

Theodor Plievier's Des Kaisers Kulis:
Ideology and Fact

by

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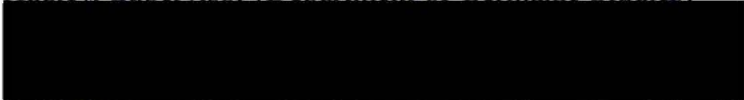
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ABSTRACT

Theodor Plievier's highly successful revisionist historical novel Des Kaisers Kulis (1930) deals with events leading to the demise of the German Imperial Navy. The sailors' rebellions in 1917-18 were a manifestation of the common sailor's antipathy towards the officer corps that reflected the discontent in the Weimar Republic between the common man and the privileged classes. Against a prevailing mood of heroic nationalism propagated by the military establishment and society's dominant, conservative elite, Plievier's stirring, anti-war novel offered a critical exposé of the hypocrisy and ineptitude of the leadership of the German navy. However, despite the novel's documentary character Plievier had motives other than just a factual recounting of history. Influenced by difficult life experiences, the self-educated Plievier had developed his own individualistic ideology. He saw neither socialism nor capitalism as solutions to the ills of the world. Rather, he hoped for a revolution of the spirit in each individual. He regarded the November Revolution as not only the end of the Great War (1914-18) and the German empire, but also as a unique, historical, global turning point. This new era would be governed by what he believed was man's primal religion -- Individualism.

This thesis focusses not only on how this ideology developed, but also on how it finds expression in both the content and form of the novel. By examining Plievier's selection of the historical data that was available to him, this thesis evaluates what documented fact has become in the hands of a literary artist, and determines what message the reader is to understand from the work. As well, the thesis focusses on how Plievier expresses his ideology through the depiction of the sailors, particularly Alwin Köbis and Max Reichpietsch, to whom the novel is dedicated.

Plievier's insistence on historical verisimilitude, coupled with an account of his own period of service aboard ship, lend the work an autobiographical quality. A mix of narrative methods provides a dual thrust to the work: a claim to both historical truth and

to ideological instruction. Indeed, Plievier's novel is significant in that it broke the taboo of the German Imperial Navy by accurately revealing the deplorable conditions of the revered institution. However, into this historically authentic background Plievier wove the tenets of his ideology. Throughout the novel Plievier attacks capitalism while at the same time ignoring all other political movements or organizations. As well, he glorifies and idealizes Köbis as an example of his 'new man'; the autonomous individual who should serve both as an example and beacon for the rest of mankind. Contrary to the prevailing interpretations offered by the political parties during the Weimar Republic, Plievier invests the genre of the war novel (Kriegsroman) with an individualistic, anarchistic interpretation of the sailors' revolt of 1917. While Plievier was revered by the left of the Weimar Republic and censured by the right, an objective reading disappoints the stereotypical thinking of both sides. Des Kaisers Kulis is the propagandization of Plievier's doctrine which Plievier had developed earlier in life and with which he remained until his death in 1955.

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Introduction

Theodor Plievier's first major literary success, Des Kaisers Kulis (1930), deals with the events leading to the demise of the German Imperial Navy. Though perhaps less well known than his war trilogy Stalingrad (1945), Moskau (1952), and Berlin (1954), his naval novel is of paramount historical and literary significance. While he took great care to ensure the historical veracity of the novel, the work cannot be categorized as non-fiction. Into an historically authentic background Plievier wove the tenets of his own ideology which had been shaped by a variety of life influences. Notable among them were a harsh, poverty-stricken childhood; a strong, early desire to educate himself and become a writer; difficult life experiences before, during and after the war; and a particularly strong sense of self. All these led to the formation of the individualistic ideology which finds expression in Des Kaisers Kulis.

The novel's documentary quality makes Plievier one of the pioneers of documentary literature in the Weimar Republic. Indeed, towards the end of the 1920s in Germany there was a trend away from Expressionism towards documentary reportage. Another highlight of this new literary sobriety was Alfred Döblin's novel Berlin Alexanderplatz (1929), which dealt with the plight of the individual in face of impersonal, large-scale urban life. Des Kaisers Kulis' documentary character and the anti-military sentiments it aroused assured the work a wide distribution. It contrasted sharply with the prevailing trends of heroism and nationalism in German war literature of the time. Most Germans had believed that Great Britain had been the aggressor and cause of the war. Many publishers in Germany had turned to publishing profitable pulp penny-books to inform the German public about the navy. One publishing house in particular, under Leopold Ullstein (1826-1899), published a patriotic series called Ullstein's War Books (Ullsteins Kriegsbücher) which remained very popular throughout both world wars.

Indicative of the prevailing mood, the series was designed to stir up the readers' thoughts of patriotism and heroism, and was supported by conservative and nationalist sectors in German society. Indeed, to counteract reports in the Allied press derogatory to the German sailor and to critically assess its operations, the navy itself published a multi-volume, scholarly work between 1922 and 1934. Entitled The War at Sea, 1914-1918, the publication's major writers strove to raise the German sailor's image from criminal and pirate to that of hero in order to restore naval honour.¹

Immediately after the First World War, however, intellectual circles in both Germany and France had tried to counter the overwhelming prevailing attitudes of militarism and nationalism. In contrast to the literary style which expounded heroism in the armed services for the national cause were three 'revisionist novels'. Where Erich Maria Remarque's renowned Im Westen Nichts Neues (1929) and Ludwig Renn's Krieg (1928) depicted the senseless destruction and horror of war, Theodor Plievier's successful Des Kaisers Kulis (1930) revealed the hypocrisy and ineptitude of the leadership of the German navy. It was into this predominant mood of nationalism and heroism propagated by the military establishment and society's dominant, conservative elite that Plievier's novel was published. It is, therefore, not surprising that Plievier's honest and fair work reflecting the terrible conditions and deplorable leadership of the navy should arouse vehement criticism and opposition from these groups.

During the first eight chapters of the novel Plievier not only establishes the historically authentic background and the characters, but also introduces into the story his ideology. The story culminates in the longest, most important chapter "Das Ende", portraying the sailors' revolt against the officers and the courts martial of two sailors, Alwin Köbis and Max Reichpietsch. It is here that Plievier's ideology finds clearest expression. The final chapter not only depicts the execution of the two sailors, much as the

historical record describes it, but signifies as well the end of the German High Seas Fleet, the Kaiser's reign and ultimately of Wilhelmine Germany itself.

This thesis proposes to examine not only how this ideology developed, but also how it finds expression in both the content and form of the novel. The thesis will examine the historicity of the work with respect to the author's intention in order to evaluate what documented fact has become in the hands of a literary artist. By examining Plievier's selection of historical data the thesis will determine what message the reader is to understand from the work and how it is presented. As well, the thesis focuses on how Plievier expresses his ideology through the depiction of the sailors. Special emphasis will be given to Köbis and Reichpietsch, the heroes of the novel to whom it is dedicated.

Chapter 1

Theodor Plievier: The Road to Ideology

Born on 12 February 1892 to a large family in a working-class district of Berlin, Plievier seems always to have been an outsider. He lived in a three room apartment with the other seven members of his family under the strict discipline of his father. Plievier wrote of having been beaten almost daily by his older siblings and that his mother was usually too tired to come to his aid. Forced by the family's poverty to enter the workforce, he was glueing paper bags at age eight, earning a wage outside of the house by age twelve and became an apprentice brick-layer at age fourteen. By age sixteen he already knew he did not want to spend his life in a working-class job.

Despite the dreadful conditions at home and the twelve-hour work-days he already showed a strong inclination to write. In June 1908 he undertook his first literary efforts by starting a diary, perhaps as means of consolation in face of such a difficult life. He wrote about his wishes for an ideal family life in a country house and longed for an "innigen geistigen Zusammenleben der Familie".² Looking to break out of the family circle, he yearned for the chance to travel to Russia and China to do literary research. Plievier soon realized that there was little chance of realizing any of these dreams. He became an idealist and took great efforts to educate himself.³ He read voraciously, continued writing at a time when he had barely mastered orthography, and taught himself how to paint.

Undeterred by his family's derision and by its fears of his being an outsider, Plievier constantly dreamed of becoming a proficient author, even though he himself thought it improbable. Writing in his diary he asked, "Bin ich zum Schriftsteller geboren oder nicht? Eine noch zu lösende Frage."⁴ Just before his seventeenth birthday in 1909 he actually enjoyed a small literary success. The anarchist magazine Der freie Arbeiter published his short story "Proletariers Ende". Once having described himself in his diary as

the lonely one, the "Einsame," Plievier here depicted the fate of a poor, old, lonely, dying proletarian whom society despised.⁵ Refused refuge by a shelter he freezes to death on a park bench. In the story Plievier did not direct his sympathy to the proletarian as a class, but rather to the individual himself, the 'Armen, Verirrten'. He focused specifically on those people wrongfully cast out from both family and society as he himself felt. For the sixteen-year old author the unrequited love for his parents had become a universal love for all fellow sufferers.⁶

Already at a young age Plievier's consequential and rather moralizing critique of social democracy soon changed into a general antipathy toward all organizations. Much of this attitude was rooted in ignorance. For example, he understood little of the efforts of the organized workers' movement and was disturbed not only by the apathy of the workers that he met at the work-sites, but also by the condescending attitude of the skilled workers towards the unskilled. The intolerance and aggressiveness shown by the unionized workers towards the non-unionized workers angered him greatly. Union people, he wrote, were simply fanatics, "Fanatiker, nicht besser als die Kirchenfanatiker des Mittelalters und der Jetztzeit." By contrast his ideal was the simple, poorly paid worker. To his mind, the lonely, non-unionized labourer was sublimely elevated above the greedy workers' movement:

Eine wahre Freude, wenn man dabei eine Ausnahme findet. Ein Arbeiter, ein einfacher, schlecht belohnter Fabrikarbeiter und Freidenker. Er hat sich wirklich freigemacht von allen Vorurteilen unserer Zeit. Erhaben steht er über unserer modernen Arbeiterbewegung, er als Unorganisierter.⁷

In short, Plievier was bothered by exactly what he lacked in his own family life: love, tolerance and idealism. He pictured an ideal of a free, independent worker, thus demonstrating an early inclination toward individualistic anarchism. In his diary he glorified the outsider status not only of the worker, but of the vagabonding Bohemian artist as well, "Als armer Künstler durch die Welt streifen und Werte schaffen, das hätte so

einen Reiz für mich." In this dream the fall to ragged proletarian and subsequent rise to writer merge and are elevated above the organized workers' movement.⁸

As well as an inclination to anarchism and urge toward universal love, Plievier's diary reveals a non-denominational, Christian quality to his thoughts. Shortly before he fled from his parents' house Plievier was preoccupied with writing a Christusdrama. He was disturbed by the apparent contradiction between Christian teachings and the reality of contemporary society which was burdened by severe differences of class and economics. As he reflected in 1930, "Der klaffende Widerspruch zwischen der christlichen Lehre und unserer 'christlich' organisierten Gesellschaft hatte einen ersten starken und rebellierenden Einfluß auf mich ausgeübt..."⁹

At this time Plievier became acquainted with a free-thinker and anarchist who, seeming to understand Plievier, introduced him to the writings of Nietzsche and Gorky. Reflecting the depth of Nietzsche's influence on Plievier are Plievier's recurring references to and quotations from the great philosopher. Nietzsche was an impassioned critic of the ethos of his time, especially of nationalism, conformism and Christianity. Plievier's affinity to Maxim Gorky, who wrote naturalistic, sympathetic stories of tramps and social outcasts, is evident not only in his own life as a vagabond and wandering preacher, but in his first published work "Proletariers Ende". However, Plievier's own prospects for a career as writer seemed very dim. The isolated existence in his family and work, coupled with the temporal and physical demands of his apprenticeship became unbearable. A slap on the face from his father, the first ever, further aggravated the situation and in June 1909 Plievier quit his apprenticeship and ran away from home.

He led the life of a vagabond, travelling through Germany, Austria, Hungary and back to Germany. While living with a prostitute in Budapest he continued working on his Christusdrama, seemingly haunted by the gaping contradiction between Christian teaching

and social reality. Reflecting on this period in Mein Weg, the brief autobiographical appendix of the 1953 edition of his novel Haifische, Plievier wrote that there was another component besides the life of a vagabond which motivated him to write, namely revolt:

Diese andere Komponente war die Revolte, die Revolte gegen die väterliche Ohrfeige, gegen die Autorität übergeordneter Mächte, gegen die Willkür des Polizeistaates, gegen eine Ordnung, die die Armen ärmer und die Reichen reicher macht, die die Ausbeutung des Menschen durch seinesgleichen zuläßt und als letztes Mittel nur den Krieg kennt. Die Revolte gegen das Bestehende, die Hingabe und Opfer und vielleicht sogar das Opfer des Lebens fordert, wurde mir zum geistigen Lehrmeister.¹⁰

While realizing his dream of a life as a vagabond Plievier found it necessary to break with the norms of society as well as to break the law. At night he slept in doorways or wherever he could and he stole bread to eat. He justified his petty thievery in his diary with a literal interpretation of Nietzsche:

Rechte, die man sich rauben kann, soll man sich nicht schenken lassen, hat ein großer Philosoph gesprochen. In dieser Beziehung gebe ich dem großen Nietzsche ganz recht. Und da es die Verhältnisse gerade so mit sich bringen, übersetze ich dieses Wort in die Praxis. - Ich nehme mir mein täglich Brot von den Türklinken jener herunter, die da einen gewissen Überschuß drin haben ...Ich sehe es als mein Recht an zu essen, denn ich arbeite auch und ich arbeite fleißig.¹¹

He spent his days in libraries reading Nietzsche, Stirner, Tolstoy, Kropotkin and others. Their influence is reflected in Plievier's own ideology and ultimately in the novel Des Kaisers Kulis. Max Stirner, a nineteenth-century philosopher and individual-anarchist, famous in his own right for his book The Ego and His Own, believed that there was no social reality independent of the individual, and that every human action was motivated by a finite, empirical ego. Peter Kropotkin, a Russian revolutionary recognized as the foremost theorist of the anarchist movement, wanted to put anarchism on a scientific basis. He believed that the chief factor in the evolution of species was not the Darwinian concept of conflict, but co-operation. Known for his two great, realistic novels, War and Peace (1869) and Anna Karenina (1877), Leo Tolstoy had adopted a form of rationalistic

Christianity based on a doctrine of nonresistance to evil. He rejected what he believed to be coercive institutions such as state, church and private property.

Prior to heading for Rotterdam, where he stowed away on a steamer, Plievier returned briefly to his parents' home to say good-bye. He worked on various ships, finally ending up in South America where he remained for approximately three years. He worked as a fisherman, translator, rancher, mine-worker and gold prospector. Spanish soon became his second language and he also learned English from an English engineer. In Mein Weg he described this period of his life, stressing the transitory, episodic, even aimless nature of his existence:

Für mich war es indessen nur ein Intermezzo neben anderen. Was ich auch angriff, ob ich Fische fing, ob ich Eisenbahnbrücken anstrich, Sekretär beim deutschen Vizekonsul in Pisagua war ... alles blieb Episode, war Durchgang. Wohin der Kompaß meines Lebens zeigte, hätte ich nicht angeben können. Als ein englischer Ingenieur ... einmal sagte, 'Sie können doch hier nicht immer so weiter leben, was wollen Sie eigentlich einmal werden? Sie müssen doch einen Plan haben?', mußte ich die Antwort schuldig bleiben.¹²

Clearly, Plievier had neither direction nor plan in life yet he seems to have understood that his life really should be directed toward some purpose. His vagabond life, together with his urge to revolt and his anarchistic leanings, which had been further fueled by anarchistic theories from the English engineer, would serve both as source and impulse for later literary activity.

On returning to Germany in 1914 Plievier's life of adventure came to an end. However, his five-year adventure as sailor and vagabond provided the inspiration for much of his post-First World War literary production: for example the anthology Zwölf Mann und ein Kapitän (1929), and the novels Das große Abenteuer (1936), Haifische (1941), and Im letzten Winkel der Erde (1941). All have strong autobiographical as well as fictional characteristics. They were exotic, adventure-filled works which combined the

spirit of revolt with love for the outcast, earning Plievier the distinction 'the German Jack London.'¹³

Arrested by the Hamburg police as a dubious element -- unsicheres Element -- in 1914, Plievier was conscripted into the German Imperial Navy where he served on the auxiliary cruiser SMS Wolf. She gained fame as a raider, creating havoc on the open seas for enemy shipping. With typical gallows humor sailors called these auxiliary cruisers Himmelfahrtsdämpfer or suicide steamers. The sailors and officers assigned to these ships were usually those who had, for whatever reason, fallen out of favour with their superiors and thus were transferred to these ships. They were meant to sail to all oceans, lay mines and sink enemy merchant ships according to rules of cruiser warfare. Ships and crews struck a note of bravado and dash in the media. Frequently portrayed as pirates because of their frequent ruses de guerre -- false flags and camouflaged ships -- sailors led a daring life.

Plievier's anarchist leanings frequently got him into difficulty in the navy where he served several terms of detention for insubordination. During one of these terms, in 1916, he met several sailors opposed to the war. Key among them were the craftsman and writer Karl Raichle; and the leader of the Vagabond Movement in the 1920s, Gregor Gog, who appears in Des Kaisers Kulis. These men supplied Plievier with anarchist literature, discussed Nietzsche and Stirner, and planned to publish an anarchist journal after the war. Plievier's own anarchist attitude and his marked urge towards personal freedom and independence were thus strengthened by his acquaintance with these two.

In November 1918 Plievier was in Wilhelmshaven during the sailors' rebellion and worked as editor of the journal Republik, the publication of the revolutionary sailors' council in Wilhelmshaven. The first issue cited Lenin's call to world revolution -- "An alle!" -- and caused the first controversy with the SPD-majority of the sailors' council. At

odds with the council, Plievier was not willing to accept any political position, he left the editor's post at the end of November and headed with Raichle and Gog to Urach.

Unlike many other revolutionary sailors Plievier did not try to propagate the revolution throughout Germany. In fact, he moved from Wilhelmshaven to Urach precisely in order to distance himself from the organized sailors' movement. Since the turn of the century Urach had become an intellectual Bohemia, a centre for various sects intent on reforming society. There were communists, socialists, anarchists, wandering preachers, and other reformers who held or participated in numerous gatherings, speeches, and discussions. These reformers were largely outsiders and rebels of proletarian or middle-class origin who, after the November revolution, were exasperated by the violent class conflicts and saw in Urach an ideal far removed from civilization. Significant advocates among them were Erich Mühsam, a poet, dramatist and radical anarchist; Friedrich Wolf, a dramatist who wrote period and revolutionary plays; and Johannes R. Becher, poet, critic and editor who strongly advocated revolutionary social reform.

