essays* (London, 1882), pp. 271–318, here pp. 303–4, 306, 316. Although the article was written by Chamberlain's loyal lieutenant from the *Birmingham Post*, Chamberlain had arranged Bunce's contribution to this volume sponsored by the Cobden Club. Chamberlain considered this article an opportunity to publicize and develop his 'Birmingham theory of municipal government'. Chamberlain to Bunce, 15 Aug. 1881, 26 July 1881, 13 December 1881, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC5/8, fos. 58, 59, 63.

among National Liberals, but his position on local government was widely accepted by left liberals who were otherwise highly critical of his views, notably Eugen Richter and Hugo Preuß.⁵⁹ Miquel's language and actions displayed the classic liberal concern about the role of local government for political integration and harmony. Faced, at the national and state levels, with an authoritarian government on the one hand, and the pressures of universal manhood suffrage on the other, Miquel considered local government with its restrictive franchise a haven of rational political discourse, and of political compromise. In this calmer and more reflective atmosphere, it was possible to arrive at carefully considered liberal policies for the common weal, for the benefit of every section of society. Miquel could fully subscribe to the Chamberlainite goal of local government, 'to promote the common good of the community by the free consent and united labour of all classes of its citizens'.⁶⁰ Effective local government reduced the need for bureaucracy, and this had a dual advantage: it was more efficient, and it limited the scope of the state. Miquel agreed, then, with the general liberal principle that local government was the link between state and society, but his views contain an important shift of emphasis in German liberal ideals of local government. Miquel's conviction and experience that local government worked led him to advocate for it much greater powers than most German liberals on the right had been prepared to accept, most notably with regard to policing powers. The greater the power of local government vis-à-vis the state, the greater its efficiency, and the greater its ability to ameliorate social conflict and broker in the growing tensions between state and society.⁶¹

Joseph Chamberlain and Johannes Miquel made significant contributions to a wider liberal debate, but what gave their views such unrivalled authority was their experience in local politics. From a nonconformist, non-establishment background,⁶² the two prominent liberals had built their careers on their reputation as highly effective and successful mayors in local government.⁶³

⁵⁹ J. Palmowski, 'Liberalism and the city: the case of Frankfurt am Main, 1866–1914' (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1995), p. 138.

⁶⁰ Bunce, 'Municipal boroughs', p. 301.

⁶¹ J. v. Miquel, 'Verfassung und Verwaltung der Provinzen und Gemeinden des Königreichs der Niederlande: Eine Skizze', *Preußische Jahrbücher*, 24 (1869), pp. 312–40, here esp. pp. 330–40; *Johannes von Miquels Reden (1870–1878)*, ed. W. Schultze and F. Thimme (4 vols., Halle, 1911–14), II, pp. 1–7 ('Über die Wichtigkeit leistungsfähiger Gemeinden; über die Bedeutung und Stellung des Großgrundbesitzes', 13 Jan. 1870). An excellent source for Miquel's views on local government, and his own role in it, are the speeches he gave in 1890 on the occasion of his departure as mayor of Frankfurt to take up his position as minister of finance in Berlin. On the importance of local government for the weal of the community, and its role as a school for national politics, see *Miquels Reden*, ed. Schultze and Thimme, III, pp. 294–303 ('Abschied von Frankfurt', 'Seine zukünftige Aufgabe', 26 and 28 June 1890). These speeches are reported in full in *Kleine Presse*, 28 June 1890 (1. Blatt), 1 July 1890.

⁶² Chamberlain was Unitarian and had built up a fortune from his screw-making business; Miquel was born into a German Reformed (Calvinist) family in Neuenhaus, in the westernmost corner of the kingdom of Hanover. His father was a medical doctor.

⁶³ Joseph Chamberlain was mayor of Birmingham from 1873 to 1876. Johannes Miquel was mayor of Osnabrück 1865–9, 1875–80, and mayor of Frankfurt 1880–90.

Through this experience, the two politicians acquired political perspectives whose similarity was by no means restricted to local government. Both gained an acute appreciation of the importance of popular rhetoric and the newspaper press. And, as Miquel and Chamberlain became pivotal figures at the national level,⁶⁴ both sought to maintain the popularity of liberalism in the face of mass politics and social fragmentation. To this end, they tried to steer liberalism to the right, advocating imperialism and tariffs in an attempt to reconcile urban with agricultural interests.⁶⁵ From the 1890s, then, both politicians moved increasingly into the conservative fold,⁶⁶ while their policies of social imperialism and tariff reform proved unable to bring about social harmony. Until the 1880s, however, such outcomes could hardly have been predicted. In the 1870s and 1880s, liberals began to respond to current social and political transformations, and Joseph Chamberlain and Johannes Miquel were at the heart of these attempts. They were clearly considered to be central to the future of liberal politics.⁶⁷ And in that future, local government with its disproportionate growth and its evident importance for liberal politics and ideology played a pivotal role. For at a time when liberals were still reluctant to demand bigger social policy roles for national government, it was local government which allowed the introduction of important social, educational, and financial reform. It is important, then, to consider more carefully the cornerstones of liberal politics in local government.

‘Municipal government is the most potent agent of social reform.’⁶⁸ For Chamberlain and for Miquel, the ‘social question’ was a *raison d’être* of local government, not least because it posed such an existential threat to their liberal ideal of a harmonious local community. The social question was most pressing in the city, and local government was the first and most important agency in addressing it. If the municipalization of private utilities was, perhaps, the most

⁶⁴ From the 1880s, Miquel was one of the principal leaders of National Liberalism, second only to Bennigsen. He became one of the few liberals to acquire an important government post, and was singularly successful as Prussian finance minister, 1890–1901. Joseph Chamberlain joined Gladstone’s cabinet in 1880 and was soon considered his radical heir, but split with Gladstone over Home Rule in 1885/6. He became one of the leaders of liberal unionism, and was colonial secretary under a (Conservative) Unionist government, 1895–1903.

⁶⁵ Chamberlain actually chose the post of colonial secretary over other, more senior government positions open to him. In 1903, he resigned to lead his campaign for Tariff Reform. Johannes Miquel was pivotal in drafting the Heidelberg Declaration of 1884 (which favoured tariffs), and successfully realigned his party with patriotism and national defence in the 1887 Kartell elections.

⁶⁶ Hans Herzfeld positioned Miquel in his late career firmly in the conservative camp, which led to sharp criticism from Wilhelm Mommsen, Miquel’s first biographer. W. Mommsen, *Johannes Miquel, 1828–1866* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1928), esp. pp. 1–7. The biography was continued by H. Herzfeld, *Johannes von Miquel: Sein Anteil am Ausbau des Deutschen Reiches bis zur Jahrhundertwende* (2 vols., Detmold, 1938). W. Mommsen, ‘Zur Biographie Johannes von Miquels’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 164 (1941), pp. 529–52. Ewan Green, in one of the most illuminating discussions on British conservatism, sets Chamberlain and liberal unionism firmly – and, perhaps, a little rashly – in a Conservative context. Green, *The crisis of conservatism*, passim.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, ‘The future of radicalism’, *Fortnightly Review*, o.s., 40 (1883), pp. 1–11, esp. p. 1.

⁶⁸ Joseph Chamberlain in 1895, quoted in Davis, *Reforming London*, p. 203.

spectacular phenomenon associated with municipal socialism, Johannes Miquel's persistent hostility to this policy shows that it was never intrinsically related to liberalism in municipal government.⁶⁹ And most liberals who like Chamberlain supported municipalization did so primarily for financial rather than social reasons.⁷⁰ Instead, what took centre stage for the liberals' attempt at uplifting the poorest sections of the community was housing. Chamberlain's audacious creation of 'Corporation Street' in 1875 was clearly motivated by factors such as the city's prestige. There is no doubt, however, that he was greatly driven by a desire to 'deal with the root of the evil' of the social question, in order to restore 'morality' and 'civilization' to the poorest sections of the urban community.⁷¹ Miquel also recognized the centrality of the housing issue,⁷² and became closely involved in the foundation and running of Frankfurt's most successful housing charity.⁷³ He also prompted the Association for Social Policy (*Verein für Sozialpolitik*) to deliberate on the problem of urban housing, and in this way brought the issue to national attention for decades to come.⁷⁴

The urban sphere formed liberal perceptions of social policy in other ways. Miquel, for instance, was particularly concerned about the plight of the petty bourgeoisie in an increasingly insecure industrializing urban environment, and advocated the formation of voluntary guilds in response.⁷⁵ Over and above this, Miquel's awareness of public hygiene and his concern for the efficacy of existing provisions for the poor reveal a comprehensive and pragmatic concern for the city's general welfare. One of his greatest achievements as mayor of Frankfurt was the successful reorganization of the city's outdated poor law provisions in 1883.⁷⁶

A final important arena for Chamberlain's and Miquel's social policy concerns was the labour market. Joseph Chamberlain used the improved

⁶⁹ For a recent survey of municipalization in British cities, which points out that the glamorous example of Birmingham was neither unique, nor was it the rule, see R. Millward, 'The political economy of modern utilities', in Daunton, ed., *Cambridge urban history*, pp. 315–50.

⁷⁰ Address to a ratepayers' meeting on the municipal purchase of the gas works, 23 Apr. 1874, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS 4/1, fos. 115–18. See also A. Briggs, *Victorian cities* (Harmondsworth, reprint, 1990), pp. 218–19, 224.

⁷¹ J. L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, 1: 1836–1885* (London, 1935), pp. 195–6.

⁷² J. Miquel, 'Einleitung', in *Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik, Die Wohnungsnoth der ärmeren Klassen in deutschen Großstädten und Vorschläge zu deren Abhilfe*, 30 (Leipzig, 1886), pp. ix–xxi. In 1889, Miquel stated that it was for the local communities (*Gemeinden*) to solve the housing question, which he described as the most important question for the weal of humanity in the next hundred years. Herzfeld, *Miquel*, 1, pp. 492–6, here p. 495.

⁷³ Palmowski, *Urban liberalism*, pp. 222–6.

⁷⁴ N. Bullock and J. Read, *The movement for housing reform in Germany and France, 1840–1914* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 63–70.

⁷⁵ Appropriately for the less urbanized German context, Miquel's social policy concerns extended to artisans not just in cities, but also in small towns. Still, his formative years at dealing with the pauperization of old crafts and trades were his time as mayor of Osnabrück, where it formed a major part of his political endeavours. Herzfeld, *Miquel*, 1, p. 196.

⁷⁶ On Miquel's periods as mayor of Osnabrück and Frankfurt, see R. Lembcke, *Johannes Miquel und die Stadt Osnabrück: unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Jahre 1865–1869* (Osnabrück, 1962); Herzfeld, *Miquel*, 1, pp. 509–50.

productivity and profitability of the municipalized gas works to better working conditions for their employees, and to introduce free Sundays. Johannes Miquel went even further, lending critical support to Karl Flesch, the pioneer in social policy who created the municipal trades tribunal to address the legal insecurities and disadvantages of workers vis-à-vis their employers. Upon his arrival in Berlin in 1890 Miquel sponsored the *Gewerbegerichtsgesetz*, an act which allowed local government across Germany to introduce such tribunals if it so wished.⁷⁷ It is ironic, and highly symptomatic of the different political environments in which both politicians operated, that Miquel never got as much political credit for his concern for labour as Chamberlain. In his appointed office, Miquel could afford to take greater political risks, but unlike Chamberlain he also had much less need to communicate his policies to the working classes.⁷⁸

It is striking that none of the social policy initiatives of Chamberlain or Miquel were conceptually new. Both men's success in this area was possible not through controversial new beginnings, but because they took existing liberal concerns to their logical conclusion. As the example of housing shows, Chamberlain's aim was to arrest and reverse the perceived decline in public morality, while Miquel's central goal was to further self-help in response to a growing alienation of the artisanate and working classes from the state. Chamberlain's Improvement Scheme did not concern itself with the rehousing of all those evicted through the destruction of the slums. Miquel did support the direct involvement of the Frankfurt local government in the building of a few flats in 1887, but these were restricted to municipal employees and represented for local government an average return on investment.⁷⁹ The thrust of their social policy remained outside direct, large-scale municipal provision. In both men's minds, financial efficiency was paramount. Finally, Miquel's and Chamberlain's overall concern for a clean environment, 'air', and 'light' reflected a commitment to the community as a whole, beyond class distinctions. For all the innovativeness of the solutions they employed, Joseph Chamberlain and Johannes Miquel were reformers in a classic nineteenth-century liberal mould.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ In order to ensure the success of the Frankfurt trades tribunal, Miquel even went so far as to persuade the Prussian authorities not to apply the anti-socialist laws, which he supported in principle, to the leaders of the Frankfurt labour movement. On the trades tribunal in Frankfurt and nationwide, see H. K. Weitensteiner, 'Karl Flesch – Kommunale Sozialpolitik in Frankfurt am Main' (DPhil thesis, Frankfurt, 1976), pp. 123–39; R. Roth, *Gewerkschaftskartell und Sozialpolitik in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt, 1991), pp. 130–58.