Plievier did not want to be just a rebel. He wanted to make a statement, to be a prophet. In this milieu he quite literally exchanged the uniform of a sailor for the cape and sandals of the prophet. His pamphlet Anarchie (1919), the first pamphlet published by his own press Verlag der Zwölf, reveals why he so quickly turned his back on practical, revolutionary politics and until 1925 acted primarily as an anarchist agitator and pamphleteer. Anarchie demonstrates that Plievier viewed the November Revolution not only as the end of both the First World War and the German Empire, but -- to use the title of his second pamphlet -- an historically unparalleled Weltwende, the end of both an era and a world. Significantly, Plievier was less interested in a practical, political reorganization of Germany than in the clash between capitalism and communism and its attendant results. With expressionistic passion and intensity Plievier presents a graphic, fiery picture of the clash between these two social systems. Mustering all the rhetoric for

which Expressionism has become noted, he regarded the clash of ideologies as engendering a new era:

Spartakismus und Bolschewismus sind die Feuer, die die alte Ordnung aufbrennen, aber Feuer, die in diesem Tun sich selbst aufzehren. Spartakist sein heißt Vernichter- aber auch Selbstvernichter sein.
Der Zusammenprall des Kapitalismus mit dem Sozialismus hat das Aggressive, Fieberhafte, Besinnungslose, Selbstmörderische des Zeugeaktes. Kapitalismus und Sozialismus, diese mächtigsten Strömungen, diese ausgewachsensten Kinder der materialistischen Weltepoche, zeugen in gewaltiger Umarmung, in der Entladung hochgespannter Gegensätze das neue Zeitalter.¹⁴

Anarchy, not socialism or capitalism, should be the iconoclastic force behind the new social order of this new age; "Anarchie! Herrschaftlose Ordnung, aufgebaut auf der sittlichen Kraft freigewordener Einzelmenschen! Urreligion der Menschheit, Glaubensbekenntnis der Zukunft und der Zukünftigen!"¹⁵

Believing a new age to have started, Plievier dated this pamphlet "das Jahr Eins der anarchistischen Ära." He prophesied that this 'new Age', as he called it, would no longer be ruled by capitalism or socialism but by anarchistic individualism in the sense of Nietzsche and Stirner. With intense, powerful imagery Plievier expressed his apocalyptic vision of capitalism and the expected consequence - the awakening of what he termed the primal religion of individualism:

In den aufflammenden Feuern der kommenden Umwälzungen zerschlägt sich der Kulturglobus >Kapital-Arbeit<, zerstäubt die Welt der Herren und Knechte.

Und stärker und bestimmter tönt die Urmelodie ewigen Neuwerdens durch die Hirne der europäischen Massen. Es ist der Glaube an das Ich, die aus der Tiefe persönlichen Lebens aufsteigende Urreligion der Menschheit: der Individualismus.¹⁶

With these words Plievier distanced himself not only from the middle-class, but also from the majority of his anarchist contemporaries who were organized into various fragmentary groups such as the syndicalists, the anarchic-communists, and the anarchic-syndicalists. Significantly, while these and other groups rejected every form of religion,

religious principles or religiousness remained a motive power with Plievier. His friend and later biographer Harry Wilde even believed that this had led Plievier to anarchism; "das Evangelium habe ihn zum Anarchisten ... gemacht."¹⁷

Written with expressionistic pathos, the pamphlet Anarchie opposed both capitalism and communism. It is, therefore, not so much a statement either of a political program or analysis as it is an ideological credo. This passionate expression of the spirit of the time is understandable when considered against the background of the current revolutionary situation. Conjuring up his revolutionary brotherhood in the image of Ahasverus he concludes the pamphlet:

Brüder, Ahasvernaturen, die ihr suchet im Reiche der Seele, die ihr schöpft aus den Tiefen eigenen Ichs, die ihr einen Pfad sucht aus Dunkel zum Licht, aus Sklaverei menschlicher Schwäche zur Bewußtheit - und in Stunden der Ruhe diesen Weg nachzeichnet: Euch zum Markstein auf Eurer Straße zum Paradiese, der Menge jüngerer Brüder zu Fackeln und Leuchtfeuern, Literaten, Maler, Philosophen: Gottsucher, namenlose Männer des dämmernden Morgens, Euch diese Worte zum Grusse, Willkommen zur Mitarbeit.¹⁸

Employing religious motifs such as light and darkness in the style of evangelical proselytizing, Plievier issued a passionate rallying-cry which combined the expressionistic ideology of awaken or fundamental change with Stirner's glorification of the individual. For it is the individual who should introduce the renewal of mankind "aus den Tiefen des Ichs." The task at hand was to drive the revolution beyond its present stage from the pit of the suffering self to the heights of individualism, "bergan zu den einsamen Höhen des Individualismus, zur Freiheit des Individuums: Zur Anarchie". Only then would man be satiated. For anarchy, according to Plievier (and Stirner) "verteidigt das Privateigentum, nennt rechtmäßig erworbenen Besitz die Wurzel der Freiheit und Selbstheit des Individuums und bekämpft den Kapitalismus, Staat und Staatssozialismus als Grenzüberschreitungen."¹⁹ Plievier saw the formation of individual existence as an act of inner purification, a mission he proclaims with all the religious ardor of a prophet:

Glaubt an euch! Glaubt an das Licht, das immer neu erstehen muß, denkt an die leuchtenden Geister Friedrich Nietzsche und Max Stirner ... denkt an den Wahrheitswillen des Einzelmenschen, der in sich hineintaucht, um aus der Tiefe des eigenen Ich die Welt der Reinheit und Schlichtheit an das Licht zu heben.²⁰

However, while his urgent evocation echoes a religious, Christian quality calling for ideals of purity and modesty, he reveres Nietzsche and Stirner as the spiritual lights -- leuchtenden Geister -- who should guide mankind towards 'das Licht.' These are Plievier's gods, promulgated with all the religious fervor that an ardent Christian evangelist would employ in advancing the cause of the Church Militant.

Despite its apparent social-revolutionary ardor, however, Plievier focuses on individual, peaceful self-realization as the key to social transformation. Though avoiding any immediate call for political action, his cry is no less iconoclastic. Like most writers who espouse Stirner's philosophy, Plievier was convinced that civilization must first be destroyed before it can be renewed. His second pamphlet, Weltwende (1922), articulates the latent basis of total destruction for this self-realization of the individual. Using short, terse sentences with words denoting explosive, violent destruction Plievier expresses his eschatological vision of the appropriate conditions under which mankind can find salvation in the individual:

Explosionen, Detonationen, Zusammenbruch ... Nebel, Rauch, Chaos.
Unter Trümmern und Ruinen sind begraben die Millionen der Menschheit.
Alles geschleift, zerstört, zerstampft, zerstoßen. Das Gebaute, Geschaffene,
Gewollte, das in die Himmel Getragene wird reduziert bis zum nihil: bis
zum Individuum.²¹

The complete chaos that Plievier and Stirner believed a necessary precondition for the reconstitution of the individual seems to have been realized in the consciousness of the worker and impoverished middle-class man. These, Plievier argued, have been cast out or de-classed through war, revolution and inflation. Plievier then saw the need not only to elevate the misery of the masses into Old Testament dimensions, but also to make it palatable to them through the heroic abandonment of capitalism. This, he thought, was to

be the price for the realization of the supposedly lost, independent existence of the individual. Neither political nor revolutionary action seem necessary to Plievier, for the chaos as precondition for the final objective had already occurred without his agency. Thus his sole task was propagandization of the doctrine.

Plievier's Anarchie (1919) and subsequent pamphlets expanded upon the anarchistic orientation he had already expressed rather diffusely back in 1909. In Anarchie he had attempted to explain Stirner's idealistic superelevation of the individual in face of the collectivism and materialism of the revolutionary workers' movement as end of the stalled revolution. He also articulated what he believed to be the common man's fear of communism. Indeed, while Plievier did recognize signs of a global revolution in the victory of the communists in Russia and in their advance into Germany, he viewed communism neither as a social advancement nor principle of the new order. Rather, he regarded it as the rearguard of capitalism, "letzte Konsequenz der materialistischen Weltepoche":

Kommunismus ist die Parole der Gegenwart. Solidarität, Sozialisierung, Schutz den Schwachen sind die blendenden Schlagworte, die Kristallisationskerne, die immer größere, immer gewaltigere Menschenmassen um sich zusammenballen. Die Zeit seelenloser Mechanik und Technik, das Zeitalter der Herrschaft der Materie über den Geist feiert seinen höchsten Triumph. Der ebene Geist der Herde regiert und bestimmt alle Einzelheiten Öffentlichen Lebens. Masseninstinkte sind die Diktatoren dieser Verfallszeit der kapitalistischen Weltepoche.²²

Plievier's activity from the end of the war until 1925 was not political in the usual sense. Rather, it was the product of his idealism, of his anarchistic orientation and his spirit of rebellion; indeed it reflects his sympathies for the poor and lost, of his desires since his youth to be a writer. He viewed the revolutionary mood of the times as an opportunity not for practical, political change but for a chance to help facilitate a fundamental revolution of the spirit -- 'Revolution des Geistes'. With the help of friends he even planned to outfit a ship with artists, scholars and future politicians to spread his gospel:

ein geistiges Lehrschrift mit Künstlern, Gelehrten und künftigen Politikern an Bord, das alle Inseln und alle wichtigen Küsten der Kontinente ansteuern und ihnen eine neue Botschaft des Friedens und der Freude am Menschsein bringen sollte.²³

These were themes Plievier had tried to combine in his life as author, agitator, prophet, and idealist.

At the end of 1920 Plievier found Urach too constricting and moved to Berlin with his wife where he continued publishing and speaking. Plievier found an audience not only in the milieu of the usual patrons and in the scattered groups of the youth movement. He appeared as well at gatherings and performances of leftist, anarcho-syndicalistic organizations. Like anarchism, syndicalism was a popular movement of the time whose proponents advocated that syndicates of workers seize the means of production and distribution. His pamphlet, Weltwende (1922), and subsequent pamphlets up to 1925 were made available through the distribution network of the anarcho-syndicalistic press. Usually the leaflets contained an editorial from Plievier as well as contributions from contemporary, avant-garde, socially critical, leftist writers. To this might be added excerpts or selections from standard anarchist authors like Wollin, Johann Most, Gustav Landauer or else from literary texts by Leo Tolstoy, Ernst Toller, Walt Whitman, Upton Sinclair and others. Sinclair supported socialism and wrote the naturalistic, proletarian work, The Jungle, while Whitman wrote about the problem of preserving the individual's integrity amid the pressures of mass civilization. Although Plievier's contributions were rooted in the more narrowly-defined individualism of Stirner, his selections from these other writers suggest he wanted to be known as an anarchist in the widest possible sense.²⁴

Plievier's third pamphlet, Aufbruch (1922), again promoted the concept that mankind could only be renewed by complete chaos and destruction. Here he evokes the

image of "taking up the cross" and using it as the hammer to precipitate the total destruction required for this renewal:

Aufnehmen das Kreuz - und sei es als Hammer! Wenn aber Kultur und Zivilisation in Trümmer gehen, muß in dir die Liebe lebendig sein, wenn die Kirchen in Flammen aufgehen, muß in dir lodern, was sie beschlossen hielten.

Preaching his secular gospel with all the fervor, rhetoric and spirituality conventionally associated with religious conversion, Plievier claimed that only on the rubble heaps of history will class differences be removed. Here the new man of the Christian gospel is transformed into the new man of Expressionism and anarchist individualism.

His compassion for the outsider now embraced all mankind leading to individual purification. Through graphic images and strong, emotive language he implored the individual to expand his love in order to 'wed himself' with the downtrodden and outcasts of society. This passionate union would then engender the new world:

Sich vermählen mit Geschändeten und Geschlagenen, mit den Schwären und Eiterbeulen der Erde, Leid und Lust und Schwere in Tatkraft wandeln, erfassen die Gedrängtheit des Seins und die Grenzenlosigkeit des Lebens und gebären: aus sich die Welt gebären. Das allein ist gewaltig.²⁵

Later in Aufbruch he stated that the change must first come from within each individual. In this secular conversion the human spirit must first change itself before it can revolutionize the world: "Erst müssen die Geister sich umwälzen, ehe diese selben Geister die Gesellschaft, die Wirtschaft, die Erde umwälzen können. Erst wird die neue Weltseele geboren - dann die neue Welt."²⁶

The next pamphlet, Hunger (1922), concerned itself with Soviet Russia's famine of 1921/22. While Plievier did contribute material aid to Russia he took no political side. Instead, he criticized the middle-class charity committees for giving only the "crumbs left over from wasteful gluttony". As well, he criticized both the relief actions of the workers'

organizations for squabbling over power, and the workers themselves for offering only material goods and not themselves, their souls: "Und die Arbeiter? ... sie opfern nicht alle ihre Habe, ihr Bett und ihr Brot, schenken nicht ihre Seele."²⁷ For Plievier giving help to others meant a total commitment of the individual.

Plievier viewed the famine in Russia as yet another sign of the Weltwende and thus, ironically, as a beacon of hope. For he believed that only when all humanity unconditionally offered its love and aid to the suffering would it then find in the global ruin the virtual freedom from the misery of capitalistic society. Significantly, a reviewer described the apolitical character of Plievier's pamphlet as a virtue, "Der große Vorzug des Flugblattes liegt darin, daß jede Parteilichkeit vermieden und nur die Menschlichkeit betont ist."²⁸

Despite his compassion for society's poor and lost, Plievier saw the masses as responsible for their own misery because of their apathy and disinterest. To his mind the masses must be an active component of the new world order. He made this position very clear in his anti-military pamphlet 1914-1924. Zehn Jahre Geschichte, which again employed strong, directed language, this time to lay blame for the war:

... die unerbittliche gerechte Antwort' auf die Apathie und Sattheit des 'Volkes': Keine Schändlichkeit, Bosheit und Gewalttätigkeit ging über die Erde, die nicht Unverbundenheit, Teilnahmslosigkeit und Untätigkeit der Massen zu ihrer stärksten Grundlage gehabt hätte [...] Keine besonderen Ereignisse, liest das Volk, liest stumpfsinnig und schweigt - oder raucht, säuft und lärmt.²⁹

The pamphlets Wahlrummel (1924) and Das Wahlkarussell (1924) expressed Plievier's censure of the socialist leadership of Germany and of politics in general. Written during the elections that year, the pamphlets encouraged non-participation in the elections because to his mind politics were irrelevant: "Die Frage, was uns die Wahlen angehen, erweitert sich zu der Frage: Was geht uns die Politik an? Was ist denn Politik?"³⁰ While

many intellectual leftists rejected politics and called for action, Plievier retreated to the private revolt of the autonomous individual:

Auf mich führe ich alles zurück: in mir wuchern die Gründe der Knechtschaft und die Ursachen gesellschaftlicher Hemmungen. Kapitalismus und Staat, die gesamte Schreibstube-, Gesetzes- und Ausbeutungsmaschine trägt in mir ihre tiefste Begründung und Berechtigung. Nur in mir, *nur in dem Einzelmenschen* können alle Fragen gesellschaftlicher Natur *zu tiefst* beantwortet und gelöst werden [...] ICH BIN DER WEG, der über Kandidaten, Parteiführer, Minister, über Programme und Gesetzbücher hinweg zum Nächsten, zum Menschen führt. Ich bin Voraussetzung zum gemeinsamen Aufbruch des Volkes, bin Ursprung und Urheber, Umwerter aller Werte, Erneuerer der menschlichen Gesellschaft.³¹

With religious fervor Plievier employed traditional Christian concepts for his secular evangelization. In the place of Jesus Christ it is now the individual who exclaims 'I am the way' and who accepts responsibility for the sins of society. Only the renewal of the individual, he charged, can effect fundamental change in society. Plievier's use of common Christian motifs and language, such as 'Aufnehmen das Kreuz' and 'Ich bin der Weg', probably helped make his ideas more palatable to the Christian public.

Orientated as they were towards Nietzsche, Stirner, Kropotkin and Landauer, Plievier's politics can be readily characterized by the following negative slogans listed by Müller; "Antietatismus, Antikapitalismus, Antikommunismus, Antiparlamentarismus, Antizentralismus und Antiautoritarismus."³² These are a fair judgment of Plievier's politics for he rejected not only capitalism and communism, but also all authority and all institutions. At times Plievier doubted altogether whether even organizations of the workers' movement itself should be allowed to exist. He mistrusted all strategies of a purely economic or political revolution and clung to a revolution of the spirit which must take place within the individual.

The pamphlet Raus die Gefangenen (1924), to which the still imprisoned Ernst Toller was a contributor, called for the release of political prisoners. The following

pamphlet Die Gefangenen (1925) not only continued this call but also railed against class-society and class justice.

Ironically, the Berlin newspaper Der Syndikalist, the organ of the anarchic, syndicalist "Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands" or FAUD, not only published Plievier's essays, but published and distributed his pamphlets as well. However, as demonstrated in 1923 during his participation at a convention held by the "Föderation Kommunistischer Anarchisten Deutschlands" or FKAD, he was not a political asset to the FAUD. The topic of discussion at the convention was the relationship of the FAUD to the FKAD. Plievier criticized both groups, for he believed that contemporary organizations were ineffective tools for dealing with the conditions of his day. Yet he continued to believe that society could nonetheless live in anarchy -- im Geiste der Anarchie. To his mind, however, his own brand of anarchy differed with what he saw in contemporary organizations. Rather than relying on revolutionary external forces, he continued to insist that there must above all be a fundamental change within the individual in order to revolutionize society:

Wenn wir glauben, daß bessere wirtschaftliche Verhältnisse, also äussere Mittel, eine herrschaftslose Gesellschaft herbeiführen werden, dann irren wir uns. Hat sich der Mensch nicht innerlich gewandelt, so wird er auch die Erde nicht wandeln.³³

This ideology had hardly any significance for the political practices of the organized workers' movement. Thus, while Plievier's own practical political activity at this time consisted primarily in his ventures of agitation for the anarchistic FAUD and in organizing political events of protest and solidarity, his relationship with the organization deteriorated. No longer could he use the FAUD's publications as an outlet for his expressionistic sketches. Nor would the FAUD remain the agent of distribution for his pamphlets. FAUD leaders could no longer tolerate this one-sided relationship and went so far as to print in Der Syndikalist a warning against Plievier. They considered him an individual who shunned work -- arbeitsscheues Individuum -- who would not let himself

be exploited by any employer yet who himself exploited his own fellow man -- Klassengenossen. The warning astutely described Plievier as an "Individual-Anarchist".³⁴

With the stabilization of the Weimar Republic in the mid 1920s the union of political leftism with the literary avant-garde collapsed. Expressionism had fallen out of fashion and extreme leftism had become politically uninfluential. The total chaos which had been the foundation of Plievier's preaching no longer existed and the readiness of people to accept anarchistic promises and eschatological visions ceased. No longer able to conjure up the Weltwende, Plievier directed his protest against the inhumanity of capitalistic society.