⁷⁸ For Chamberlain's relationship to the working classes, see his reception to the leaders of the Amalgamated Miners, 7 Oct. 1874, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC4/1, fo. 130; W. J. Davis in *The searchlight of Greater Birmingham*, 1, no. 53 (13 Nov. 1913), pp. 20–3.

⁷⁹ Excellent on Chamberlain's street clearance scheme is P. T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: entrepreneur in politics* (New Haven and London, 1994), pp. 92–8. For Frankfurt, see K. Maly, *Die Macht der Honoratioren: Geschichte der Stadtverordnetenversammlung, 1: 1867–1900* (Frankfurt, 1992), pp. 237–8. ⁸⁰ Mommsen, 'Zur Biographie Johannes von Miquels', pp. 531, 537, 548–9.

The crucial point is that the parameters of nineteenth-century liberalism allowed Chamberlain and Miquel so much room for manoeuvre that they did not need to venture beyond these boundaries to realize their quest for an urban community. Liberals had accepted that localities were, by definition, smaller, more homogeneous, and more flexible. Innovations could be tried out without much risk. That this perception had become standard liberal fare by the 1880s is evidenced, for instance, by Gladstone's ideal, the transformation of the local level into 'ratepayers' democracies' with greatest possible financial freedom. He fully appreciated that these communities might elect to pursue high levels of spending, in complete defiance of Gladstonian financial precepts at national level. But, given the limited geographical nature of each individual locality, this was of little consequence overall, and a risk worth taking in the interest of individual financial responsibility.⁸¹

Miquel's and Chamberlain's ideas about a harmonious urban community were closely reflected in their conceptions about the urban polity. As government at the national and state levels became increasingly complex and remote, the importance of local government as a forum for individual engagement and creativity increased. To be sure, active participation in local government remained the prerogative of the middle and lower middle classes, but the propertyless and disenfranchised working classes would benefit from this, too. For at the more intimate local level, it was much easier for a political elite to act in co-operation and harmony with the working classes. Here, elites were more attuned to the actual needs of the working classes, which in turn were much more willing to trust in the leadership of the elites.⁸² Indeed, one of the major arguments used in favour of local political organization in England and Germany was precisely the fact that party organization would take the power from the elites and ensure the fair representation of all.⁸³ By implication, at the local level an extension of the franchise was no longer necessary to achieve a fair representation.

This contradictory relationship within urban liberalism, between progressive and emancipatory social policies on the one hand, and a dogged insistence on a discriminating franchise based on property on the other, has exercised the minds particularly of German historians for over a decade. The liberal refusal to extend the local franchise to mirror the national franchise marked a decisive

⁸¹ H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 168-70. For a much more cautious approach from the 1860s, see Mill, 'Considerations on representative government', pp. 388-9.

⁸² *Mr Chamberlain's Speeches*, ed. C. W. Boyd (2 vols., London, 1914), 1, pp. 41-2 (Birmingham, 17 June 1874).

⁸³ Anon., 'Politics, principles, and party', *Central Literary Magazine (CLM)*, 3 (1878), pp. 285-90, here pp. 289-90; J. Chamberlain, 'The caucus', *Fortnightly Review*, o.s., 30 (1878), pp. 721-41, esp. pp. 724, 728-9. As John Davis has shown, this argument was not entirely without foundation, as in London coherent local government was only enabled by the overcoming of disparate separate interests through well-organized party machines. Davis, *Reforming London*. For Germany, see Palmowski, *Urban liberalism*, p. 54.

weakness of German liberalism.⁸⁴ However, the self-evidence with which even Chamberlain with his self-conscious radicalism accepted a restrictive local franchise tied to property in Britain demonstrates that liberal endorsement of a local franchise based on property did not display peculiarly German political regressiveness. There is little evidence that Chamberlain lacked the support of the working classes in Birmingham even where they were disenfranchised. In fact, tying the local franchise to property and wealth put German liberals in the mainstream of European liberal thought.⁸⁵

The problem with the property-based local franchise was not the loss of liberal credibility it entailed amongst the disenfranchised, but the disproportionate weight it rendered to the enfranchised. In Britain, both the franchise and local taxation (the rates) were tied directly to property. Throughout the nineteenth century, English local government continued to be heavily reliant on the rates for its income, so that ratepayers were disproportionately affected by increases in local government expenditure. The problem was confounded by the regressive incidence of the rates, which were often passed on to occupiers and which hit many artisans, tradesmen and other urban dwellers on the economic margins particularly hard. In Germany, by contrast, there were two principal sources of taxation. Supplements to income tax became the principal source of local taxation, whereas taxation on property was the most important direct tax at a local level. Both types of taxation were reflected in the urban franchise. Citizens with high incomes (who were usually also propertyowners) were favoured at the polls, either through the three-class franchise or the existence of a census threshold. In addition, in most German states at least half the local councillors had to be propertyowners.

Since local government in both countries had strong in-built mechanisms to guard the interests of local taxpayers,⁸⁶ finance became a major determinant of its success.⁸⁷ Chamberlain's popularity derived first and foremost from the financial success of his policies. For to realize his ideal of efficient and all-embracing local government against the ratepayers' obstruction, Chamberlain

⁸⁴ J. Reulecke, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1985), pp. 138–9; D. Langewiesche, *Liberalism in Germany* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 227–8; Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 533–43, esp. pp. 541–3.

⁸⁵ For a related point about liberalism and the national franchise, see G. Eley, 'Liberalismus 1860–1914: Deutschland und Großbritannien im Vergleich', in Langewiesche, ed., *Liberalismus*, pp. 263–4.

⁸⁶ In Britain, municipal expansionist policies often oscillated with drives for municipal economy dictated by ratepayers' associations. For the example of Leeds, see E. P. Hennock, *Fit and proper persons: ideal and reality in nineteenth-century urban government* (London, 1973), pp. 209–12; B. Barber, 'Municipal government in Leeds, 1835–1914', in Fraser, ed., *Municipal reform*, pp. 104–7. See also Briggs, *Victorian cities*, pp. 210–15, 235–8. For the power of houseowners in Hamburg and Frankfurt respectively, see R. J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: society and politics in the cholera years, 1830–1910* (Oxford, 1987); Palmowski, *Urban liberalism*, esp. pp. 266–8.

⁸⁷ For national politics in England, the pivotal role of finance has already been well established. H. C. G. Matthew, 'Disraeli, Gladstone, and the politics of mid-Victorian budgets', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), pp. 615–43; A. Gambles, *Protection and politics: conservative economic discourse, 1815–1852* (Woodbridge, 1999).

recognized that he had to increase the municipal asset base and derive income from sources other than the rates. In the German context, Miquel, too, saw the political need for effective municipal finance. His consolidation of the municipal budget in Frankfurt did much to commend Miquel to the Prussian government in Berlin. As 'the greatest, perhaps the only great finance minister of the modern age' (1890–1901),⁸⁸ Miquel succeeded in passing a comprehensive finance reform. Its second part of 1893 dealt exclusively with local finance, with the aim of rendering local government as financially self-sufficient and responsible as possible, and making taxation and accounting more transparent. A centrepiece of Miquel's finance reform attacked the special interests of property in passing on the costs of municipal improvements while reaping its benefits. By strictly limiting the amount of local taxation that could be raised by income tax supplements relative to direct taxation on property, Miquel sought to bind the special interests of property closer to the common weal of the community.⁸⁹

Even Miquel and Chamberlain were able to carry out far-reaching reform only as far as it did not challenge the interests of urban taxpayers.⁹⁰ Indeed, both politicians were careful to take into account and respond to the special interest of property. For all the progressive liberal rhetoric about the community and the common weal, local government had much stronger in-built mechanisms to favour sectional interests than national government. This was the practical and ideological achilles heel which even Chamberlain's and Miquel's vision of efficiency and local harmony struggled to overcome.

In their concern for progress and enlightenment, few subjects were more important to liberals than education. As the state delegated its organization to the local level in both countries, education became a key issue for local liberalism. For urban liberals, education became a principal element of moral and economic self-improvement, an arena in which the relations between the state and the church had to be negotiated, and a touchstone of central–local relations.

Both Chamberlain and Miquel were passionate advocates for secular control over education, even if Miquel was prepared to accept a non-denominational system in which church influence was accepted for a few hours of religious instruction every week. Joseph Chamberlain first rose to national prominence not as mayor, but as the National Education League's executive secretary fighting against Gladstone's Education Act.⁹¹ Similarly, it is perhaps Miquel's greatest achievement as mayor of Frankfurt to have defended Frankfurt's

⁸⁸ '... dem größten, vielleicht dem einzigen großen, Finanzminister der Neuzeit, Miquel'. Adolf Wagner in A. Wagner and H. Preuß, *Kommunale Steuerfragen* (Jena, 1904), p. 12.

⁸⁹ Moreover, Miquel restricted homeowners' resistance to higher local taxation on property by introducing tight regulations on the statutory relationship between taxation on income and on property. A more detailed evaluation of Miquel's local finance reforms is in Palmowski, *Urban liberalism*, pp. 261–78.

⁹⁰ Palmowski, *Urban liberalism*, pp. 302–10.

⁹¹ P. Chilcott, 'British politics and the elementary education question, 1850–1870' (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1990), pp. 314–23, 359–63.

relatively unusual system of non-denominational education against the Prussian Ministry of Education. However, it would be misleading to characterize both men as 'typical' liberals in this regard. Chamberlain may have appealed to liberals of his nonconformist background, but there were plenty of Anglican liberals who were happy to accept Gladstone's compromise to support church schools through rates. In Prussia the divisions among liberals on this issue were more complex, since they did not run parallel to, but across, denominational divides. Rural as well as orthodox Lutheran liberals tended to side with Roman Catholics in favour of church-controlled primary schools, against many (but by no means all) urban and liberal Lutherans who opposed them.⁹²

The complexity of the inter- and intra-denominational fissures on education led to the controversies surrounding the 1870 and 1902 Education Acts in England. By contrast, in Prussia it was not even possible to pass a state-wide education law before 1918. Its simultaneous importance and divisiveness predisposed education for local government. For at this level, education could be organized and funded according to the particular make-up of the locality. The problem this entailed, of course, was that at the local level opposition could be expressed much more easily, hence denominational matters could be politicized much more effectively. It is no accident that Chamberlain saw to it that elections to, and the proceedings of, the new Birmingham Local School Board became subject to Liberal caucus control. Even in Frankfurt, a city with one of the lowest rates of religious observance in Germany, local opposition to its system of non-denominational education mounted until the liberals suffered a heavy defeat at the local elections of 1904 on precisely this issue.⁹³ Clearly, church-state relations were a key problem for liberals in England and Germany just as elsewhere in Europe. However, liberals learnt the lesson from the *Kulturkampf* in Prussia and the 1870 Education Act in England respectively. By transferring their concern for education to the local level, liberals shifted the divisive debate over education away from the state, to the level of local government. In addition, the localization of the (financial) responsibilities for schooling ensured state control without necessitating a dramatic increase in public spending by the state.

Education became a local government concern for liberalism not simply because of the state's inability to deal with this issue. Urban liberals welcomed the burdens of financing and organizing education because it was central to their ideal of a forward-looking society imbued with science and rationality. Upon arriving in Osnabrück, Miquel immediately set to revive the city's economic development through establishing a technical secondary school

⁹² The administrative and spiritual complexities of German Protestantism are superbly assessed in N. Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism, 1700–1918* (Oxford, 1995).

⁹³ J. Palmowski, 'Between dependence and influence: Jews and liberalism in Frankfurt am Main, 1864–1933', in H. Tewes and J. Wright, eds., *Liberalism, anti-Semitism, and democracy: essays in honour of Peter Pulzer* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 84–5.

(*Realschule*) financed by the city. The new school would teach technical skills to the sons of the bourgeoisie and help them adapt to science and industrial development. In this way, schools became integral to, and came to epitomize, the welfare of the local community.