In 1925 Plievier was forced to give up not only his distribution of pamphlets and books, but also his anarchistic Teestube or tea room. For several years this had been a meeting place in Berlin not just for German anarchists but for other writers and activists as well. Shaving off his beard and exchanging the monk-like sandals and cape for a well-cut suit, he changed from prophet to ordinary European -- "vom 'Propheten' zum Durchschnittseuropäer."³⁵ Yet this external change was not accompanied by any change in Plievier's political orientation. He continued to maintain his connections with anarchistic circles until the end of the Weimar Republic. Even after the burning of the Reichstag anarchist friends are said to have helped Plievier with his flight to Czechoslovakia. At any rate, after 1925 Plievier gave up the role of anarchistic agitator and idealist. Retreating from the public, political life of the wandering preacher he returned to a private existence and launched himself into literary reminiscences.

Having found it impossible to forge a practical union between the roles of agitator and writer, Plievier tried even harder to cultivate his literary talents. Around 1927 he informed his friend Harry Wilde that he wanted to devote himself entirely to writing.³⁶ From 1925 up to the quick success of Des Kaisers Kulis (1930) Plievier wrote a series of

exciting, exotic, non-political stories for middle-class newspapers dealing with his adventurous, vagabondish pre-war life.

While the style of his work may have changed, the goal of his literary efforts did not, for he still wanted to contribute to the revolution of the spirit. Still in the style of the preacher at the end of 1930, Plievier wrote about the revolutionary aims of his literary work:

Auf den Geist kommt es an und auf die Energien, die man dem Hunger und der Ungerechtigkeit der kapitalistischen Ordnung entgegenstellt. Diese Energien zu wecken, ist Aufgabe der revolutionären Literatur, wie es Aufgabe der revolutionären Politik ist, diese Energien für den Kampf kollektiv zu organisieren.³⁷

Chapter 2

Des Kaisers Kulis: the Plan

What began as an attempt to describe his war-time exploits aboard the auxiliary cruiser SMS Wolf ended up as a documentary novel about the German High Seas Fleet. What had once been intended as an adventuresome tale of derring-do and bravado similar to the stories he had written for the newspapers ended up as the hard hitting naval epic known under the critical title Des Kaisers Kulis (1930). It very quickly became a sensational literary success. The title itself announced that Plievier was taking an entirely different tack from the current popular fare of heroics and bugle-and-drum adventures. Plievier reflected on this dramatic shift of emphasis in 1930 in the Berliner Tageblatt:

Nachdem ich im November 1918 von den «grauen Schiffen» der S.M.-Flotte herunter war, hatte ich nicht daran gedacht, ein dokumentarisches Epos und den Roman der deutschen Flotte zu schreiben. Am liebsten hätte ich alles vergessen - das Leben auf den Decks und in den Kasematten der Kriegsschiffe, den Drill und die ganze Sinnlosigkeit des vier Jahre langen Unternehmens. Noch vor drei Jahren, als ich den Plan zu meinem Roman «Des Kaisers Kulis» faßte, dachte ich zunächst nur daran, eine Episode aus meinem Kriegserleben, die 444 Tage lange Kaperfahrt des Hilfskreuzer «Wolf» zu erzählen. Doch mit diesem Stoff kam auch alles andere, alles so lange Unterdrückte wieder. Ich stand wieder «mittendrin», nur diesmal mit dem Abstand und von dem Standpunkt der dazwischen liegenden Zeit aus und mit der Möglichkeit, die Zusammenhänge nachzuprüfen.

Und was für Zusammenhänge und Hintergründe sah ich!³⁸

This aesthetic distance of time allowed Plievier not only to deal with the subject matter objectively and critically; it also afforded him the opportunity to research whatever material had been written about contemporary naval history since the war. Because his own war experiences offered too small a foundation for an ambitious project of this kind - Plievier had neither taken part in the Battle of Jutland, which forms an entire chapter of the Kulis, nor in the sailors' revolt of 1917 - he immersed himself in the naval history of the war. Study and analysis of the war record ensured the work its documentary character. Once the novel had reached its definitive form, as Plievier explained in the Berliner Tageblatt, he had foraged through literally masses of German and British source material

as well as memoirs: "...außerhalb der eigenen Erlebnisse von Beginn bis zum Zusammenbruch des Seekriegs etwa einen halben Kubikmeter deutscher und englischer Admiralsliteratur und Memoiren durchgearbeitet."³⁹

Needing someone to transcribe the manuscript Plievier turned to his friend, Harry Wilde. An active member of the German Communist Party, the KPD, Wilde agreed and began writing for Plievier in September 1928. Two months later Erich Maria Remarque's Im Westen nichts Neues appeared. This best selling novel proved to be the decisive factor for the definitive conception of Des Kaisers Kulis. Within several days Plievier told Wilde that he had burnt what he had been writing up to that point. He then read aloud several new pages that he had just written, pages which would remain largely unchanged in Des Kaisers Kulis. When asked by Wilde what precisely he had in mind -- "Worauf willst du hinaus?" -- Plievier responded that he was composing 'The novel of the Imperial German Navy', "Ich schreibe den Roman der deutschen Kriegsmarine."⁴⁰ To his mind nothing in contemporary war literature had emerged as a definitive work on the German navy. As his article in the Berliner Tageblatt explained, both the novel and the subsequent stage play were a response to the war-mongering propaganda of rightist organizations:

Dies ist der Hauptgrund dafür, daß ich nach der epischen Behandlung des Stoffes ... denselben Stoff noch einmal dramatisch gestaltet habe.

Solange die Nationen weiter rüsten und Kriege vorbereiten, solange die Jugend von chauvinistischer Seite ein verlogenes und schiefes Bild des sinnlosen Völkermordens vorgesetzt bekommt, ist noch lange nicht genug gegen den Krieg gesagt worden.⁴¹

Inevitably, the depiction of these events in the German navy aroused the ire of reactionary circles which were increasingly setting the tone in the Weimar Republic. His novel of the war at sea of 1914-18 touched on taboos, on the self-serving legends of the Germany naval victory at Skagerrak, and on the legend of the German 'revolution' of 1918, which was really only a soldiers' strike.

Significantly, Plievier evaded the question when Wilde asked about the plot and principal arguments -- "den roten Faden." Plievier spoke only about individual figures, for which comrades from the patrol boat Fuchs and from the Himmelfahrtsdämpfern Belgravia and Wolf would serve as models. The story, he added, would ultimately depend on historical sources: "Wir werden sehen, was es für Material gibt". With that, Wilde immediately began gathering source material, first from the Preußische Staatsbibliothek where he searched out all possible books on the German High Seas Fleet. Available as well were the volumes of the Reichstag Investigating Committee's review of the cause of the sailors' revolt and collapse of the German navy.

The writing went quickly. The first chapters -- "Shanghaied", "Das nasse Dreieck", "Kulis", and "Leichen" -- were quickly followed by the chapters "Springflut" and "Himmelfahrtsdampfer". Only after the 3rd reprint was the chapter "S.M." inserted, the scathing account of the ceremonial visit of "Seine Majestät der Kaiser" to the fleet. It immediately follows the chapter "Leichen" (corpses) and serves as a stark contrast to that grim chapter.

Not having experienced the Battle of Jutland, Plievier at first did not know whether he should include an account of that event. Yet, in the course of his research he met sailors in Berlin who had actually taken part in the battle. With Wilde's assistance Plievier set up a model of the North Sea and of the ships involved in the battle. The two friends replayed the battle in detail in order to re-construct its individual phases, the significance of which official reports had not adequately emphasized. Both countries, of course, had claimed victory and each with some justification. While it was a tactical victory for Germany (which had sunk more tonnage), the strategic victory belonged to Britain. Britain had driven the High Seas Fleet back and put it out of commission for months; Germany would never venture forth again in any major sortie. This resulted in Britain's controlling the seas as before. Appropriately entitled "Skagerrak", the chapter

details the battle and culminates in a report -- Erlebnisbericht -- inspired by a sailor who survived the sinking of the light cruiser Wiesbaden. This story had appeared during the war in the cheap Ullstein-Kriegsbücher series.

After several weeks of inactivity Plievier began to write again, starting on the novel's ninth and final chapter entitled "Das Ende". It proved to be the most extensive and involved chapter of the book. Until then the text had been a novel based on historical fact with only a few autobiographical features. Himself the narrator in the novel, however, Plievier began the last chapter with an insistence on historical verisimilitude, an eyewitness account. This was no novel, no fictional adventure-story, he pointed out, here was stark truth, "Hier ist kein Roman. Hier ist ein dokument." He authenticated the end product with the assertion that he had in fact been there: " ... ich bin doch auch dabei gewesen." This narrative approach, coupled with an account of the voyage of the SMS Wolf, lends the work a strong autobiographical quality. A mix of narrative methods provides a dual thrust to the work: an historical claim both to truth and to political instruction.

Given the political atmosphere of the day the publisher, Gustav Kiepenheuer, who had been supporting Plievier with a monthly stipend of 300 marks, did not think the book would be successful. Nor did he think it suited the program of his publishing house. Seeing in Plievier a cross between Jack London and Upton Sinclair, Kiepenheuer had not expected a political work, but rather a novel of adventure and love spiced with Plievier's adventures in South America. As this was not the case Kiepenheuer said he would look for a publisher suitable for such a political work -- "ein solch prononciert politisches Werk wie Des Kaisers Kulis."⁴² Thus, even before it was published the book suffered its first criticism as a piece of potentially nasty politics. The response hints at the later political furor the book would cause.

Yet, even while Kiepenheuer was passing off Des Kaisers Kulis, Plievier received a telegram from Kurt Kläber, head of the Internationalen Arbeiter-Verlag, an organ of the KPD, inviting Plievier to present his work. Plievier, however, was distrustful of any purely party enterprise. Therefore, he had never joined the KPD nor even its closely associated "Bund Proletarisch-Revolutionärer Schriftsteller", or BPRS, whose president was Johannes R. Becher. Instead, he signed with the Malik-Verlag, a private publishing house headed by Wieland Herzfelde. Although it was clearly communist-orientated the publishing house was not the communist party's own organ, nor was it bound to party directives. With its excellent connections to literary circles and to the press, the Malik-Verlag published the novel at the end of 1929. Inexplicably, Plievier did not oppose a republication run of Des Kaisers Kulis in the official organ of the KPD, Die Rote Fahne. Significantly, both this preprint and the novel's publication in the Malik-Verlag brought Plievier the completely undeserved reputation of being a communist - a rumor that rightist circles used against Plievier in the Federal Republic of the 1950s.

Within a couple of weeks Des Kaisers Kulis was the talk of the town. Plievier became famous and was vigorously sought after for interviews by the media. Plievier even met and had a discussion with the crown prince, who apparently was deeply impressed by the book. He asked Plievier if conditions in the book represented those in the navy under his father, the Kaiser.

Chapter 3

The German Imperial Navy and the Sailors' Revolt

In November 1918 sailors of the German High Seas Fleet had refused to obey their officers who, in defiance of the government, intended on carrying out a suicide mission against the British fleet. The sailors seized control of their ships, removed the officers from power and took control of the German naval bases in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. This precipitated the November Revolution which in turn led to the fall of the German Empire.

The sailors' strike of 1917 and the mutiny of 1918 have both been the subject of serious political controversy and scholarly discussion. During the Weimar Republic nationalists and rightist politicians, historians and military officers accused the leftists of inciting the rebellions. These accusations put not only the left on the defensive - the "Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands" (USPD) and the majority "Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands" (SPD) - but also the more moderate, democratic parties. Along with leftist historians these parties vehemently denied the allegations of treason.

This clash of left and right resulted in an abundance of partisan and controversial literature in the Weimar Republic, which offered no objective judgements of the rebellions and their cause. During the Weimar Republic leftist researchers and interested parties were denied access to the naval archives. As well, the right did not release any information which might incriminate or tarnish the image of the officer corps or navy. This controversy continued even after the end of World War II.

In contrast to the Junker-dominated, conservative, feudal army, which was despised and feared, the German Imperial Navy was a well-loved institution in Wilhelmine Germany. The Navy had been founded as a demonstration of Germany's new-found

national unity and freedom. Fueled by the industrial revolution the major forces in creating the navy were Germany's desire not only for national expansion, but to also challenge Britain's dominance on the high seas. However, during World War I the affinity of the middle-class and common-people for the navy dissipated as the navy become embroiled in class conflict and discontentment spread. German society was plagued by social and political strife which threatened to tear Germany apart. These same conflicts were key ingredients during the decision-making process in building the German navy. Indeed, the navy's social makeup and the accompanying problems are a reflection of German society of the time.⁴³

In the beginning the navy had actually been rather cosmopolitan and relatively free of the class divisions characteristic of the army. Naval officer recruits were generally drawn from the middle-class. The navy was small enough to accept and integrate different social classes, thus developing an esprit de corps which was remarkably void of the class prejudice which plagued the Prussian army. As well, the crews and officers were well-travelled. They encountered many different peoples, cultures and beliefs, which encouraged greater tolerance. Fostering better relations between the two groups, officers treated the sailors with greater respect and leniency than army officers did their soldiers.

Kaiser Wilhelm's continuing patronage of the navy assured not only the navy's prestige, but instilled in it a sense of glory and honour as well. Unlike the army, which suffered under the trials of particularism, the navy became a symbol of national unity.

In 1898, under Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz as Secretary of the Navy, Germany started its naval expansion program. Engendering the age of modern military propaganda, Tirpitz immediately set up the Press and Information Branch through which he could propagandize for the German navy.⁴⁴ With its varying degrees of truths this propaganda, overseen by the Kaiser, who viewed the modern warship as an "expression of human

purpose and national character," succeeded in establishing the perception that Germany was a seafaring nation with a need for a naval fleet.⁴⁵ Based on Alfred Mahan's concept of naval power Germany's naval plans called for the construction of large, all big-gun surface vessels to challenge Britain's Grand Fleet. Only with a powerful, national, high seas fleet could Germany hope to realize its dreams of expansion and prestige, and compete with other European nations. This intended large-scale construction would in turn promise prosperity for both German industry and the working-class. The dominating political, social and economic classes hoped that this general prosperity would fortify their positions of power. Thus navalism became the dominant strategic concept in Germany.

With Tirpitz at the helm the tolerant, liberal and egalitarian qualities of the navy soon began to disappear. As the navy grew so did its prestige, which in turn attracted more officers from the upper middle-class and even from the aristocracy. Thus, the officer corps gradually became more exclusive and sought recruits who would be socially and politically acceptable. Ensuring the corps' elitist, social homogeneity, measures such as deliberate monetary barriers for admission into officer training were enacted in order to help weed out prospective cadets from the lower classes. As well, the officer corps had aspirations of attaining both a military and social status equivalent to that of the cavalry officers in the army. Relying on Kaiser Wilhelm's affinity for the navy to achieve this, the corps believed itself to be 'the first estate' of the realm.⁴⁶

Hoping for several results from the construction of a huge naval fleet, Tirpitz, like the ruling classes, believed that the steady work and good wages would cause workers to rally around the empire. He felt that a naval fleet would cause the middle-class to look overseas for further growth and prosperity, and that it would be a uniting force behind the various particularist states. As well, Tirpitz hoped that it would unite political parties against the Social Democrats. Furthermore, he hoped his fleet would raise the image of the crown worldwide, impress other minor powers and potential allies with Germany's

power, and force concessions from Britain with the threat of a massive battle fleet concentrated off her coast.⁴⁷ However, by 1912 this was not the case. The Social Democrats had become the largest party in the country and the huge cost of the navy caused dissension among its political supporters. As well, no naval power in Europe approached Germany to form an alliance. Except for the Austro-Hungarian empire, Germany stood isolated in Europe.

In an officer corps dominated mainly by the affluent bourgeoisie and to some extent by the nobility, sailors found it nearly impossible to move up through the ranks and earn a commission. Soon forgetting any earlier liberal tendencies, the bourgeois officers closed ranks with the aristocratic officers, adopting their bearing and deportment. This effectively shut out the lower classes. As the officer corps grew more exclusive it gradually developed its own caste-spirit (Kastengeist). Feeling it had a monopoly on honour and patriotism, the corps treated the lower ranks with ever-increasing strictness and severity. As well, a Prussian military system of discipline had been introduced into the navy. For the common sailor this meant suffering under the stringent discipline, brutality and caste system practiced by the Prussian army.

Confined to manoeuvres in the North or Baltic Seas the navy's capital ships rarely sailed again to foreign waters after 1912. Activity on the ships was reduced to never-ending drills and inspections while officers became less cosmopolitan and lenient. Constantly worried about promotion and plagued by boredom, the officers became increasingly aggressive and intolerant towards the sailors. By contrast, the enlisted men were increasingly drawn from the cities. As both the navy and its ships grew larger and more complicated, the industrial cities became recruiting grounds for men with education and technical skills. Conscious of a class struggle, these technicians and trained craftsman generally supported socialism and were normally members of trade-unions.

Thus, even before the war the ingredients for social conflict existed in the navy. While the lower classes were trying to improve their lot through new political and social rights, the conservative, landed aristocracy and industrialists, like the naval officers themselves, were trying to maintain their positions of privilege. World War I served to heighten these tensions.

Viewing the outbreak of war as an opportunity to test itself in battle and take control of the seas from the British, the High Seas Fleet greeted the start of the war enthusiastically. Hopefully, the navy could now justify both its tremendous strategic and material cost. Not only did the navy put great strains on Germany's financial resources, but its build-up caused Britain to break with its traditional neutrality and form an alliance with France and Russia.