Miquel's dictum that 'education makes good and rich, ignorance coarse and poor' summed up Chamberlain's attitude perfectly. Chamberlain insisted that local government could either spend 30 s per year on a child which would then become a 'good and useful citizen', or £100 later in life to support the delinquent adult in gaols and workhouses.⁹⁴ Education provided for moral self-improvement by creating a more efficient and effective workforce, so that it provided good return on investment.⁹⁵ This was true, incidentally, of education in the widest sense. Chamberlain was a great enthusiast for the establishment of local museums, but it is his emphasis on their practical benefit which is most striking. He thought that Birmingham museums, for instance, should display industrial art and exhibits pertaining to the city's particular industry and identity. Opening the local Museum of Small Arms, he trusted that such a museum would 'stimulate enquiry and suggest improvement' amongst all its visitors. According to Chamberlain, in the locality there was always 'floating about in the air an immense amount of creative and inventive genius, and a museum of that kind precipitated it into a solid and tangible form'.⁹⁶ Education, then, was at the heart of Chamberlain's vision, as schools, more than any other institutions, would achieve that ultimate liberal goal, an improvement of the general 'character' of the people. Consequently, schools became an object of civic pride. Buildings became ornamental, current pedagogical concepts on classroom size were applied, and teachers were paid a competitive salary.⁹⁷ Education was an integral part of Birmingham's municipal gospel, and more generally of liberal conceptions of municipal government.

The central liberal goal of creating a local community relied not just on practical policies, but also on the creation of a common sentiment. This was enshrined in the great municipal town halls of Leeds or Hamburg, Corporation Street in Birmingham, or the municipal school buildings of Frankfurt. And yet,

⁹⁴ 'Bildung macht gut und reich, Unbildung roh und arm' (1865), quoted in Lembke, *Johannes Miquel* p. 96. Speech by Joseph Chamberlain, 8 Mar. 1870, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC4/1, fo. 9.

⁹⁵ Chamberlain tirelessly pointed to the continent, arguing that Prussia's economic growth was directly related to its superior system of education. Joseph Chamberlain, speech in Newcastle, 26 Feb. 1872, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC4/1, fos. 33-5. Joseph Chamberlain, lecture to the Mutual Improvement Society at the Church of the Messiah, 28 Apr. 1870, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC4/1, fo. 11.

⁹⁶ Joseph Chamberlain, speech at the Local Museum of Small Arms, 25 Sept. 1874, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC 4/1, fo. 129.

⁹⁷ Joseph Chamberlain, speech on the opening of Severn Street Schools, 30 Nov. 1874, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC4/1, fo. 144. See also Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 1, pp. 210-12; Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, pp. 30-1.

the specific municipal culture reflected in such monuments was expressed also in distinctive rituals of social festivals as well as rhetoric.⁹⁸ Urban liberal politics was not simply about what civic leaders did, it was also about how their actions were communicated, and how the community that they strove for was 'imagined'. Highly aware of the particular political environments within which they operated, Chamberlain nurtured his image of 'Radical Joe', while Miquel was happy with a reputation that was rather more refined and detached. Through populist language and appeals to social justice, and (not least) through the persistent use of religious allusions in his rhetoric, Chamberlain acquired a mass following in a way Miquel never did, nor ever needed to do. Beyond these very important differences, however, both responded to, and in turn helped develop, a specific language of community and civic pride which formed the pillar of their municipal endeavours, and which became central to urban liberalism.

With extreme skill Chamberlain amplified and gave cohesion to a municipal self-consciousness which emphasized the civic community's (and, by extension, his own) radicalism and the citizens' supposed straightforwardness. In turn, these were closely related to the community's industry, inventiveness, harmony, and vision. Birmingham council members refused to wear robes during meetings to emphasize their simplicity. In this spirit, the council had refused to spend any public money in celebration of the prince of Wales's wedding in 1863. By contrast, it was happy to celebrate the laying of the foundation stone to the new Council House in 1874 with a fireworks display in the evening. Finally, there were a number of celebrations and festivals in which the city's radical self-understanding was fostered, such as the exuberant jubilee celebrations held, without any public subsidy of course, for John Bright in 1883.⁹⁹ Similarly, Chamberlain used the unveiling of the Priestley memorial in 1874 to underline his own agenda for urban reform through self-help and education.¹⁰⁰ Chamberlain did not invent Birmingham's identity, but his success legitimized it as never before, making it respectable even beyond the confines of Birmingham. He showed his critics in and beyond Birmingham what the city could do, so much so that when he hosted the prince and princess of Wales in 1874, the visit did not become an embarrassment to, but a confirmation of, the

⁹⁸ R. J. Morris, 'Structure, culture and society in British towns', in Daunton, ed., *Cambridge urban history*, pp. 395–426, here pp. 414–15; D. Eastwood, *Government and the community in the English provinces, 1700–1870* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 117–19. It is curious that investigations into the interface between urban politics and culture are represented by outstanding individual examples, but that these have found relatively little general scholarly response as much work is still to be done in this field. A. Briggs, *Victorian cities* (London, 1963); C. E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: politics and culture* (London, 1979); B. Ladd, *Urban planning and civic order in Germany, 1860–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1990). For a discussion of current research on politics and local identity, see J. Palmowski, 'The politics of the "unpolitical German": liberalism in German local government, 1860–1880', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp. 675–704.

⁹⁹ Birmingham Liberal Association, Management Committee 1883, Birmingham, Birmingham Central Library, MS 440/3; Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 1, pp. 393–4.

¹⁰⁰ Unveiling of the Priestley Memorial, Birmingham, Birmingham University Library, Joseph Chamberlain MSS JC4/1, fos. 127–8.

radical civic gospel. Corporation Street was but a monumental seal to his and the council's daring, vision, and success.¹⁰¹

The Birmingham municipal gospel, then, was not simply about the municipalization of enterprises, the issue which historians have focused on almost exclusively. Nor was it just about the efficiency of local government, or the creation of universal education. It was also about the invention of a distinctive urban culture. Eighteen years after the Central Literary Association was founded to give a cultured gloss to Birmingham's business elite, the society had become so successful and confident owing to the involvement of Frank Schnadhorst and others that in 1874 it started to publish the *Central Literary Magazine*.¹⁰² Unencumbered by its literary pretensions, its pages were infused by the spirit of the municipal gospel. As the civic gospel sought to encourage men to come forward in the service of their city, so the *Magazine's* aim, it declared, was to encourage individuals to come forward and contribute to the Association's and the city's literary life. But the *Magazine* supported the municipal gospel in very concrete ways, too. Although theoretically non-political, it kept its members informed about Birmingham council matters, leaving the reader in no doubt about which side to take.¹⁰³ The Birmingham Literary Association was clearly part and parcel of the city's urban renewal, and although not strictly political in nature, it had clear political connotations in practice.

An even more striking manifestation of civic pride was the particular reverence for Shakespeare in 'Birmingham, the real capital of the county in which Shakespeare was born'. In honour of Birmingham's virtual native, in 1863 private donations were collected at the instigation of one of the municipal gospel's founders, George Dawson, to create the Shakespeare Memorial Library as the 'noblest monument to the memory of England's greatest poet'.¹⁰⁴ The political success of the municipal gospel is unimaginable without its cultural background, and the city's cultural self-confidence was in turn encouraged and validated by the success of Chamberlain's political vision.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ In general, see J. T. Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham* (2 vols., Birmingham, 1885), II, here pp. 206–51, 539–50. The book is in itself a testament to the high point of the civic pride prevailing in Birmingham at the time of publication.

¹⁰² Schnadhorst was the organizational mastermind behind the Birmingham Liberal Association.

¹⁰³ 'Business and literature: musings by an old member', *CLM*, 1 (1874), pp. 71–3; 'Our address', *CLM*, 1 (1874), pp. 1–3; 'Annals of the Association', *CLM*, 1 (1874), pp. 4–11; 'Our town council', *CLM*, 3 (1877–8), pp. 32–9, 93–8, 147–56.

¹⁰⁴ J. A. Langford, *Modern Birmingham and its institutions: a chronicle of local events: from 1841–1871* (2 vols., Birmingham, 1873), 1, pp. 349–55. The Shakespeare Memorial Library Committee read like the 'Who's Who' of the municipal gospel, its members including J. T. Bunce, J. H. Chamberlain, George Dawson, Thomas Martineau, Samuel Timmins, and Charles Vince. See also H. R. G. Whates, *The Birmingham Post, 1857–1957: a centenary retrospect* (Birmingham, 1957), pp. 106ff.

¹⁰⁵ The example of Birmingham is striking, but by no means unique in Britain. For instance, Elfie Rembold has shown recently how the specific and distinctive civic consciousness of Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively came to invent competing visions of 'Scottishness'. E. Rembold, *Die*

Owing to the much stronger German tradition of civic identity,¹⁰⁶ Miquel did not need to create a rhetoric of civic pride. His success was substantially based on his recognition of local distinctiveness, and he masterfully played to local prejudice and peculiarity to achieve his aims.¹⁰⁷ He also helped fashion a language of community and civic identity, though much less overtly than, for instance, Chamberlain. To Miquel, an urban vision helped unite different and opposing local factions by directing them towards a shared goal and identity. In fact, this was central to his politics and his style, for local self-government could only work if it remained united against encroachments by the state. Local government needed to be confident vis-à-vis the state, especially in areas such as education and finance, in which the state had a strong interest.

Johannes Miquel and Joseph Chamberlain operated in an era of civic pride evident in, and brought about by, many facets such as the burgeoning of the provincial press and the growing importance of the provincial urban economy.¹⁰⁸ Municipal self-consciousness was not created by Miquel, Chamberlain, or any other individual politician, but they responded to it, and in this way encouraged it. Success in local politics often became contingent on having excellent relationships with the proprietors or editors of the local newspaper press. Local (as well as national) politicians had to adjust their speeches to local sentiments and prejudices. And, even though towards the end of the nineteenth century it was no longer imperative for local politicians to be native to the city in which they governed, they had to be all the more careful to foster social relationships with the local elites, ideally by marrying into them.¹⁰⁹

Liberalism in local government, then, was not simply about ideology and its translation into policy, it was also about the creation of a distinctive liberal public sphere. Clearly, much of the underlying rationale for civic pride was common to all cities, such as patrician attitudes to social and political leadership, philanthropy, and historical distinctiveness. Yet, beneath the

festliche Nation: Geschichtsinzenzierungen und regionaler Nationalismus in Großbritannien vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg (Berlin, 2000), pp. 59–72.

¹⁰⁶ J. Jenkins, *Provincial modernity: local culture and liberal politics in Hamburg, 1885–1918* (Ithaca, forthcoming). For urban culture in a European context, see H. E. Meller, *European cities, 1890–1930s: history, culture and the built environment* (Chichester, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Miquel's adeptness at appealing to local pride is nicely illustrated by his speech to a dinner held in his honour before his impending departure from Frankfurt, after ten years of reforming activity. He told his audience that, upon his election to Frankfurt, he had been asked by the late Empress Augusta how he intended to shape the city. His reply had been 'I do not intend to shape the city at all, because THIS city will not allow itself to be shaped!' ('Ich denke aus Frankfurt nichts zu machen, denn DIE Stadt läßt sich nicht machen!'). *Miquels Reden*, ed. Schultze and Thimme, II, p. 302.

¹⁰⁸ A. J. Lee, *The origins of the popular press in England, 1855–1914* (London, 1976).

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Chamberlain's first two wives, both of whom died in childbirth, came from the Kenrick family, an established local Unitarian family. Johannes Miquel had a rather unfulfilled marriage with Emma Wedekind, who came from a prominent, established Hanoverian commercial family with close links to the Osnabrück bourgeois elite.

language of local pride notions of equality, tolerance, education, self-improvement, and community are visible which do point to a distinctly liberal self-image. Such a civic identity became the closest answer the liberals ever had to a milieu, an identity of belonging that went beyond the purely political, and identified community of sentiment and patterns of behaviour.¹¹⁰ And yet, if the liberal ideal of a civic community was a recipe for success, it also contained within itself severe limitations. In the first instance, the liberal ideal of urban progress was not always compatible with the concerns of shopowners and artisans who feared precisely the economic forces which the liberals sought to promote. More importantly, as this article has shown, urban government, despite its communitarian ideals, was always divided in practice – not simply by class or religion, but by property. In the last instance, with liberals unwilling to address the prominence of property, it was only national policies which could ultimately erode this social divisiveness which the liberals, ironically, did everything to uphold.