Clearly, however, Grand Admiral Tirpitz and other naval planners had miscalculated when building up the fleet.⁴⁸ Believing Britain would not risk losing part of its fleet in a war with Germany and thereby domination of the seas, Tirpitz' 'risk theory' had, therefore, presumed that Germany did not need to build as large a navy as Britain. Tirpitz believed that even a smaller but growing German fleet would act as a deterrent to the British. Ultimately, Tirpitz hoped to have a German navy equal to Britain's Grand Fleet. However, this did not occur. Indeed, Germany's competitive naval build-up provoked the very opposite. Britain kept pace with Germany in naval construction. Also, because of its overseas commitments Britain did not want to engage the German Imperial Fleet in an all-out battle. Rather, commanded by Admiral Jellicoe, Britain's Grand Fleet blockaded Germany's access to the North Sea. This prevented goods from reaching Germany, thereby causing hardship for the German population. Completely misunderstanding Britain's interests, Tirpitz had not accounted for this possibility and the German fleet was uselessly boxed in. When war finally came, the fleet numbered too few ships and was therefore unable take on the entire British fleet at once.

While many naval technicians and strategists had earlier recognized the drawbacks of Germany's naval plans, personal and political considerations generally took precedence. Even though submarines and cruisers might be more effective weapons by waging war against merchant shipping according to Prize Rules, both Tirpitz and the Kaiser himself preferred the Mahanian dream of the all-big-gun capital ship. The result was the construction of large, powerful, menacing, multi-gunned ships which were actually less potent than the fewer-gunned, higher-calibre British ships. Thus, during the war British ships could remain out of range of the German ships and fire on them with relative impunity. This illusion of power was cultivated out of budgetary concerns. Tirpitz understood rightly that the Reichstag preferred to allocate money to large, impressive-looking projects such as battleships.

Germany's smaller, inferior fleet could not contest Britain's blockade. Its only reasonable response was a blockade of its own -- with submarines. However, no serious submarine construction project was started before or even at the beginning of the war. Nor did the navy change its emphasis on construction of battleships even after the Battle of Jutland in 1916. Due to superior training and boldness the Germans managed at Jutland to sink nearly twice as many ships as the technically and numerically superior British. Yet, Germany's tactical victory was a strategic loss. Except for a few furtive sorties its fleet dared not put out to sea again. Any further encounter with the Grand Fleet was viewed as suicide. This reduced the surface navy to performing fleet support duties, while leaving Britain to rule the seas. Even Admiral Reinhard Scheer, the commander of the High Seas Fleet and hero of Jutland, admitted to the Kaiser that the German navy could never defeat the British and that their only hope lay with submarines.⁴⁹

Neither Tirpitz nor his successor, Admiral Eduard von Capelle, embraced the idea of submarine warfare fully at first. They regarded it as too radical, not so much for warfare as for personnel management. Demonstrating the mentality of the naval leadership

during a secret session in the Reichstag, Capelle responded to the navy's critics by asking "what would happen to the organization and promotion [ladder] of the navy, if U-boats were to supplant battleships."⁵⁰ U-boats were generally commanded by lieutenants or lieutenant-commanders, whereas large ships were commanded by captains, and squadrons by admirals. To where would the higher-level officers of the capital ships be promoted if no large warships were built? The promotion and protection of the privileged officer-class was deemed more important than winning the war. Thus, the navy did not construct in any great numbers the only weapon which could possibly have won the war for Germany.

Monotony and inactivity soon took their toll on the surface fleet. Discontent arose at first primarily from the lack of action and was reflected in a popular slogan seen as graffiti on the walls in Wilhelmshaven: "Lieb' Vaterland, magst ruhig sein,/ die Flotte schläft im Hafen ein."⁵¹ The navy was losing its status among the people. Feeling this loss of prestige the officer corps attributed the inactivity of the fleet to overly cautious government policies. Many officers sought to transfer from the navy to the army. Both the growing unrest among the officers and their vociferous denunciations of the civilian government would later have dire consequences for both the navy and Germany.

Officers and enlisted men alike were disgruntled at not winning fame and glory like the submarines were doing. Unfortunately for surface sailors this meant suffering under the hands of the discontented officers. In his diary of life on the battleship SMS Helgoland Seaman Richard Stumpf noted that the sailors were extremely happy at the prospect of taking on the British:

Our joy and excitement were boundless and lasted until late into the night.... All of us breathed a sigh of relief. The very thing for which we had so long waited and hoped, the thing we had yearned for and feared, had come true.⁵²

Made public after the war, Stumpf's honest, nonpartisan, and perceptive diary reflects the feelings and attitudes of the majority of sailors in the Imperial Navy.

The euphoria felt by the sailors at the outbreak of war soon dissipated. Inactivity, constant drills, and tension with the officers served to intensify the conflict and lower the sailors' morale. No effort was made on the part of the German navy to address the spiritual, intellectual or physical needs of the crews. Unlike in the British navy, there were no organized activities such as sports, theatre or movies. Nor did the officers attempt to advise the sailors on either the course of the war, or of the navy's place in it. As well, the enlisted men were rarely granted shore leave. On the grounds of secrecy and security they were kept in their 'iron prisons.' Officers, meanwhile, could live ashore and obtain leave at any time. This physical and social separation was primarily a result of the caste-spirit of the officer corps. Officers believed that, in order to maintain order and authority, they had to remain separate and aloof from the enlisted men.

However, even in 1916 the men, socialists and anti-militarists among them, were still patriotic and keen to fight. Just before the Battle of Jutland in May 1916, Stumpf joyously described his reaction to the captain's statement that they would attack enemy shipping and warships off the Norwegian coast:

Finally, finally --- At last the momentous event which for twenty-two months has been the object of our longings, emotions and thoughts has arrived! For many years we have hoped, worked and drilled with great fervor for this.⁵³

One of the leaders of the 1917 rebellion, Seaman Wilhelm Weber, wrote that after the Battle of Jutland both the morale of the crew and its relationship to the officers improved. Stoker Willi Sachse also expressed a similar sentiment.⁵⁴ Weber believed that if the men had only seen more action, if life on board had not been so numbingly monotonous, and if the crews had received regular shore leave their spirit would have remained healthy, and mutiny might have been avoided.⁵⁵

The events in the summer of 1917 had three causes; the officers' increasing and unwarranted harassment of the crew, the bitter conflict between the enlisted men and

officers over fair distribution of rations, and the wide difference of opinion between officers and crew with regard to Germany's foreign and domestic policies. The fleet's periods of inactivity after the Battle of Jutland gave time for these conflicts to fester and grow. Stumpf noted the effect of all this on his shipmates, who began objecting to almost every regulation and measure. As he wrote in his diary, "Since we have such limited contact with the actual war we wage a sort of internal war among ourselves on the ship."⁵⁶ Often sailors would intentionally overstay their leaves just so they could go to jail and escape life aboard.⁵⁷ The awful, callous treatment suffered by the crews at the hands of the officers cannot be understated. Stumpf, who witnessed the strike of 1917 and was a minor participant in the rebellion of 1918, was a devout monarchist, nationalist and Catholic. However, despite his conservatism he despised the officers:

Truly, if I still possessed even a shred of honour, I would have had to jump at the scoundrel's [officer's] throat. There may come a day when I shall lose control over myself. If it were not for my parents and relatives, I would long since have vented my wrath on one of these fellows who has done everything in his power to destroy my ideals, my love of the Fatherland and my sense of justice. Our military system has accomplished what no book, no newspaper and no Socialist could ever have done. I have learned to hate and despise its authority more than anything else in the world. This authority is not based on any distinctive superiority but relies solely on the fear of the paragraphs of the naval code of justice.⁵⁸

Added to these intolerable conditions was the food shortage in the aptly named Turnip Winter of 1916-1917 when the German people had almost nothing but turnips to eat. While the sailors had very little nutritious food the officers continued to eat well. One of the very few enlisted men to become an officer, Joachim Ringelnatz, recorded his experience on board: as an enlisted man he had been hungry most of the time, but as an officer he was always well fed.⁵⁹ Had the officers shared the same food and dangers with the sailors -- as was the case in the Submarine Service where morale was invariably higher -- conflict might have been avoided.

News that the officers were taking enlisted men's rations to provide for their own families reached even the civilian population. As usual, the naval leadership did nothing substantive to correct the problem and continued to ignore the sailors' pleas for enough food, even though they were constantly hungry. The response of one officer to these pleas is both illuminating and disturbing, and characterizes the officers' attitude in general:

Today some men stepped forward requesting more bread. There is no more bread. Therefore you will have to go hungry. In case one of you should starve to death, I shall be only too glad to have him buried with full honours....⁶⁰

By this time the enlisted men were both physically and emotionally run-down. As well, with the inactivity of the fleet and no decisive land victory in sight, many sailors felt it was time for a negotiated peace settlement. The officers, by contrast, wanted to press on and fight. In the spring of 1917 this significant political rift between officers and men of the surface fleet would figure prominently in causing the sailors to unite and form a resistance against the officers. Sailors viewed the officers' desired continuation of the war as proof that the officers wanted to maintain the class system in order to exploit their privileges even further. In the fall of 1916 Stumpf wrote of his growing enmity towards the officer caste and its policies:

Nevertheless my hatred for the navy keeps growing. I now realize better than ever before, how stupid we really are to do all the work while those who merely look on get all the pay. We live in an unjust and evil world. Should the opportunity ever arise, I will be only too happy to make it better. Damn the officers! Never again shall they be allowed to drag us into war! Let them either practice some honourable profession or drop dead! They shall no longer earn a living from our stupidity and grow fat on our money.⁶¹

Sensing the strong, widespread sentiments of defeatism and war-weariness throughout the country, Germany's military leaders looked for a quick victory at any cost. The leadership of both the army and navy realized that losing the war meant radical social and political change. For the German military establishment, winning the war meant not only maintaining its position of power and privilege, but also avoiding democratization.

Thus, in the fall of 1916 they hoped to end the war quickly by once more attempting unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917.

The civilian political scene was heating up as well and in the spring of 1917 precipitated a domestic political battle. Strengthening its ties with the conservative, anti-democratic, civilian ruling classes - the Junkers and industrialists -- the military became much more political. The opposing parties and Reichstag majority responded with an increased call for democratic reforms and peace.

Meanwhile, the navy still refused to offer the sailors any concessions. Officers harangued the sailors against socialism, against the peace resolution and reform, all of which caused the sailors to fraternize even more with the civilian working-classes in the port towns and thereby become familiar with their politics. The sailors hoped that the March 1917 revolution in Russia might not only bring about an early peace, but also speed up the pace of reform in Germany. The revolution inspired leftist parties in Germany to call for reform and democratization. This led the Kaiser to give his famous Easter Message. It vaguely promised more democracy, which helped alleviate the strained, political atmosphere in Germany. By the spring of 1917 the enlisted men were much more interested in Germany's domestic and foreign policies. Thus, sailors' support grew for both the anti-war USPD and for the SPD, which the sailors believed supported the common man.

The officer corps was not above disobeying orders from the civilian government when it deemed them to be harmful to the navy.⁶² Thus, officers ignored not only the order to stop spreading political, conservative, Pan-Germanic propaganda, but also the order to set up enlisted men's food committees. By May 1917, officers had noted a growing unity among sailors and forbade them from engaging in any political activity whatever. In response to complaints, Admiral Capelle ordered on 20 June 1917 the

establishment of food complaint committees (Menagekommissionen) which were designed to provide a forum for sailors to discuss complaints about rations. Fearing these commissions could become political, naval officers opposed even this directive from Capelle. The officers' open disobedience to civilian policy decisions was another major cause of the revolt of 1917 and the later mutiny of 1918. By contrast, some sailors who were later involved in a movement calling for peace without annexation were arrested and received long prison terms or else were executed. These officers who had earlier disobeyed the government, however, were never punished, and astonishingly, some even sat in judgment on the aforementioned sailors.

The first case of organized resistance was reported on SMS Friedrich der Große; a group of stokers had refused to carry out its duties until previously-cut soap rations were restored. The officers relented. Anti-war slogans then began appearing aboard: "Down with the war! We want Peace!", and down with the aristocrats, "Was sind die deutschen Soldaten? \Weisse Sklaven! \Nieder mit den Aristokraten! \Hoch die weissen Sklaven!"⁶³

The sailors complaints about food fell on deaf ears. They lost confidence and hope in their superiors and soon began holding meetings in taverns or remote corners of a ship to discuss their plight. At first the topics concerned food and rations, but inevitably expanded to include war, peace and politics. Some socialist newspapers were still available which offered material for discussion, outside news, as well as a contrasting point of view to those of the officers.

Two leaders to emerge from these disorganized gatherings were Willi Sachse and Max Reichpietsch. Sachse was a well-read 22-year-old stoker from SMS Friedrich der Große. From the same ship came Max Reichpietsch, who proved to be a puzzle not only to his comrades, but to naval authorities and lawyers, and even to post-war historians.

Reichpietsch came from a working-class district in Berlin and in 1912 had volunteered for the navy. Continually running into trouble, he was arrested several times and soon became bitter about his demotion and imprisonment. In June 1917 he visited a USPD-deputy in Berlin. Upon returning to his ship he assured his fellow sailors that they had the active support of the USPD, and thus began organizing support for the party among the sailors.

On the morning of 2 August 1917 several hundred sailors of SMS Prinzregent Luitpold walked off the ship to the little town of Rüstiersiel near Wilhelmshaven. Explaining the purpose of the walk-out was another leader of the sailors, Stoker Alwin Köbis from SMS Prinzregent Luitpold: "Comrades of the Third Watch! We are walking out in order to protest ... [the impending imprisonment of our fellow stokers]." ⁶⁴ The sailors gathered happily in a tavern where Köbis again addressed them, telling them that in a couple of weeks they would be joined by over 1500 men from other ships. He concluded his talk by asserting that, "WE are the true patriots! Down with the war! We no longer want to fight this war!" ⁶⁵ Later that morning the men returned to the ship.

Back at the ship, Köbis and the other leader of the march from SMS Prinzregent Luitpold, Stoker First Class Johann Beckers, realized the gravity of the situation. Members of the ship's Menagekommission advised an officer that the reason for the walk-out was the unfair punishment of their fellow sailors. Promising to drop the charges the captain placated the crew, who then returned to work. However, the ship was soon put on alert and was to head out to sea. Köbis and Beckers managed to get a note to Sachse which read, "Ship sailing out, under state of siege. If no news in three days, strike!" ⁶⁶ The arrest of its leaders subsequently stifled the movement aboard SMS Prinzregent Luitpold.

These events constitute the mutiny of 1917. It resulted in 10 death sentences, two of which were actually carried out, and a number of lesser sentences totalling 360 years imprisonment. Whether it was actually a mutiny, as the Germany navy asserted, or

merely a walk-out or wildcat strike, was the subject of a passionate debate with charges and counter-charges flying between politicians, historians and officers from each end of the political spectrum. An objective examination of the course of events within the listed men's ranks after Reichpietsch's visit to Berlin up to the revolt reveals the true character of the movement.

In June 1917 the sailors' movement was barely discernible. Sailors were primarily concerned with living conditions, rations and maltreatment from the officers. They were neither very interested in, nor knowledgeable about political affairs. However, as most sailors were from working-class families, they were familiar with class-differences and trade-unionism. When their demands fell on deaf ears the sailors resorted to familiar trade-union concepts such as self-organization, strikes and collective bargaining. Yet, organization takes time and only aboard SMS Prinzregent Luitpold did it happen relatively quickly. On 6 June the crew had gone on a small hunger strike. This had resulted in promises from the officers for change which never materialized. Significantly, this strike occurred before the order for food commissions had been made public and before there was any connection with any political party. This hunger strike constitutes the first time sailors voluntarily organized in solidarity against the officers.

Very interested in philosophy, twenty-five year-old Johann Beckers was both a former miner and member of the Free Socialist youth movement. A devotee of Nietzsche and Stirner -- like Plievier himself -- he too displayed anarchist leanings, viewed all wars as morally wrong, and therefore supported the SPD's demands for peace without annexation. He did not see the sailors' movement as having any political function.⁶⁷

Beckers' co-leader was twenty-five year-old Alwin Köbis, a machinist from a working-class district in Berlin. Bored with his life and eager for change, Köbis had served over three years in several merchantmen prior to enlisting in the navy. Never active in

politics he had studied socialism and philosophy. Like Beckers, he was an anarchist, though more impulsive and direct. This was reflected in his less than stellar disciplinary record which reveals ten punishments in five years. Köbis, Beckers and the crew in SMS Prinzregent Luitpold decided to form a sailors' council (Soldatenbund) in order to raise grievances regarding food, and to coordinate any future strikes. In order to better empower the organization and broaden its base, they believed that contact with sailors of other ships should be established. Thus, around late June 1917 both Beckers and Köbis contacted Max Reichpietsch and Willi Sachse, the leaders of a sailors' movement aboard the flagship SMS Friedrich der Große.

The movement under Köbis and Beckers in SMS Prinzregent Luitpold generally reflected the true sentiments of the majority of sailors. Here the Soldatenbund dealt with conditions and abuses in the ship and sought to better the sailors' lot. By contrast, the movement in SMS Friedrich der Große under Sachse and Reichpietsch was somewhat politically motivated and relatively more sophisticated. After Reichpietsch's return from Berlin, part of the movement's aim on the flagship was to recruit members for the USPD, and to establish a party organization in the navy and organize a general peace strike.

Word of the successful hunger strike in SMS Prinzregent Luitpold spread throughout the fleet. It became the model for other ships whose sailors wanted to improve their living conditions. On 5 July 1917 in SMS Friedrich der Große occurred the second successful hunger strike in the fleet. Significantly, the sailors aboard the flagship staged their strike before Reichpietsch had time to politically indoctrinate them. Proving to themselves they could prevail by offering a united front, the 500 crew members held firm against the officers' threats of violence. Capitulating completely, the captain allowed the sailors to establish a Menagekommission, even though they had not demanded one. Reichpietsch, Sachse and Weber, a sailor with a history of disciplinary punishments but a good speaker, were elected to head it. Their duties included not only handling food

grievances, but all grievances in general. Thus, the first real all-purpose grievance committee was established. It served as a model to the rest of the fleet.

Originally, many communist historians viewed the strike as a successful organization of the men by socialist-leaning sailors such as Reichpietsch and Sachse. In reality, however, the strike was more spontaneous than organized, for the crew had already known about the successful strike in SMS Prinzregent Luitpold. Later, these historians tempered their interpretation of the strike with the acknowledgements that the socialists in the sailors' movement were never well organized nor very purposeful.⁶⁸ Besides, it is doubtful that these few men could have organized the crews if conditions had not already motivated the sailors. Reichpietsch had only just returned from the Reichstag two weeks earlier so hardly had time to recruit and propagandize an entire ship's crew. The fact that the sailors had never demanded a grievance committee, and were taken aback when the captain conceded to the Menagekommissionen, further supports the claim of the apolitical nature of the strike.