III

In the decades before 1900 local government acquired an importance in the worldview and practice of liberal politics unparalleled before or since. It is natural that rapidly growing and self-confident urban communities should give liberals food for thought in their constant monitoring of the role of government and the evolving body politic. Yet the city also emerged as a critical forum in which liberal goals and ideals could best be modernized and adapted. Miquel and Chamberlain never tried to break out of the ideological confines of nineteenth-century liberalism, because the freedom and autonomy which liberalism conceded to the locality was sufficient. It created a framework within which urban liberals could fashion a blueprint for a society based on tolerance and harmony, efficiency, education, and social justice. Their programme was remarkable, but far from unusual in the context of urban government up to 1900. By the turn of the century, technical and primary education, civic architecture, municipal enterprise, industrial tribunals and street clearances were all admired jewels in the municipal crown.¹¹¹

And yet, it is undeniable that only a few decades later local government had become a shadow of its former self, as many of its most important functions had

¹¹⁰ On the concept of the 'milieu', see K. Rohe, ed., *Elections, parties and political traditions: social foundations of German parties and party systems, 1867–1987* (Oxford, 1990), and K. Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen* (Frankfurt, 1992), esp. pp. 19–27. Theories of political cleavages and the 'milieu' have not been explicit in British historiographical debate, which has nevertheless devoted much excellent study to the relationship between cultural identity and political behaviour. In the local context, see, for instance, J. Davis, 'Radical clubs and London politics, 1870–1900', in D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones, eds., *Metropolis London: histories and representations since 1800* (London, 1989), pp. 103–28. More generally, see the important R. McKibbin, *The ideologies of class* (Oxford, 1990), and, on liberalism, E. Biagini, *Liberty, retrenchment and reform: popular liberalism, 1860–1980* (Cambridge, 1992).

¹¹¹ The practical success of local government is emphasized in Fraser, *Power and authority*, esp. pp. 155–73.

been taken over by central government in its attempts to deal with the complexities of a rapidly transforming society. It was central, not local, government to which came the task of addressing problems of social inequality and economic insecurity, as local government stumbled from one financial crisis to the next, finding it difficult to meet existing obligations, let alone expanding these for the future. This raises the fundamental question whether the liberals' reliance on local government was realistic in the first place, or whether it was already outdated at the point of inception. Put differently, if even forward-looking liberals who were alert to the social changes around them considered local government an adequate response to these problems, it might underline the point that liberalism was simply unable to recognize and cope with the sheer scale of the social and political problems of the industrial era.¹¹²

To liberals in Germany and Britain, local government in the 1870s and 1880s was able to provide innovative responses to a range of issues, from innovative social policies to denominational flexibility, from educational concerns to administrative and economic efficiency. To them it was clear that in an increasingly complex and heterogeneous world it was local government that could best deliver community, responsibility, and citizenship. The faith which they and other liberals put into an innovative, Protestant/nonconformist, efficient and all-embracing civic liberalism was highly rational given that in Germany, for instance, local government's share of total public expenditure increased faster than that of government at the state or national levels.¹¹³ The problem with the liberal view of local government was not the vision itself – the problem was that the foundations upon which this vision was based changed so rapidly that, by the First World War, it had become untenable.

Local government had commended itself to liberal practitioners of local government as the laboratory for reform, especially with regard to social policy. Yet once effective responses to social problems had been tried and tested, the transition to a wider provision of these solutions beyond the purely

¹¹² R. Bellamy, *Liberalism and modern society: an historical argument* (Cambridge, 1992). The assumption that German liberalism was inherently unable to cope with the social and political problems of modern society has underlain much of German historiography. L. Gall, 'Liberalismus und "Bürgerliche Gesellschaft": Zu Charakter und Entwicklung der Liberalen Bewegung in Deutschland', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 220 (1975), pp. 324–56; W. J. Mommsen, 'Der deutsche Liberalismus zwischen "Klassenloser Bürgergesellschaft" und "Organisiertem Kaptitalismus": Zu einer neuen Liberalismusinterpretation', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 4 (1978), pp. 77–90. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 1050–5.

¹¹³ As a proportion of total public spending from 1881 to 1913, local government spending increased from 26.3 per cent to 32.9 per cent, national government spending from 29.3 per cent to 35.3 per cent. This led to a correspondingly sharp decline of individual state spending, from 44.4 per cent of total public spending in 1881 to 31.8 per cent. T. Köster, *Die Entwicklung kommunaler Finanzsysteme am Beispiel Großbritanniens, Frankreichs und Deutschlands 1790–1980* (Berlin, 1984), p. 171. Germany was evidently not unique in the growing relative importance of municipal government. Even in centralized France, communal budgets' share of the national budget rose from 16 per cent in 1836 to 30.2 per cent in 1912. W. B. Cohen, *Urban government and the rise of the French city: five municipalities in the nineteenth century* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 257.

local arena was the logical next step. Similarly, once controversial schemes (such as public housing) had gained more widespread acceptance through their success, it was time to apply them at the national level. Local government maintained its usefulness with regard to the practical application of social policies because of its continued immediacy to social problems. But as soon as national government had made that conceptual sea-change in accepting responsibility for social policy, local government was destined to become the executor, rather than the motivator, of social reform.

One major policy arena in which local government had asserted itself over the second half of the nineteenth century was education, principally because it was able to benefit from the difficulty of central government to respond to denominational concerns over education at the state and national levels. With the retreat of religious controversy from the public sphere, the crucial stumbling block for national/state-wide educational provision was removed. In England, this process was largely complete by the 1920s. In Germany, by contrast, the continuity of religious strife apparent until the educational debates of the 1960s was one important reason for the prolonged importance of local government throughout the Weimar period.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, in both countries the reliance on local government for religious mediation was bound to decline as religious observance declined and spirituality retreated into the private domain.

Local government had been able to provide an enlightened response to urbanization through the provision of parks, street clearances, sanitation, the municipalization of urban transport, and so on. These provisions, however, came at a cost. As their realization became a generally accepted local government concern, the difference in quality and scope of municipal provisions grew sharply according to the quality of the local tax base. What had once been the underlying rationale for liberal attitudes towards local government, that differences in local spending were acceptable, even desirable, was increasingly challenged. The more general was the acceptance of local provision for education, sanitation, recreation, education, and infrastructure, the more unacceptable were sharp differences in the quality of their provision. In this way, the success of liberalism in local government created the conditions for its impending redundancy.

Moreover, much of the mounting debt incurred for the local government provision had been taken up under the impression of constantly rising revenue from a growing local tax base. Yet when urban growth slackened, first in Britain and then in Germany, many public utilities which had been provided on a grand scale left behind them a crippling trail of debt. In consequence, local government was forced to shift to a much less progressive and expansionary role. In Britain, this shifting role of local government was expressed by its

¹¹⁴ In fact, the Weimar School Compromise (Art. 146:2 of the Constitution) explicitly put the power over denominational education in the hands of the localities as the executors of the parents' demands. Bernd Zymek, 'Schule, Hochschulen, Lehrer', in D. Langewiesche and H.-E. Tenorth, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte*, v: 1918-1945 (Munich, 1989) pp. 162-4.

growing dependence on grants-in-aid since Gladstone's 1870 Education Act,¹¹⁵ while in Germany the First World War marked a sharp caesura in the way in which local government was perceived. As local government initiative was stifled by a shrinking material base, its rhetoric, the social and visual manifestations of distinctive local pride, were increasingly difficult to sustain. If, despite growing evidence that urban authorities were living beyond their means, local government activity was seen with near unbridled optimism right up to 1914, city councils found themselves hopelessly overburdened with debt in the Weimar Republic. Hyperinflation brought about a rather ambiguous reprieve, but the Great Depression gave local government its coup de grâce.

The final and crucial pillar upon which liberal assumptions of local government rested was its administrative efficiency. Given the paralysis often affecting state and federal governments from 1871 to the foundation of the two Germanies, the constancy, effectiveness, and political maturity of local government is indeed striking.¹¹⁶ In late nineteenth-century Britain, local government provisions had become especially important in the context of central government's *laissez-faire* attitude to internal administration. Indeed, the liberal concept of a minimalist central state and active, enterprising local councils were perfect complements.¹¹⁷ New forms of public welfare policies could be realized most effectively, quickly, and successfully at the local level. Only once it became plain that the scope of local government for what were increasingly considered to be national problems was too limited were liberals forced to think of more comprehensive, national solutions. And yet, the real sea-change of Lloyd George's People's Budget and his social legislation was not that the state accepted the responsibility for social provision on a national scale. Rather, Lloyd George's administrative and financial drive proved for the national level what Chamberlain had established for the local level thirty-five years earlier: the possibility of pursuing a positive commitment to engage in social change with maximum benefit, and at minimum cost, to the greatest number of people. Once national government had proved its capacity for doing this, local government had lost the initiative for administrative and financial innovation and effectiveness for good.

Local government occupied a central position in late nineteenth-century liberalism. The comparative national framework reveals that for the local level, the central tenets of liberalism in ideology and practice were striking in their similarity. The importance of local government for liberalism extends beyond a particular national context. Despite significant differences in the structure of local government in England and Germany, liberals in local government were affected by very similar concerns and challenges. If, under these circumstances, liberals responded in similar ways, the differences that separated the various

¹¹⁵ H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809–1874* (Oxford, reprint, 1991), pp. 215–17. Even though 'assigned revenues' replaced grants-in-aid in 1888, this did not alter the growing local government reliance on centrally distributed funds. Harris, *Unemployment and politics*, pp. 369–70 (appendix A).

¹¹⁶ Ribhegge, 'Staat kommt von Stadt'. ¹¹⁷ Biagini, 'Popular liberals', pp. 140–1.

liberal movements at the national level had little to do with the vagaries of liberalism. There was no ‘peculiar’ path of a German liberalism wedded to authority and subservience to Bismarck, nor was there a British liberalism splendidly isolated by its ideological clarity and working-class popularity.¹¹⁸ The similarity of liberal ideology and politics at the local level suggests that the differences between liberal movements at the state level reflected primarily the particular constitutional and political contexts in which they operated.

Moreover, the attempt to realize the goal of community through local government represented the last united liberal attempt to deal with the growing social question. The ingenuity of Miquel’s or Chamberlain’s policies was precisely that they never challenged any fundamental tenets of liberal belief. Despite their rhetoric, liberal advocates of ‘municipal socialism’ pursued social mediation not through the redistribution of income, but indirectly through the promotion of education, affordable housing, culture, health, and recreation. As much as the success of urban liberalism boosted the popularity and cohesiveness of liberalism at the national level, its ultimate failure added to the liberal confusion about how to deal with the social question. Many ‘new’ liberals, mostly in Britain, but also in Germany, drew the conclusion that social policies needed to go beyond the purview of local government and include redistributive measures undertaken by central government. However, the examples of Chamberlain and Miquel show that this conclusion was far from obvious, especially for German liberals. From their perspective, local government had not failed, but needed to be supplemented by policies of tariffs and Empire, all of which would leave assumptions about the nature of the state untouched.

Finally, if local government was integral to the success of liberalism before 1900, it was also intimately related to its decline after the First World War. In both countries, the war and its aftermath led to new dimensions in social conflict. In response, urban liberals, who were still disproportionately influential in the local politics of Weimar Germany, were quick to reclaim pioneering roles in social and cultural policies. However, in the post-war context the politics of innovation divided urban society even further. Conversely, British liberals at the local level tended to react to social fragmentation defensively, through the formation of anti-Labour alliances. Urban liberals in England lost the initiative, which came on top of the emasculation of local government initiative through central government at a time of retrenchment. In England as in Germany, urban liberalism accelerated rather than prevented liberal decline in the inter-war period. Once the central state became the principal guardian of social mediation, urban liberals were

¹¹⁸ Perhaps the greatest single difference between German and English liberalism was that in Germany there was no ‘popular’ nonconformity whose values managed to ally the ‘respectable’ working classes to the liberal movement. However, British liberals were not ‘peculiar’ in this regard. For the similar case of Sweden, see M. Hurd, *Public spheres, public mores, and democracy: Hamburg and Stockholm, 1870–1914* (Ann Arbor, 2000).

deprived of the principal purpose of their policies. Their futile search for distinctive, popular, and uniting policies at the local level reinforced, and made more visible, the general ideological and political helplessness of liberalism during the interwar period. Unfortunately for the viability of liberalism at a time of rapid social, political, and economic change, local government had turned out to be a palliative, rather than an agent, for its ideological and political transformation.