The success of both ships in establishing food commissions in early July gave great impetus to crews in other ships to press for changes and concessions were granted in almost every instance. For example, after a complaint committee was established in SMS Helgoland the crew successfully held a strike. Although forced back to work by armed officers, the men's actions went unpunished. This was a remarkable change of events given that shortly before such an act would have meant court-martial and imprisonment. In SMS Helgoland Stumpf wrote that though the food improved, long-term change seemed unlikely. After talking with sailors, however, he reflected on their still hopeful mood: "one might almost believe that the events in Russia are about to be repeated here."⁶⁹

Sailors discovered that through determination and good organization they could successfully employ trade-unionist methods to achieve their goals. Indeed, these various

actions by the sailors are very similar to the industrial conflicts experienced before the war; their successes were bound to lead to a serious crisis in the High Seas Fleet.

The officers' weak and ineffectual action against the sailors was probably due to an unwillingness to demonstrate any loss of control over their crews. Had all the strikes been severely punished, the publicity might have shed unwanted light on the surface officers' poor leadership and maltreatment of the enlisted men. The surface officers' Kastengeist naturally caused them to protect one another.

In July 1917 the political atmosphere in Germany was tense and tumultuous. In the Reichstag the moderate parties such as the SPD, the National Liberals, the Progressives and the Center formed a committee in order to press the government to call for both domestic reform and peace without annexation. On 19 July 1917 the committee was successful in getting the new chancellor, Georg Michaelis, to accept the peace resolution and proclaim it as the government's official peace policy. It was widely supported by both the war-weary general population and the enlisted men, who believed that despite efforts by conservatives and annexationists the war would soon end.

What had begun among the sailors as a reaction against abuses threatened to turn into a political peace movement despite itself. Given his position as head of the Menagekommission in SMS Friedrich der Große, Reichpietsch's influence had broadened. Other ships sent delegates to him to learn how they could establish their own councils. Reichpietsch spoke with shipmates, urging affiliation with the USPD. Realizing that the sailors were generally not politically inclined, however, he used their war-weariness and desire for peace to help with his recruiting while keeping politics to a minimum. This explains why he asked sailors to sign a list supporting the International Socialist Congress in Stockholm, whose topic was how to end the war. Reichpietsch had correctly judged the mood of the sailors, for many signed the lists simply as a means of expressing their

opposition to the war and their desire for peace. Many actually joined the USPD because of its strong pro-peace stance. Estimates suggest that in July and August 1917 some 5,000 enlisted men joined the USPD.⁷⁰ Yet, even after other sailors and stokers had contacted the party, the USPD had little influence in the fleet.

Only Reichpietsch remained convinced of USPD support. However, it took Reichpietsch a month before he broached the subject of a strike. Both Sachse and Weber were skeptical of such an action. Their views of social democracy did not allow for strikes and violence. They could not believe such actions would be supported by the USPD, no matter how much Reichpietsch contended that they were.

While Reichpietsch vigorously pursued his goals, it was a speech on 20 July by Alfred Herre, former editor of a socialist newspaper, to an audience of sailors in Wilhelmshaven which served to coalesce and galvanize the fragmentary and divided sailors' movement. The best evidence suggests that despite its innocuousness, Mr. Herre's speech contained enough ambiguities and opinions to render it open to interpretation. He spoke of peace without annexation and war credits. Herre clearly opposed violence and told the enlisted men they could neither become paying members of the USPD nor collect money for the party. He had not said anything that the sailors had not heard before.

Perhaps both awed by Herre's status and impressed by his apparent affirmation of Reichpietsch's actions, the politically naive sailors interpreted the speech as having a more radical content than was actually the case. They saw it as a call to action. Later confirming this, Sachse stated that the sailors frequently discussed the speech and presumed it demonstrated official USPD support of their program.⁷¹ Sachse further stated that political meetings among the sailors in support of the July Peace resolution became common place. Supporting this view, Beckers reported that shortly thereafter hundreds of sailors joined the USPD. Reichpietsch called for a revolution against the officers, which should emulate

the revolution in Russia. However, demonstrating just how deeply he had misunderstood Herre, Reichpietsch supported the use of violence, if necessary, against the officers.

The sailors' movement in July 1917 can best be described as a spontaneous, mostly apolitical expression of the men's dissatisfaction; a movement that had no cohesive leadership, and no concrete contacts with the USPD nor its support. Later accusations from the right and exaggerated claims from the left that the rebellion of August 1917 in SMS Prinzregent Luitpold was politically influenced are not true.

Although delegates from various ships met in an abandoned railway car to discuss the officers' arbitrariness, they discussed neither politics, the USPD, nor peace.⁷² The only way they knew how to oppose the officers was to strike. Köbis suggested leaving ship for no more than three hours thus minimizing the impact on the ship's state of readiness. In light of the officers' previous weak actions with regard to strikes and walkouts, the delegates did not think they would be severely punished. Indeed, naval authorities had regarded most of the earlier actions simply as pranks.

Thus, on the morning of 2 August the sailors had walked off their ship to Rüstersiel in good humour with no foreboding of the coming events. Their intention had not been to mutiny but simply to repeat an action similar to those that had occurred in other ships earlier in the summer. Reflecting an awaking sense of trade-unionism and solidarity, the sailors were striking for their rights. Upon returning to the ship the sailors faced charges of political conspiracy and mutiny. However, there is little to support these charges. Clearly, the spontaneous character of the walkout and its lack of both political stewardship and political demands demonstrate the sailors' apolitical nature and naivety.

It was probably Captain v. Hornhardt of SMS Prinzregent Luitpold who first imputed to the movement a political influence.⁷³ His report accused the USPD of recruiting and agitating in the ships, and of disseminating information through socialist

newspapers. His report ensured that any future investigations and actions would concern themselves with political issues, and not with conditions aboard ship. Some officers blamed foreign agents, an idea at which Stumpf scoffed by insightfully remarking that the officers "have no idea what a tremendous guilt they bear."⁷⁴ Significantly, naval interrogators quickly accepted the notion of a political influence. They concluded that the enlisted men had no grounds for complaints, and that the movement and strike must therefore have been politically motivated. They ignored Beckers' and Köbis' denials of any political influence and refused to listen to the sailors' side of the story or to anything else that might weaken their case. Triggering the "Stab-in-the-Back" (Dolchstoß) legend, the investigators were intent on shifting blame from the officers to both the enlisted men and USPD.

On 3 August eighteen men of SMS Prinzregent Luitpold who were thought to be leaders of the walk-out were arrested and removed from the ship. In light of previous strikes, and subsequent leniency on other ships, the men were not worried. Indeed, Admiral Scheer was at first inclined to dismiss the strike and believed that there were indeed abuses which needed to be rectified. Probably influenced by the report of the captain and other commanders, however, and by the results of the interrogation of the sailors, Scheer reversed his position and adopted the belief that the strike was politically motivated. The navy's subsequent fall into mutiny and chaos was precipitated by the navy's own legal personnel, who not only conducted both the contrived interrogations and the ensuing trial, but who also dominated the court martial panels and issued the sentences.

Interrogations of the men involved in the walkout began on 6 August when legal counsel Dr. Dobring interrogated Beckers. Setting the tone for Beckers' and for all ensuing interrogations, Dobring introduced Beckers as "one of the death candidates." Although Beckers admitted sympathizing with the USPD, he adamantly maintained that the strike was nonpolitical and did not implicate any of his fellow sailors.

The interrogation of Sachse had gone much differently. When Sachse entered the interrogation room Dobring had on his desk both a revolver and a drawing of a gallows. He then asked Sachse to choose between the two. Hoping for a lighter sentence by declaring that he had been led astray by USPD deputies, the fearful and opportunistic Sachse confessed to what Dobring wanted to hear. This confession on 8 August completely changed the nature and direction of the case. Sachse advised the delighted Dobring of the movement in SMS Friedrich der Große and of Reichpietsch's visit to the USPD in Berlin. He also revealed the names of the leaders of the sailors' movement and advised Dobring that Beckers and Köbis had told him to call a strike three days after their arrest. Perhaps the most important point Sachse reported to Dobring was the existence of an organization headquartered in SMS Friedrich der Große which supported and worked for the USPD. Thus, by exaggerating Sachse's testimony, Dobring, supported by Admiral Scheer, claimed the existence of a well-organized USPD-supported sailors' movement throughout the fleet.

Reichpietsch proved to be a very unwilling witness. Only through strenuous interrogation and threats was Dobring able to elicit a confession about Reichpietsch's connections with the USPD. Thus, with confessions from Sachse and Reichpietsch, Dobring managed to coerce testimony from other prisoners. This corroborated the thesis of an organized, political movement. Both Beckers and Köbis had initially resisted Dobring's coercive methods and had remained silent. However, upon learning about the confessions of the other sailors, they confessed in mid-August to their involvement.

Weber reported that Dobring "excelled at suggesting testimony" by giving a political connotation to most everything a sailor might say. The fearful, browbeaten, politically naive sailors were no match for Dobring and other interrogators.

As with other courts martial, the trial of Weber, Reichpietsch, Sachse, Beckers and Köbis was little more than a formality. Accomplishing its aim the trial's sole purpose was to exculpate the officers and attribute all the blame to the enlisted men and the USPD. The only evidence presented was that of the pre-trial interrogations. No issue was made of the abuses and conditions suffered by the sailors. The navy and its officers were thus exonerated. Courts martial of other sailors followed the same pattern. Of major significance is that no USPD representatives were called to testify at the trial. Had they been called in they would have destroyed the prosecution's case and aroused publicity. Indeed, a political presence might have prevented the prosecution from obtaining the death sentences which the navy felt was imperative to maintain discipline in the fleet. The navy's whole case was based primarily on Sachse's testimony.

After the show-trial the officers of the court-martial board reached their foregone conclusion and handed out five death sentences for treason. The court's decision was disputed by several naval legal authorities of the time. Even the legal counselor of Admiral Scheer, Judge-Advocate-General de Barry, advised Scheer that the verdict might be legally untenable and to therefore commute the death sentences.⁷⁵ Admiral Scheer had the final word with regard to the fate of the condemned. However, Scheer was convinced that his officers could not be responsible for the enlisted men's behavior, and that it must be due to political interference from the USPD. On 3 September 1917 he commuted three death sentences, but not those of Reichpietsch and Köbis. Scheer later wrote in his memoirs that he did not commute the death sentences of the two ringleaders, Reichpietsch and Köbis, in order to "demonstrate the enormity of their crime to the crews in order to warn them against any future attempts, [and] for the maintenance of discipline."⁷⁶ Scheer had issued pardons to the three who had duly repented and acquiesced to the interrogators. Naturally, Sachse was one of these; another was Weber who had repudiated violence, was a member of the SPD, and claimed to have intended to leave the movement.

Claiming he was an anarchist opposed to any organizations, Beckers was pardoned. On the other hand, the sentences of Reichpietsch and Köbis were upheld. Köbis had not cooperated fully and had made some rather radical statements. Reichpietsch was even less inclined to get leniency. He had never shown contrition and was, according to the court, guilty of introducing politics into the fleet.

Thus, for reasons of politics, military discipline and judicial expediency, Admiral Scheer and other naval leaders clearly committed a crime which has at times been described as "an inexplicable miscarriage of justice," "judicial murder" and "legal murder."⁷⁷ The tone of the interrogations, the show trial with its exclusion of key witnesses, and Scheer's denying the Kaiser an opportunity to grant a Imperial pardon leads to the conclusion that the navy had sacrificed Reichpietsch and Köbis intentionally.

On 5 September 1917 at 7:03 am at the Wahn Firing Range near Köln, Reichpietsch and Köbis were executed by firing squad. Soon thereafter Reichpietsch and Köbis were made into martyrs by the extreme left in civilian Germany and other countries. Songs and announcements were written in their memory and to stir up revolutionary feelings among the working-class and the sailors.

Naval officers viewed the guilty verdicts based on USPD complicity as a way to exonerate themselves and regain public respect. Their pride, honour, professional reputation, Kastengeist and social position did not allow them to contemplate their own guilt. In order to show the guilt of the USPD deputies a public trial was needed. Thus, the navy had to be prepared to enter politics and perhaps cause a political crisis. Scheer wrote Capelle, urging immediate political prosecution of the USPD. He also urged the Kaiser that strong action was needed against the USPD-deputies even though these had parliamentary immunity. Chancellor Michaelis was in agreement. He was under increasing attack from the Reichstag majority and the USPD for opposing the peace resolution.

Therefore, he had to rely increasingly on the military to oppose the power of the Reichstag. Thus, rather than correcting conditions in the navy and thereby placating the sailors, the navy conducted a political witch-hunt which only served to perpetuate and worsen conditions in the navy. This eventually caused a second, more widespread mutiny in the navy in November 1918.

The officers reviled the government, blaming it for not letting the navy itself deal with the problem of mutiny. This myth that the navy could have handled the rebellion and other problems itself was vehemently proclaimed by the admirals even after the war and was espoused as late as 1962 by Lieutenant Förste of the navy.⁷⁸

Demonstrating their complete lack of understanding, the officers set out on a course of repression rather than reform. Believing that most sailors were still loyal, however, the officers' solution was to transfer the suspected agitators and troublemakers to the naval stations in Wilhelmshaven and Kiel or else to the Naval Infantry Brigade in Flanders. Many were merely sailors against whom officers bore a grudge or who had poor navy records. By concentrating in the shore installations troublemakers of questionable political orientation, as well as sailors with disciplinary problems and bad attitudes, the authorities themselves set the stage for revolt. It would be exactly these elements in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven which in November 1918 would rise up and mutiny.

The navy banned all USPD-connected publications and prohibited the sailors from attending any rallies or party meetings. Meanwhile, with great hypocrisy the officers subjected the sailors to an unending barrage of Pan-Germanic propaganda. Through the winter of 1917-18 the navy remained gripped by the fear that another rebellion would break out. The slightest indication that the sailors were planning similar, rebellious action was met with swift punishment. Petty and arbitrary treatment at the hands of the officers continued unabated. Had the naval authorities stopped the abuses of the officers against

the men it might have prevented another rebellion. However, into the last year of the Imperial Navy, the officers' attitudes of superiority continued as did the enlisted men's ever-growing feelings of anger, frustration and alienation.

Directionless after the arrest of its leaders, the sailors' movement dissolved. In the spring of 1918 the enlisted men's rations were cut yet again, and hunger became commonplace. By this time the enlisted men detested the officer corps so much that open rebellion was inevitable. The appalling handling of the mutiny, the executions, four years of war and mistreatment by officers had pushed the enlisted men to their limit.

Centrist Chancellor Georg von Hertling, who had replaced Michaelis, resigned office and was succeeded by Prince Max von Baden, a liberal who would head the reformist government. By the end of October 1918 his reform proposals had been passed and Germany became a democratic, parliamentary monarchy. The ruling classes - the industrialists, the land-owning aristocracy and both the naval and army officer corps - were sent reeling by this change. The officers were bitter, afraid, and despondent at both their military and political defeat. The sailors, workers and soldiers, by contrast, were relieved and welcomed the change.

In the fall of 1918 the admirals had intended to order the Imperial Navy out on a mission against Britain. Though the officers believed the mission heroic, it was in reality desperately suicidal, with no chance of success. The enlisted men caught wind of this and were outraged not only because it was a waste of lives, but because the armistice was near at hand. They refused to sail out and were consequently branded as traitors by naval authorities. When threatened with harsh punishment sailors throughout the navy rebelled in open mutiny, thus destroying the power base of the moribund officer corps.

Clearly, the cause of the German navy's downfall was the admirals' rebellion against the government. The upper levels of the officer corps were locked in their caste

mentality. They could accept neither a parliamentary government nor defeat in war, nor their loss of prestige and position of power. Thus, they rebelled against Prince Max von Baden's government.

As well, there was Scheer's determination to make a name for himself as well as to satisfy his officers' urgent calls for action by pushing through a large but belated submarine-building program even though the war was almost over. This was not due to any sound military reasoning but rather to reasons of honour and prestige: he was unwilling to command an inactive and impotent fleet. Scheer relented only because he and other naval officers had devised an alternate plan - the suicide mission against Britain. They believed that if successful, this risky sortie would ensure the fleet a future after the war and uplift the low morale of the German people. Indicative of the naval officers' attitudes, Vice Admiral Adolf von Trotha, supported by Admirals von Hipper and Scheer, said that the primary objective was a final, decisive battle from which, if it ended in death, a new High Seas Fleet would arise. He believed that "dying with honour, is still worthwhile" but if the fleet remained "shackled by a humiliating peace" it would have no future.⁷⁹

Scheer kept the planned suicide mission secret from both the Kaiser and Prince Max as they would not have been willing participants. In a clear deception, if not insubordination and outright mutiny, Scheer assured Prince Max of the loyalty of the navy when the latter had implored Scheer to have the navy avoid any incidents which might disrupt the peace negotiations.

Immediately after the enlisted men thwarted the mission, the navy began its process of deception and myth-making which it would determinedly and vehemently reiterate for years. One excuse was that the British were about to attack and had therefore acted defensively. After the war the navy attempted unconvincingly to justify Scheer's

unscrupulous actions. With polemic finery Scheer himself tried vainly in 1926 to defend his actions. For in May 1917 the Kaiser had clearly stated that with regard to any battle with unfavourable odds against a superior foe, he himself would have the final word.⁸⁰ For years the navy continued its lies unabashedly, claiming that the attack was only intended to sever the enemy's lines of communications or that it was to prevent Britain from invading Holland through Flanders. In 1925 the Stab-in-the-Back Trial would finally illuminate the issue, forcing the officers to admit that the real motive had been a final glorious, battle against Britain. However, the navy again twisted fact, stating that the mission would actually have been a success had it been allowed to carry it out. This even though the British had a two to one edge in ships.

Drawn from the proletarian ranks, the enlisted men could not be expected to agree with the officers' concept of an honourable death. With the decline of the military establishment the sailors' faith and fear in its power disappeared. When it was time to sail out on the suicide mission on 27 October the sailors offered widespread, passive resistance.

In a fateful decision which would have dire consequences for the navy, Hipper ordered the Third Squadron to sail to Kiel. This order only served to spread the rebellion. Not knowing what to do in the face of the rebellion, the officer corps panicked. Both Trotha and Hipper vacillated and hesitated, offering their officers no direction. Trotha attempted to shift blame to other commanders. By 2 November Hipper, attempting to shift blame away from the navy leadership, was claiming that the movement was a Bolshevik conspiracy. Other naval commanders were not above blaming each other for the resistance movement. Without government support -- having earlier rebelled against it -- the collapse of the officer corps was rapid and complete. Lacking strong decisive leadership the officers, trained to obey orders from superiors, acted with uncertainty and fell into chaos. Neither lies of Bolshevik involvement nor assertions of loyalty to the government could

save them. The admirals rebellion, their Flottenvorstoß, and their inability to deal with the enlisted men's justified rebellion made it impossible for the crews to continue their blind obedience to the officers. These officers, who had so ardently espoused Pan-Germanism, heroism, and militarism, were unable or unwilling to back up their words with action. Most officers buckled under the challenge and indeed only four officers risked their lives to defend the honour of the navy. The Imperial Navy was collapsing.

On 7 November, after their rebellion was triumphant in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven and after the navy's authority had collapsed, sailors of the Third Squadron presented their modest demands. Lacking any political agenda or revolutionary ideology, and reflecting the sentiments of the enlisted men throughout the navy, these demands refute the navy's claims of Bolshevik influence. Indeed, the sailors made efforts to assure the Secretary of the Navy that Bolshevism had not crept into the navy. The sailors demanded the release of their comrades, the abolition of monarchies in Germany, universal franchise, amnesty for all prisoners, freedom of speech and press, fair treatment by their superiors, and a prominent Independent Socialist be sent to Kiel. Their demands dealt with their situation and circumstances and were hardly a call for mass revolution.

Gustav Noske, a government representative sent to Kiel, reported that there did not seem to be any real leaders of the movement. Rather, it all seemed to be confused and unorganized. This refutes the navy's conspiracy theory. For had there been Bolshevik or even USPD influence, there certainly would have been leadership and direction. The local leaders of the USPD and the sailors in general did not oppose Noske's plan to take command of the movement. Needing a leader and looking to restore order, the sailors displayed their political naivety by electing Noske head of the Sailors' Council.

Sailors streamed out of Kiel, spreading the rebellion along the coast to every naval station and eventually throughout all of Germany. In Hamburg sailors waged a

successful propaganda campaign. They joined local workers and dissidents and began disarming officers. By morning they easily controlled the town. Similar events occurred in Bremen, Cuxhaven and Wilhelmshaven. The speed of both the collapse of the naval authority, the navy's fortress of Wilhelmshaven, and of the High Seas Fleet itself was due more to the ineptitude and paralysis of the officer corps and its leaders than to the strength or determination of the rebel sailors.⁸¹ A chain reaction was under way reflecting not only the crumbling military establishment but also the collapse of a governmental system which, like the navy, was ruled by a small, privileged class which relied on the compliance and support of the masses. Like the naval leadership, this ruling civilian class was discredited with the loss of the war. Without the support of the masses it inevitably fell. Thus the navy, pride of the Empire reflecting the spirit of its ruling groups, was the cause of the November Revolution in Germany which ended the Empire.

Des Kaisers Kulis is for the most part the story of the German Imperial Navy. Thus, the preceding examination also serves as an abstract of the novel.

Chapter 4

Des Kaisers Kulis: Historicity and Ideology.

When Plievier was writing Des Kaisers Kulis the literature concerning Germany, the war and the Imperial Navy was largely political, partisan and polemic. Particularly reflective of this acrimony were the proceedings of the Reichstag Investigating Committee 1919-1928, established to debate both Germany's defeat in World War I and its ensuing collapse. In 1924 the debate became extremely heated when rightist politicians and writers accused the radical socialists and other leftists of inciting the sailors into acts of subversion and rebellion in 1917-18. Attempting to refute these charges, the left replied with a litany of accusations: defeat was caused by the bad food, by a profound war-weariness and a strong desire for peace, by the officers' ill-treatment of the sailors and the sailors' refusal to sacrifice themselves for the officers' honour. Fueling the Stab-in-the-Back legend, many former officers alleged that Germany had lost the war due to the treasonable activity of leftist political parties.⁸²

This debate raged on during the infamous Dolchstoß Trial in Munich in which the right accused the left, particularly the USPD, of treason against Germany. Indeed, most of the published diaries and war-memoirs in post-war Germany were from officers, among them Admiral von Trotha, or well-known rightist politicians, who defended their actions and/or attacked and accused the political left of treason and subversion.⁸³ Very few enlisted men appeared before the Reichstag Investigating Committee, and even fewer had published their war-memoirs. Thus, the voice of the common sailor was drowned out under the vociferous and fervent arguments of conservatives and former officers. However, the voice of one sailor was heard clearly at the proceedings. Seaman Richard Stumpf not only appeared before the committee, but in 1926 much of his six-volume diary was read into the minutes. Indeed, attesting to its importance and insight, Stumpf's diary

was the only memoir published in the committee's minutes. It presented a stark and honest picture of the deplorable conditions in the navy and the reasons for the sailors' revolt.

There were a few other published criticisms of the naval leadership at this time, one by a captain no less, but these were in the minority.⁸⁴ Reinforcing the patriotic, heroic image of the German Imperial Fleet was the navy's own official multi-volume record as well as the popular nationalistic pulp novels such as Ullstein's War Books.

Thus, Plievier had access to publications such as the Reichstag Investigating Committee's minutes, Stumpf's diary, the official naval records, the many, mostly conservative orientated war-memoirs, as well as the contemporary, heroic, popular literary fare. Added to this abundance of material containing a wide range of opinions were Plievier's own war-time experiences in the navy. Thus, in light of Plievier's earlier, impassioned endeavors as prophet and promulgator of his own ideology, the question arises as to whether we can infer a strategy of representation from Plievier's method of using his sources.

In the first eight chapters of his nine-chapter novel Plievier generally preserves historicity and verisimilitude. Events, battles, conditions in the navy, names of ships and leading figures, weaponry, and attitudes reflect actuality and are readily verifiable. Indeed, when describing in chapters 2-4 the reasons for the destruction of the sailors' confidence in the fleet leadership, Plievier follows closely the evidence given in June 1926 by retired secretary of the navy, Emil Alboldt, to the Reichstag's parliamentary committee of inquiry.⁸⁵ This objectifies and asserts the truthfulness of the novel's claim that it was the failure of the naval officer corps which caused both the sailors' loss of confidence in the leadership of the navy and the sailors' ultimate revolt. In the ninth chapter Plievier uses his sources essentially just for the depiction of the course of the sailors' revolt and of the naval

court trials of 1917. However, his selection, interpretation and depiction of other evidence and events attest to intentions other than a total, factual representation of history.

According to Müller, Plievier's depiction of the course of the sailors' revolt and the subsequent naval court trials up to the execution of the sentences of Reichpietsch and Köbis follows closely the report of Hans Beckers Wie ich zum Tode verurteilt wurde. Die Marinetragedie von 1917 (1928).⁸⁶ Beckers had also appeared as a witness before the Reichstag's committee of inquiry and had reported the same facts. Thus his version was also available in the published minutes of the committee's proceedings. Beckers had been sentenced to death for being a leading figure in the sailors' revolt aboard the warship SMS Prinzregent Luitpold. Claiming to the Reichstag's board of inquiry that he was not a member of an organized group but merely an individual-anarchist (Individualanarchist), he was later spared.

Plievier differs on several major points from what was known at the time from testimony given before the Reichstag's committee as well as from the many published reports and memoirs. Given the widely differing views of the time this is understandable. Most importantly, for the expression of his ideology in Des Kaisers Kulis Plievier denies any formation of organizations among the crew. He depicts the sailors' revolt of 1917 as an act of pure, spontaneous agreement occurring naturally between the sailors and stokers. Significantly, Plievier's novel omits any reference to the institution of the Menagekommission. In the Imperial Navy sailors had fought largely successfully for the implementation of these committees which assured crews the right to a voice regarding rations. In contrast to Plievier's version, Beckers, as well as naval officers and conservatives, asserted that the Menagekommissionen were very important for the spreading of the sailors' movement. According to Beckers, the sailors tried not only to expand the rights of the commissions, but also to have them serve as forums for discussions of politics and peace. Beckers also maintained that Köbis' leadership role in the

sailors' movement aboard SMS Prinzregent Luitpold was based on his capacity as spokesman of the Menagekommission. Plievier, however, portrays Köbis as a spontaneous leader of the sailors, free of any political or organizational influences.

Considering that in his own life Plievier had dismissed all organizations as irrelevant, it comes as no surprise that as well as omitting the Menagekommissionen, Plievier does not discuss in Des Kaisers Kulis any other type of organization nor the founding in several ships of a Soldatenbund or soldiers' council. Indeed, whenever Plievier had contact with organizations in his life there was inevitably friction. Even rejecting unionism, he had idealized the simple, free-thinking, independent scab worker as Unorganisierte and had elevated him above the workers' movement. Thus, the Soldatenbund is only mentioned once in the story. Significantly, it is brought up by the navy's judge-advocate, Dr. Dobring, who when interrogating the sailors was trying to prove the existence of a political influence on the sailors' movement.⁸⁷

Despite the evidence of Beckers and the overwhelming opinion of the right, Plievier also denies any political influence of the Independent Socialist Party (USPD) on the sailors' movement. Throughout the novel Plievier painstakingly demonstrates through the sailors' actions and dialogue that the reasons for their revolt were in no way influenced by politics. Indeed, politics and political parties remain significantly absent in Plievier's version. However, despite the clearly apolitical actions of the sailors throughout Des Kaisers Kulis, Plievier finds it necessary towards the end of the novel to describe precisely and clearly the reasons for the rebellion. In the novel's reconstruction of the naval court trials Plievier, as narrator, repeatedly and explicitly asserts that there was no connection whatever between the sailors' movement and the USPD. When the examining magistrate in the novel questions Köbis regarding the suspected connection with a political party, the narrator interpolates the remark that such connections exist only in the minds of the judges and in the testimony of the spies -- "nur in den Köpfen der Richter und den Angaben der

Spitzel" (Pl.294). In an important part of the novel just after the trial, Plievier asserts that while the interrogators insisted on the existence of some kind of political connection, it was really the sailors' hunger and the officers' arrogance which caused the spontaneous strikes and resistance:

Wo es in Wirklichkeit zu spontanen Ausbrüchen gegen den Hunger, gegen die Überheblichkeit der Offizierskaste und zu einer verzweifelten unorganisierten Abwehr gekommen ist, konstruieren die Untersuchungsrichter eine großzügig angelegte Verschwörung, die nur mit Hilfe einer politischen Partei in die Flotte hineingetragen worden sei. (Pl.296)

As narrator Plievier continues that while the examining judges manage to extract the confessions from the sailors, they are unable to reach what would be the crowning achievement of their work -- the USPD-deputies and the USPD itself. In the novel not only were the naval judges unable to prove USPD complicity, in a passage perceptive for its time Plievier as narrator also notes that there was hardly any political influence on the fleet whatsoever:

Nur die Krönung ihres Werkes gelingt ihnen nicht. Die Spitzelaussagen allein genügen nicht. An die Abgeordneten und die politische Partei können sie nicht heran. In der Tat, es gab auch kaum einen derartigen von außen in die Flotte hineingetragenen Einfluß. (Pl.296)

Thus, Plievier makes it absolutely clear that in his opinion there was no external influence on the sailors. Indeed, for the most part he is historically correct. While there was some degree of USPD intrusion into the fleet through Reichpietsch, its effects were minimal. For Plievier's ideological purposes in Des Kaisers Kulis, this weak, political influence supported his interpretation that the sailors' rebellion was a natural, spontaneous occurrence free of any external influence. Underscoring the notion that the sailors would have rebelled without any kind of political influence, Plievier as narrator makes the causes of the spontaneous rebellion abundantly clear. They were the long war, the meager and bad rations, and the officers' actions:

Drei Jahre Krieg? Der Kohlrübenwinter! Die Kluft zwischen der Back und der Messe! Das allmähliche Erkennen der ehrgeizigen und selbstsüchtigen Motive der Kriegstreiber! Das waren die Ursachen, dagegen richten sich die spontanen Erhebungen der Mannschaften. (Pl.296)

The above passages, taken from a single page in the novel, belabour Plievier's point. While the first eight chapters and beginning of the ninth demonstrate through the sailors' actions and attitudes the reasons for their rebellion, Plievier now finds it necessary to detail the causes as he sees them. With the polarized arguments and greatly conflicting testimony and evidence given at the time, it may seem surprising the Plievier came to this historically correct conclusion. However, Plievier would have had a fairly good understanding of conditions and attitudes in the navy, for he had himself been a sailor in the fleet. As well, his research into the Reichstag Investigating Committee's minutes would reveal Stumpf's and other sailors' testimony. However, even the testimony of other sailors such as Beckers offered conflicting views. To corroborate his version of events in Des Kaisers Kulis, Plievier quotes a passage from Stumpf's diary about an officer's abuse of a crippled soldier.⁸⁸ This supports Plievier's claim of historical verisimilitude as well as Stumpf's point of view. Stumpf was critical of the officers' attitude and actions, and believed they were the cause of the rebellions.

Plievier's denial of USPD influence also explains why Reichpietsch, to whom Des Kaisers Kulis is dedicated along with Köbis, plays absolutely no role in the novel. That Plievier ignores Reichpietsch altogether is noteworthy given the fact that it was Reichpietsch who introduced politics into the fleet and was consequently vilified by the right. The extent of Reichpietsch's contact and actions concerning the USPD are important with regard to how far Plievier deviates in his novel from the abundance of information concerning Reichpietsch and his political activities.

In the summer of 1917 Reichpietsch had indeed been the first sailor to establish contact with Reichstag deputies of the USPD in Berlin. Later, several other members of

ships' crews visited them. An enthusiastic supporter of the Menagekommissionen and under advisement from his fellow sailors to visit both the USPD and SPD, Reichpietsch had visited Berlin for two reasons. He wanted to ascertain if the Admiralty's order banning the enlisted men from political activity were genuine, and if the enlisted men were actually allowed to form food commissions. Suggesting that there was no real political affiliation among the sailors they advised Reichpietsch to go to both parties.

The questions arises as to whether the USPD had ever wanted Reichpietsch to stir up rebellion in the navy, and whether his visit to the USPD in fact marked the beginning of a politically organized rebellion. Evidence suggests that Reichpietsch in fact went to Berlin to consult with socialist deputies on the two aforementioned points as well as visit his parents. He met with Deputy Wilhelm Dittmann of the USPD and expressed his concerns of conditions in the navy. A couple of days later he returned and again met with Dittmann and Hugo Hasse, chairman of the USPD. Reichpietsch advised them of the informal meetings of the sailors and that there was support for the USPD on board. Dittmann simply advised Reichpietsch and the sailors to be careful. Reichpietsch left with some political pamphlets and addresses of various members of the party. He then visited the secretary's office and joined the USPD, leaving with a supply of party applications. These two meetings were the extent of Reichpietsch's personal contact with the USPD in Berlin, and formed the basis of the naval authorities' case against him.

What Reichpietsch had done was common among sailors and soldiers who wanted to voice their dissatisfaction to Reichstag representatives. A key difference, however, was that Reichpietsch did not simply represent himself, but spoke on behalf of sailors of SMS Friedrich der Große, and wanted to give the deputies a list of the sailors' complaints. As well, he hoped to ascertain if both the order to stop political activity and the permission to establish Menagekommissionen were genuine. However, Reichpietsch never gave the list to the deputies. Instead, he spoke mainly of political matters, thus

giving the incorrect impression that the sailors were organized and waiting for leadership from the USPD. Furthermore, he never visited any deputy of the SPD.

Reichpietsch seems to have changed the intended purpose of his visit from apolitical to political. He pushed the topics of the Menagekommission and sailors' complaints to the background while exaggerating the strength of the sailors' movement and urgently sought the deputies' advice about establishing a peace movement in the navy.

Through Reichpietsch the USPD saw a way to make inroads into the navy and gain the sailors' support in the event of an uprising against militarists in Germany. There were two factions in the USPD: the left wing favoured an active, revolutionary course while the right still hoped for a more peaceful solution. The USPD's rather uncertain, weak and equivocal actions with regard to Reichpietsch demonstrate the fine line between legal and revolutionary tactics.⁸⁹ For conservative historians and naval officers alike it was clear that the USPD had plotted mutiny with Reichpietsch. It may be more accurate, however, to describe Dittmann's actions as politically opportunistic, for the USPD had much to gain -- and little to lose -- if sailors joined its ranks.

Reichpietsch returned to his ship confident of USPD support. According to some of his comrades Reichpietsch felt proud and rather self-important of his contact with USPD-deputies. Soon his reports of the meetings became exaggerated. He told of great support from the USPD and that he was to spread the movement in the navy. Thus, Reichpietsch was quickly able to start a 'semi-political' movement in SMS Friedrich der Große whose members were under the mistaken assumption that they had the active support of a political party of the Reichstag.

On 14 July Reichpietsch met in Kiel with yet another representative of the USPD who clearly told Reichpietsch that the USPD did not support sailors' strikes.⁹⁰ However, Reichpietsch not only continued to claim that strikes were supported by the USPD in

Berlin, but continued to enthusiastically call for them. Reichpietsch's urgings of both violence and strikes played an important role in inflaming the sailors' movement. Indeed, without the support of the USPD and its leaders Reichpietsch bears the brunt of the blame for organizing, politicizing and revolutionizing the movement, such as it was. This is borne out in his testimony given to his naval interrogators on 10 August 1917. Here Reichpietsch revealed that he only assumed that the support offered by Dittmann and his colleague of the USPD, Frau Zietz, with regard to the expansion of the movement in the fleet also inferred support of strikes. Nowhere does Reichpietsch admit direct support of strikes by the USPD. He also revealed that the USPD-deputies had only indicated that it would be a good idea for Reichpietsch to recruit sailors for the USPD. Clearly, Reichpietsch totally misinterpreted or misrepresented what the deputies' support meant.

If the USPD had indeed called for strikes and violence Reichpietsch would most likely have said this during his interrogation in order to mitigate his own guilt, and thus perhaps draw a lighter sentence. That he did not implicate the USPD deputies surely demonstrates that they had never advocated violence or knew of the strike and therefore could not be held legally responsible. As well, the USPD's actions were far too cautious to accuse them of intentionally provoking a strike.

While Reichpietsch seemed to relish his contact with the USPD and was able to drum up much support for the Stockholm Conference among the sailors, the influence of the USPD on the navy remained negligible. Only about 7 to 8 percent of the enlisted men were involved in the movement and most of these were not involved for political reasons. Indeed, most of the sailors of the movement were unaware that there was any political connection to it at all and were surprised to learn about it at the hearings.⁹¹

Significant for the political and ideological conception of Des Kaisers Kulis is that Plievier chose to ignore Reichpietsch completely. Clearly, with all this apparent

damaging information at hand regarding Reichpietsch, Plievier could not possibly have included him in the novel as a leading figure. Plievier was attempting to actualize his own ideology through the sailors and their rebellion. He was depicting the sailors' actions as honest, natural, spontaneous occurrences free from external influence which stemmed from what he regarded as the awaking primal religion which lies deep within every person. Diametrically opposed to this ideal were Reichpietsch's less than honest actions, his calls for violence and strikes, and his political association and intent. Indeed, Reichpietsch's name is only mentioned a few times in the novel: not until the trial in chapter nine and then subsequently at his execution. Further demonstrating Plievier's desire to minimize and even ignore Reichpietsch and his political motivation is the fact that Reichpietsch does not have any dialogue whatsoever in the novel. Had Reichpietsch not been one of the sailors executed he might not have appeared at all in Plievier's novel. Even without Reichpietsch's actions, however, it was very likely that the sailors would have organized a resistance for the conditions under which they lived in the navy were abysmal. Indeed Des Kaisers Kulis is Plievier's story of just such a likelihood. For Plievier's interpretation, which finds support in Stumpf's and other sailors' testimony, Reichpietsch's enthusiastic support of the USPD and actions on its behalf were antithetical and thus omitted.

As well as omitting the events and facts concerning Reichpietsch, Plievier also ignored in Des Kaisers Kulis key points Beckers had reported both in his booklet and in his testimony before the Reichstag's committee of inquiry. Beckers maintained that the press of the USPD had a significant political influence on the sailors' movement. A self-proclaimed "individual-anarchist" Beckers had, however, had no motive for over-emphasizing the influence of the USPD on the sailors. Supporting Sachse's testimony, he also maintained that the USPD influenced what he called the 'naval headquarters' of the sailors' movement in SMS Friedrich der Große of which Reichpietsch was one of the spokesmen. Beckers also claimed that a list of signatures not only voiced support for a

peace resolution, but also called for entry to the USPD. Reichpietsch had indeed approached the sailors, asking them to sign a list supporting the international Socialist Congress in Stockholm which called for peace without annexation. Many sailors signed the lists as a way of expressing their opposition to the war and many even joined the USPD. In fact, the leaders of the USPD actually knew nothing about the lists signed by the sailors, demonstrating that the lists and associated recruitment of sailors was largely Reichpietsch's doing.

In his novel Plievier mentions these lists only once, where conditions in the navy have reached a critical point and the sailors do not know where to turn. One sailor in the novel asks where one can find sanity in these mad times -- "bei diesen verrückten Zeiten, wo nur der Wahsinn regiert...?" To this another sailor answers that they should sign the lists calling for peace -- "In die Listen müssen wir uns eintragen und für den Frieden stimmen!" (Pl.288). Significantly, the confused sailors are interested only in peace and no mention is made in the novel of the USPD or that the sailors might want to sign the lists to join the party. The topic of the lists is then quickly and completely forgotten. For Plievier's purposes, the lists offer no proper direction for the confused sailors.

Finally, Plievier also omitted in his novel Beckers' testimony that Köbis was also in Berlin. According to Beckers, Köbis had gone in order to present grievances to Reichstag deputies or officials of the USPD and to seek advice. In July 1917 both Köbis and Sachse were indeed in Berlin where Sachse visited deputy Dittmann, as he did after the war as well. However, during the short meeting Dittmann did not seem very interested in Sachse nor in the enlisted men's movement. Had Dittmann and the USPD wanted to instigate a revolt in the navy Dittmann surely would not have talked so openly to Sachse would have taken more time and care. By contrast, Dittmann's rushed and disinterested manner towards Sachse demonstrated his and the USPD's lack of interest in the sailors' movement.

In Berlin Köbis met with Deputy Adolf Hoffmann, advising him of the conditions on board and seeking advice. Hoffmann did little more than warn Köbis to use neither violence nor strikes and advised him to simply send the complaints to the USPD. Quite apart from disappointing Köbis, this again demonstrated the USPD's lack of interest in the sailors and their cause. Only Reichpietsch remained convinced that the USPD supported not only the sailors but the use of strikes.

Besides Reichpietsch, Plievier chose to ignore two other sailors who were important participants of the sailors' movement. Wilhelm Weber did not view the movement as political and felt that this political component was greatly exaggerated by Sachse in his testimony at the court-martial. As well, when speaking with sailors from other ships who wanted to form a Menagekommission, Weber would advise them the purpose of the committees was to improve food and conditions. Weber's testimony supports the apolitical nature of the movement even though a few of its leaders, such as Reichpietsch and Sachse, were politically inclined. However, while Weber did not view the movement as political and tried to keep the Menagekommissionen non-political, he was, in fact, a member of the SPD. Thus, his close association with a political party made him an unsuitable protagonist for Plievier. Together with Reichpietsch and Sachse, Weber remains silent in the novel and his name is only mentioned in passing at the trial.

Sachse also plays no role in Plievier's novel. For Plievier, Sachse's blatant quest for leniency at the actual trial cast him in a disparaging light. Later, Sachse had tried to smuggle a note out of prison, stating that he had fooled the interrogators in order to be granted leniency. Furthermore, after the war Sachse became a communist and, proving his earlier selfish opportunism at the trial, denied his testimony there. Sachse's cowardly actions, his betrayal of his friends, his communist affiliation, and his unwillingness to sacrifice himself for his fellow sailors certainly did not measure up to Plievier's ideal. Thus, he does not appear until the final chapter of the novel, and then only fleetingly.

In Des Kaisers Kulis Plievier denied any acknowledgement of an external influence on the sailors or any hint of political intrusion. Thus, besides organizations, political parties and politically inclined sailors, Plievier also omitted from his novel the important, catalyzing speech by Alfred Herre to sailors in Wilhelmshaven. Conservatives and rightists had accused Herre of instigating the rebellion and he had even been detained for questioning by authorities. Sachse reported that the sailors thought Herre's speech evidenced USPD support and that it became a popular topic of discussion. Thus, despite the importance of Herre to the sailors and naval authorities, he too finds no place in Des Kaisers Kulis.

Beckers seems to embody Plievier's ideal as an independent free-thinker and anarchist. By avoiding any political connections, by calling for sailors to act on their own, and wanting to improve conditions in the navy and to end the war, Beckers would appear to be suitable as a main character in Plievier's novel. Indeed, in contrast to the political tones emanating from SMS Friedrich der Große through Reichpietsch, the leaders of the movement in SMS Prinzregent Luitpold, Beckers and Köbis, were apolitical. The contrast between these non-political and political elements in the movement is reflected in the power struggle for leadership between the two ships. Beckers led SMS Prinzregent Luitpold's walkout of 2 August. He had drafted a constitution for the movement which called for improvement of conditions in the navy and an end to the war. He believed that the men should act on their own and not wait for directions from the USPD in Berlin. Reichpietsch vehemently opposed this, advocating maintaining ties to the USPD and thus he objected to Beckers' draft. Beckers never did want to follow the leadership of the movement in SMS Friedrich der Große. He did not like its political orientation, nor did he want to subordinate the movement in his ship to his rival. Also, what Köbis and Reichpietsch reported to the sailors from their respective visits to Berlin was quite

different. Köbis was clear in saying he had been instructed not to strike or resort to violence. Beckers felt that the sailors on his ship could defend their cause well enough.

However, Beckers' later actions at the trial proved him to be inadequate for Plievier's purposes. When the critical moment came Beckers not only refused to sacrifice himself for his fellow sailors, but like Sachse also sought leniency.

Plievier by contrast depicts Köbis as an ardent individual-anarchist who is ready to volunteer his life and be a martyr for the sailors' cause. Indeed Köbis is already incorporated into the events of the first chapter as protagonist and spokesman. In the novel Köbis speaks to the 600 gathered stokers and sailors and ends with the call 'down with the war,' "Nieder mit dem Krieg!" (Pl.290). Revealing just how closely Köbis reflects Plievier's own philosophy or Weltanschauung, Plievier as narrator comments that Köbis had books from Nietzsche and Stirner in his seabag -- "Auf dem 'Prinzregent' in seinem Seesack hat er Max Stirner und Friedrich Nietzsche liegen, und er redet ein schweres, gläubiges Pathos" (Pl. 290-1). Following the reference to these two philosophers who were so fundamental to Plievier's own ideology is Köbis' iconoclastic confession to individual terror, "Ich ... gestehe offen, daß ich mit ganzer Kraft dahin gestrebt habe, durch individuellen Terror die Flotte lahmzulegen, um den Frieden zu erzwingen!" (Pl.300). Plievier's stylization of Köbis as an anarchist is generally borne out by historical fact, but with some deviations. Köbis' political views were outlined in 1926 in the Reichstag's committee of inquiry by Willi Sachse. Jointly accused with Köbis in 1917, Sachse said that Köbis was neither a follower of the USPD, nor of the then Majority Social Democracy, nor even of the well-known leftist organization "Gruppe der Internationale." Sachse believed that if Köbis had any political tendency it was a view to anarchy. Beckers also characterized Köbis more as apolitical.⁹² In his interrogation by naval lawyers Köbis himself had succinctly voiced the sailors' reactions to the officers' actions. He replied that the sailors' movement had only recently started and could be

considered "a counter-action against the Pan-German type of propaganda which had been disseminated with increasing intensity by the officers."⁹³ Thus, Plievier's depiction of Köbis as a non-politically inclined leader of the sailors rings true. Even Köbis' visit to Berlin was only to voice concerns about conditions in the navy. As well, Köbis' remark about the officers' chauvinistic propaganda reflects Plievier's own intentions of writing Des Kaisers Kulis. Plievier had stated that the purpose of the novel was to counteract rightist chauvinism and war-mongering.

Plievier's ideology called for a peaceful transformation of the individual and therefore of society. That Köbis actually had no inclination to 'individual terror' is evidenced by the statement he gave after judgement was pronounced. In this statement, appearing in the committee of inquiry's minutes, Köbis declares that he was not inclined to violence -- "Der Gedanke einer Gewaltsanwendung ist mir persönlich jedoch nie sympathisch gewesen."⁹⁴ Even in the novel Köbis had earlier rejected violence (Pl.290). Thus, Plievier adheres to historical truth for the most part. Difficult to reconcile, however, are Köbis' earlier rejections in the novel of violence and his later call at the trial for "individuellen Terror." Whether Plievier's call through Köbis for 'individual terror' meant violent rebellion or, echoing Plievier's calls for a return to anarchic-individualism, was merely a call for defiance and passive resistance, must remain unanswered.

Plievier not only idealizes Köbis as a determined individual-anarchist, but also as a voluntary martyr who is the only one of the accused who stands up for the cause of the sailors and is willing to sacrifice himself. Indeed, Plievier correctly recounts both Köbis' and Beckers' willingness to shoulder all the blame.⁹⁵ At the actual trial Köbis had said he had kept quiet out of consideration for his fellow sailors. He had only come forward and confessed upon learning that other sailors had implicated him. However, he did not in turn implicate his friends. Rather, he confessed his full guilt as a participant in organizing the

sailors' rebellion. This selfless sacrifice by Köbis was certainly suitable for Plievier's representation of events and expression of his philosophy.

In Des Kaisers Kulis Plievier eliminated everything which could tarnish the image of Köbis as a heroic martyr. Plievier omits Köbis' (and Beckers') contact with Reichpietsch and Sachse in SMS Friedrich der Große. According to Müller, Plievier's depiction of the court-scene continues largely to follow Beckers' report. However, Plievier does not include in the novel Beckers' assertion that Köbis deeply incriminated his comrade Weber before the court. Nor does Plievier include Beckers' observation that it seemed as if Köbis wanted to impress the judges.⁹⁶ Following the novel's depiction of the naval court trials, which ends with the pronouncement of the death sentences for the five main accused, Plievier introduces a passage from Beckers' report.⁹⁷ The quotation describes how Beckers penned a petition for clemency and vainly urged Köbis to do the same. Beckers wrote that they wanted only peace, freedom and bread and now were going to be shot like dogs. Echoing Köbis' calls for the truth, he asked if they were not justified, "Waren wir nicht im Recht gewesen?" (Pl.301). He does not want to die, at least not yet. Saying he turned to this nefarious movement only because he wanted peace, he wrote an appeal to Admiral von Scheer. In Des Kaisers Kulis Plievier shows Beckers as begging shamelessly for leniency. In the novel this passage comprises two and half pages (Pl.303-3), while in Beckers' report it was six. Plievier does not mention that according to Beckers, Köbis gave a declaration against the magnitude of the sentence (as did Beckers). Indeed, Plievier writes in the passage from Beckers' that Beckers was not successful in getting Köbis to pen a petition for clemency. Plievier also omitted Beckers' observation that Köbis' behaved as if he indeed wanted to be a martyr. Also omitted was Beckers' comment that Köbis' denied ever wanting to be one.⁹⁸ As well, through these and other omissions from Beckers' report Plievier gives the impression that a suicide plan, devised by Beckers and Köbis, evoked from the latter only laughter. A passage in Beckers' report -- omitted by Plievier --

notes that Köbis hoped to escape the firing squad: "Ein Hoffnungsschimmer lag auf seinem blassen Gesicht. Endlich eine Möglichkeit, dem grauenhaften Tod durch Erschießen zu entgehen."⁹⁹

The issue here is not whether Beckers' information as to Köbis' demeanor and comments after the conviction is true. Plievier would have had at his disposal other sources besides Beckers' report. Accepting Müller's declaration that Plievier had indeed used Beckers' report, the issue then is not whether Plievier used it, but rather how he used it. Clearly, it did not suffice for Plievier to depict Köbis simply as a victim of planned judicial murder. He needed to rework the material in order to stylize and elevate Köbis beyond a victim to a heroic symbol of an individual-anarchistic martyr. Köbis was to serve as an example to others.

Plievier's characterization of the sailors' rebellion of 1917 as completely unorganized and spontaneous clearly deviated from Beckers' testimony. It also deviated from the ardent accusations of former officers and rightist historians and politicians, as well as from the facts concerning Reichpietsch. On the other hand, Plievier is generally in agreement with other sailors such as Richard Stumpf and Willi Sachse. Indeed, later objective reviews of the events generally agree with Plievier's interpretation except for his complete denial of any political intervention. Clearly, Plievier had political and ideological motives when he was reconstructing the facts available to him at the time.

Plievier's distinctive use of sources and facts evidences a political or ideological strategy of selection which is due to Plievier's own "individual-anarchistic" orientation. His characterization of Köbis as an "individualistic-anarchistic" leader and martyr of the sailors' movement is extremely idealized and finds no sound basis in his sources. True, the apolitical Köbis had not only led the sailors bravely, but actually admitted to leading them and willingly accepted blame. However, Plievier has clearly imbued him with the qualities

he sees necessary to be a representative of his 'new man'. Demonstrating the importance both of the character Köbis and his message was Plievier's insistence on himself playing the role of Köbis in the premier of Erwin Piscator's stage production of Des Kaisers Kulis 30 August 1930.

Chapter 5

Des Kaisers Kulis: Vehicle for Ideology.

Plievier expresses his ideology not only through his reworking of history, but also through the depiction of the sailors and their language. His earlier anarchistic writings insisted that both capitalism and communism were great evils which threatened the very existence of mankind. Only through the clash of these ideologies would a new era be engendered. He believed that in order to survive and thrive, the human race must first discover the primal religion which it had somehow lost or forgotten. Only through individual self-realization and personal change could one rediscover this Urreligion which would then lead to true, universal fraternity. Those individuals fortunate enough to attain this epiphanic self-realization should then serve as examples for others. In this context Plievier reveals his support of Nietzsche's criticisms of nationalism, conformism and religion, as well as Gorky's affinity for tramps and social outcasts. Plievier not only espouses Stirner's glorification of the individual, but also supports Stirner's belief that civilization must first be destroyed before it can be renewed. Finally, Plievier endorses Kropotkin's contention of co-operation as the main factor in evolution. Just how these themes are expressed in Des Kaisers Kulis, which he designed as an anti-war novel, provides the focus of this discussion.

In chapter one Plievier quickly introduces his contempt for capitalism, which he had so graphically expressed in his publications Anarchie (1919) and Weltwende (1922). As with other motifs, Plievier's censure of capitalism intensifies and crystallizes throughout the story. Furthermore, Plievier variously elaborates on the theme of the symbiotic, collusive and self-serving relationship between the military establishment and the civilian capitalist elite.

The title of the first chapter, "Shanghaied!", captures the press-gang mentality in a word known through all west European navies. The drafting of sailors for the Kaiser's navy, Plievier would have us believe, was little better than the capitalist technique of oppression.¹⁰⁰ In Plievier's view the normal life of a merchant sailor, an exploited Chinese coolie (Kuli), is as oppressive in peacetime as in war.

Echoing Marxist theory that wars are waged for the benefit of big industrialists,¹⁰¹ Plievier develops the symbiosis between capitalism and militarism. Officers from each system bark similar commands to the sailors (Pl.25, 26). As well, the cheap, shoddy and abusive treatment suffered by the crew at the hands of the civilian shipping authorities finds counterparts in the practice of military authorities. Indeed, even the exploitive street-women are after the sailors' skin. Plievier likens the interest of the women hustlers of a harbour-side dive in the incoming ships to the interest of a ship broker, an epitomical representative of capitalism; "Die Mädels sind an den Eingängen im Hafen interessiert wie irgendein Schiffsmakler" (Pl.22).

According to Plievier, the oppressive inhumanity of both the military and its partner capitalism impedes individual autonomy. Representing the military system which seeks to remove distinctiveness, a lieutenant observes recently drafted sailors. He thinks to himself how terribly different each sailor is and that this must be corrected; "eine erschreckende Mannigfaltigkeit, eine Blindheit der Natur, die in das System nicht hineinpaßt und die korrigiert werden muß" (Pl.33). Begun earlier in a naval doctor's office, the process of depersonalization and integration continues. As well, the result of unending military drill for the drafted sailors in the novel did not mean they would become better sailors or soldiers. Rather, in Plievier's view the sailors become so tired they can no longer think for themselves and are reduced to behaving like circus animals (Pl.34). This depressing image of the sailors reduced to a blindly obedient, homogeneous herd is

diametrically opposed to Plievier's own call for the re-discovery of the individual. Here, this systematic oppression is expressed against the backdrop of contemporary history.

While the first chapter introduces many sailors by name -- the historical Alwin Köbis among others -- representatives of the military and capitalist systems, the officers, bourgeois towns people and naval doctor, remain nameless. This encourages the reader's empathy for the sailors and their actions, and dislike for the others.

The introductions of the first three chapters underscore Plievier's assertion of capitalism's and militarism's partnership. Chapters one and two open with very similar calls for the sailors aboard ship to go to their stations (Pl.9, 42). Whereas the setting of the first chapter is during peacetime in the merchant marine, chapter two is set in the navy during war. Chapter three, "Kulis", opens with a graphic scene of poverty. Helping to make shells for the German guns, a sailor's mother slaves in a Thyssen factory, leaving the children at home with only pieces of coal as toys. This picture of severe civilian hardship associated with the name of a well-known steel factory producing ammunition demonstrates the collusion of the military and capitalist systems and the attendant, tragic consequence: namely, the poverty and exploitation of the common person.

With several historically authentic slogans Plievier's anti-capitalist stance finds support even in the historically true attitudes of the sailors. One particular slogan voices the sailors' belief that rather than fighting for Germany, they are fighting for the capitalists; "Wir kämpfen nicht für Vaterland/ und nicht für deutsche Ehre!/ Wir sterben für den Unverstand/ und für die Millionäre!" (Pl.79-80).

Chapter four graphically illustrates Plievier's contention that for the common man the result of the collusive relationship between capitalism and the military is a demeaning, senseless death. In the bowels of a damaged ship dead crew members have been reduced to objects carried out with the rest of the debris of war - wooden crates, clothing and

corpses: "... Kleiderstücke..., Fässer, Kisten und Konservenbüchsen, die Leichen, alles wird nach vorn geschleppt ..." (Pl.98-9). The depersonalization of the sailors reaches its ultimate, unavoidable conclusion in war. Indeed, the sailors are in Plievier's view society's neglected and abused outcasts with whom he had empathized in his early short story "Proletariers Ende."

This ultimate price of death paid in a society dominated by the military/capitalist establishment is rewarded with callous indifference even by the society's highest representative. Contrasting sharply to the preceding chapter "Leichen," Chapter Five »S.M.« continues the motif of death. When visiting a ship the Kaiser, "Seiner Majestät," goes to precisely that part of the ship from where just shortly before the floating corpses had been removed. Thus, the Kaiser figuratively walks on the dead sailors who had laid down their lives for his and his officers' glory, for their "Orden und Ehrenzeichen", and finally for the capitalist system which supports the war.

Plievier continues to expand and intensify his attack on capitalism. While the officers enjoy their privileges and the capitalists profit from the war, the sailors wait aimlessly: "Untätig im Sinne des Zweckes." Underscoring his view not only of the "dreadful" conditions suffered by the sailors but also the sailors' image as exploited 'coolies', Plievier likens them to slaves of antiquity crowded together without dignity in the bowels of the ships: "Sie leben in den engen Schiffsdecks zusammengepfercht wie Sklaven des Altertums." (Pl.125)

The capitalist system of profit, Plievier's novel asserts, not only thrives in the navy, but indeed preys on those who can least afford it. Demonstrating both the financial and moral bankruptcy of the current naval system, sailors who request shore leave are refused unless they can pay for it. As well, a company of men are sent out to pick stinging-nettles in the fields near Wilhelmshaven. Aware that the nettles are raw material for the

textile manufactures, who reap great profits from this cheap resource, the sailors do not exert themselves (Pl.166). In contrast to the wealth of their "employers", most of the sailors instead search for food. Thus, for the common sailors, capitalism means grubbing in a field for food.

The one bright spot of which the German navy could boast was the Battle of Jutland 31 May 1916. Plievier invested much ambition and attention when researching his sources for Chapter eight, in which this figures. For the ideological conception of Des Kaisers Kulis, however, the chapter's historical accuracy is not of paramount importance. Significant is that when recounting the battle, Plievier has stilled the conflict between the upper and lower decks, differences are forgotten in death:

An treibende Schiffstrümmer geklebte Gesichter sehen wie ein Idyll aus.
 Ein zersiebter Kapitänleutnant wimmert nicht anders als ein Kuli.
 Unterschiede haben aufgehört. Goldene Ärmelstreifen oder Mützenbänder,
 Steckrüben oder fünf Gänge, alles ist eins. (Pl.226)

Portraying a drowning sailor against the backdrop of the battle, Plievier dramatically expresses his belief that war is perpetrated by capitalism to support the international free market -- "Für den Weltmarkt!" (Pl.236). Furthermore, the war's purpose was to satisfy Germany's expansionist policies, so Germany could have its 'place in the sun.' Clinging to some flotsam, Seaman Karl Kleesattel relives the battle. Earlier in the story, when faced with nationalist, chauvinist propaganda, Karl could not help thinking he had only his seabag to defend. Now, as he floats in the ocean with the sun beating down on him, he says with the greatest of irony that he has indeed found a place in the sun: "'Seine Majestät, der Kaiser, Hurra! Er hat doch die Wahrheit gesagt - - der Platz an der Sonne!'" (Pl.238) Punctuating the earlier motif that for the common man death is ultimately the result of the partnership of war and capitalism, a nearby mine explodes and kills Karl.

This dramatic scene concludes the first eight chapters of the novel in which both the action and the sailors' growing resentment and self-awareness rise incessantly and must inevitably lead to a rebellious climax. As well, Plievier was not satisfied with simply demonstrating the collusive relationship between the military and capitalism in these first eight chapters. Throughout chapter nine he overwhelms the story with the indictment. According to Plievier, however, this existing system of authority and government cannot continue. The machinery of war and capitalism is overheating, reaching a danger point at which time it will come to a screeching halt, "Das Rad läuft sich heiß" (Pl.314).

With a mix of narrative viewpoints, the various stories and narrative threads begun in earlier chapters cumulate in Chapter 9 "Das Ende." It is the longest and most involved of the novel in which Plievier abandons the linear chronology of the previous chapters. The chapter functions as a summary in which Plievier depicts key events through montage: the incidents of 1917; the sailors' strike, the trial, the sailors' later mutiny and the collapse of both the navy and Germany. More intense, urgent and obvious, this chapter will underscore the themes of the first eight chapters.

Death in war, Plievier insists, is the result of Germany's expansionist policies around the globe:

9526 Tote vor dem Skagerrak, 5475 auf der Doggerbank, vor den Falklandinseln, vor Coronell und Helgoland. In Reihen nebeneinander liegen sie in den Massengräbern von Wilhelmshaven und Rosyth oder verscharrt in den patagonischen Einöden. Die andern haben die Fische gefressen. (Pl.240)

In a direct, rather ponderous, repetitive manner, Plievier has one of his principal characters, Köbis, hammer home that capitalism is just as guilty as the officers' caste and the military establishment for both causing and prolonging the war. According to Plievier, capitalism is the monstrous evil at the root of war which will only end when the sailors [and mankind] refuse to be passive bystanders. Therefore, man must be aroused out of his

apathetic stupor. In an emphatic speech reminiscent of Plievier's urgent, emotional pamphleteering, Köbis laments:

"80 Admirale haben wir rumrennen, fast alle sind an Land und haben fürstlich bezahlte Stellungen! Und dann sind die Generäle da und die Gouverneure der eroberten Provinzen, keiner wird seinen Platz freiwillig aufgeben. Und die Aktionäre und Dividendenschlucker, die mit Kanonen und Ersatzstoffen Millionen verdienen!/ Der Krieg ist ein riesengroßes Geschäft!/ Und der Schwindel wird aufhören, wenn wir das erkennen und nicht mehr mitmachen! Kameraden! Einer für alle, alle für einen! Lieber ein Ende mit Schrecken, als ein Schrecken ohne Ende! Nieder mit dem Krieg!" (Pl.291)

Only when Köbis is espousing Plievier's philosophy as above, or later when the sailors call for action, does the language change from the colourful, nautical jargon to Plievier's emotional, ideological rhetoric.

Demonstrating that it is not only the sailors, but also the common-man in general, who realize the moral bankruptcy of the current capitalist system and therefore act, Plievier expands his attack on capitalism to encompass the civilian scene. Citizens are encouraged to deliver copper kettles and brass fittings to depots. Plievier writes sarcastically that the last copper kettle has been "mobilisiert". It will bring profit to a chain of middle-men until it becomes the guide-ring of an exploding shell. With graphic imagery there is no escaping the conclusion the capitalism leads to death, here represented by an exploding shell.

Like the sailors, the civilian population rebels against authority by striking and looting (Pl.314). Slogans circulate calling for end to martial law, freedom to strike and to assemble, and freedom for political prisoners. These scenes actually occurred in Germany, and support Plievier's view that war was proof of the evil of capitalism. As well, these occurrences confirmed for Plievier that the common person was ready to act and change society.

For Plievier, the war and the ensuing collapse of German society was the 'Weltwende' which both he and Stirner believed was the precondition for the renewal of mankind. This was Plievier's proclamation in chapter eight when describing the outcome of the Battle of Jutland; "Das Ende der Welt ist gekommen...." (Pl.226). Only on the rubble heaps of history could civilization be rebuilt. Indeed, in the novel the decline of the contemporary capitalist society through war is matched by the growth in the self-realization among the sailors.

Events in Germany at the end of the war, Plievier's narrative asserts, are the last convulsive death throes of a rotten, moribund system of civilization. Chapter nine's feverish pace of events -- from the return of the Wolf right up to the Kaiser's abdication and flight from Germany -- reflects a decaying system of government collapsing on itself: "Das System geht in die Brüche" (Pl.316). Not only does the collusion of the military and capitalism mean death for the sailors and the common-man in war, it is the catalyst for the final breakdown of society. Yet for Plievier this is beacon of hope for the renewal of man.

Besides his contempt for capitalism, Plievier introduces in Chapter 1 several other themes which he expands on throughout the novel, right up to the climax of the final chapter. The opening scene of the novel takes place on a merchantman just before the war where the overworked and abused sailors, led by Jan, refuse to continue the dangerous work ordered by the officers (Pl.12). The election of Jan as head sailor demonstrates the sailors' ability to organize themselves, even if rather loosely; the sailors are strong enough and willing to resist their superiors if pushed too far; and finally their resistance to oppression, here in the form of the ship's officers and captain who are equipped with the power of police and authority, is a natural, spontaneous, collective expression free of external influence.

Preponderating throughout the novel, the powerful, spontaneous characteristic of the sailors and their actions is due both to Plievier's language and natural imagery. Thus, for example, in a pub scene sailors of many nationalities; German, Finnish, French, Swedish, and Irish, toast a murdered politician who had spoken out against the war. Suggesting unanimity of feeling, an anonymous voice yells that they [the sailors] will stick together, "Wir halten zusammen!" (Pl.22). Indeed, the narrator reports that the sailors feel as one, "... wie ein Mann fühlen sie sich" (Pl.22). This natural internationalism, explained by the fraternal nature of the sailors' work, is directed against the war and leads to solidarity among the sailors. Corresponding to its pre-organized, non-political character, however, this instinctive, spontaneous manifestation is transient and eventually lost in the pub environment.

Later, when discussing the inept naval leadership, the sailors are unified in their opinion; "... darüber sind wir an Bord alle einig!" (Pl.70) During their discourse the sailors have been freely speaking one after another. When they do eventually come to their common conclusion it is unclear which sailor is talking. This anonymity coupled with the inclusive words "wir" and "alle einig" demonstrates that there is commonality of thought among the sailors. Voicing similar heartfelt, universal laments, individual sailors and stokers continue discussing the hard work, the abuses suffered at the hands of the officers and the officers' easy life: "... überall ist Stimmengewirr, diskutieren Gruppen über die Ereignisse in der Flotte" (Pl.83). Significantly, there are no individual sailors causing dissent among the crew and their laments remain natural, instinctive, and spontaneous.

The sailors' anonymous, free-flowing, intermingled, mutually supportive discourse demonstrates the crews' ever growing likeness of feeling and thought as a type of slowly awaking synergetic force. Offering similar thoughts about all aspects of the navy, the sailors' sentences cascade one after the other (Pl.84). Using this form of language throughout the novel enables Plievier to depict the growing self-realization of the

individual sailors as been fostered by co-operative interaction within the group. As well, it exemplifies Plievier's own call for the awakening of the individual, here in its infancy, in order to discover man's 'primal religion.'

Finally, suggesting not only continuity of thought, but the existence of an even deeper, subconscious unity, Plievier describes the silent sailors as seeming to awake one after another, "Und als ob sie nacheinander erwachen." (Pl. 110) With that various anonymous sailors begin again to question what they are doing .

Intensifying this natural, spontaneous character is the crews' refusal to obey an order. With fists raised, the men's response offers a demonstration of defiance which is more intensive and forceful than previous examples. Köbis' earlier words that the sailors must themselves know what action to take finds physical expression in the raised fists, indicating that the sailors are on the road to self-realization according to Plievier.

With history on his side, Plievier elevates the sailors' image to a higher moral plane than that of the spiteful, self-centred officers. Where the naval leadership seemed preoccupied with advancement, regulations and party politics, the sailors were concerned only about naval equipment, proper tactics, and good leadership. This makes the sailors' later rebellions in the novel more easily acceptable to the reader.

As with his attack on capitalism, Plievier's depiction in the final chapter of the sailors' powerful, widespread communal feeling intensifies. What had begun at the beginning of the story as a fleeting glimpse of resistance from a few sailors on a merchantman and had grown to include a few hundred in the walkout, has now grown to include thousands of sailors in the fleet. Upon learning of the officers' planned suicide sortie against Great Britain, the sailors react with determined solidarity: "Tausendköpfige Besatzungen sind beherrscht vom selben Gefühl: Aufspringen! Schluß machen!" (Pl. 319).

Plievier's call in his pamphlet Aufbruch for the individual to 'wed himself' with the downtrodden in order to beget through this passionate union the 'new age,' resonates in the urgency and emotionalism of the sailors and their situation: "In die Massen kommt Bewegung" (Pl.321). The casemates resound with anonymous calls from the sailors for peace, and abolition of the aristocrats and the navy: "Friede muß kommen!/ Freiheit muß werden!/ Die Aristokraten! Die Halsabschneider! Die kaiserliche Marine: Nieder! Nieder!" (Pl.321). The early, sporadic anti-war sentiments and ability to resist authority have now reached such a high, intensive pitch that full self-realization of the sailors must be imminent.

Plievier uses natural imagery to support this natural, spontaneous picture of the self-realization of the sailors. A pub decked out with exotic mementos from visits to foreign ports provides images of ancient, even primordial times. Thus, a large, awakening crocodile, cannibals and ancient ships offer faint echoes of Plievier's Urreligion and Urmelodie des Neuwerdens from his pamphlet Anarchie:

Das Riesenkrokodil unter der Decke der Kneipe scheint aus langem Schlaf zu erwachen. Die verstaubten Schiffsmodelle an den Wänden, die Auslegerkanus menschenfressender Insulaner, die Segel von uralten Karavellen und Vollschiffen sind wie gespannt zu neuen Abenteuern.
(Pl.22-3)

Concurring with the natural, powerful image of the sailors collectively as an "awakening crocodile" or separately as ships with full sails ready for new adventures, is the title of the sixth chapter, "Springflut". It expresses not only meteorological information, but also the spasmodically constant growth of both the sailors' resentment towards the officers, and the sailors' own growing awareness of self-determination. The chapter opens with a description of a storm threatening from seawards: "März!/ Sturmtage - - ein Tief nach dem andern jagt über den Atlantik oder bricht aus den Polargebieten in die Nordsee. Landwärts rennen die entfesselten Gewalten" (Pl.122). Like the storm itself,

the sailors will eventually sweep through the navy and across Germany in the November Revolution.

The influence of Plievier's life at sea is very evident in his natural, oceanic imagery which reflects the constant ebb and flow in the novel between individual and group. Often the thoughts and words of individuals talking are carried on by other sailors within the group. As well, the natural imagery suitably expresses the ebb and flow in the story between sailors and officers, between the sailors' opposition and the ensuing bribery from the officers, and finally between the officers' oppression and the sailors' rebellion.

Himself a sailor, Plievier was very familiar with the power of the elements and uses them in his narrative. Representing the unstoppable force of the sailors, sea water leaks into an old ship, foams upwards and seeps through the planks of the old, decrepit ship (Germany's decaying military/capitalist establishment). If the elements themselves are set for battle -- "Auf Kampf sind die Elemente eingestellt" -- then the sailors are no less so -- "Auf Kampf steht der in den Schiffsdecks gepferchte Mensch" -- (Pl. 125). As Stumpf's diary had noted, Plievier writes that the front is no longer "England," but now much closer.

The officers, by contrast, have appeared like mushrooms after a rain. Earlier, Seaman Paul Weiß had lamented the loss of the old naval spirit which had once united officer and crew. By contrast, Plievier characterizes as petty and extremely self-interested the spirit of the current officer corps:

Aber da sind goldene Ärmelstreifen, eichenlaubbestickte Offiziersmützen!
Eine Generation von hohen Offizieren und Admirälen ist aufgeschossen wie
Pilze nach einem warmen Regen. Ein Geist jämmerlicher Intrigen,
kleinlichsten Eigennutzes - oft noch gepaart mit Unfähigkeit - macht sich
breit. Die Tätigkeit des Flottenschefs beschränkt sich auf das schreiben von
Briefen, Tagebuchaufzeichnungen und auf das Verfassen von
Denkschriften an den Kaiser. (Pl. 125-6)

Plievier presents the process of the sailors' self-realization with unstoppable force, which seems to grow and spread exponentially among the crew until it must inevitably break out. At the end of the novel Plievier employs a most powerful, natural image of the sailors as an avalanche, "Wie eine Lawine rollt die Mannschaft nach Achtern." (Pl.326)

Insisting on the primacy of the individual, Plievier nonetheless demonstrates that there must be interaction and communication between people in order to foster universal brotherhood. Thus, not only the fraternal nature of the sailors' work and common living quarters on ship, but also their infrequent leisure time locals (the pubs and washrooms), cause the sailors to inter-act, communicate, and form acquaintances and friendships. Becoming more prominent later in the novel, the harmoniously balanced movement between individual and group, as between Kōbis and the sailors, illustrates Plievier's concern that the individual maintain his integrity in face of the masses. While various sailors are identified in chapter one, they are not accentuated or elevated out of the body of sailors. By contrast, however, Plievier has Kōbis rather formally introduce himself by name to the other sailors (Pl.32). This pointed introduction raises Kōbis out of the sailors' milieu and marks him as an individual to be noted.

Later, when Plievier identifies Kōbis as orator of a call for resistance, Kōbis is, however, not the originator. As demonstrated in the first chapter on the merchant ship, resistance is a latent, existent drive within the sailors and, by extension, of mankind. That Kōbis is indeed identified reflects Plievier's support of Stirner's individualism in the face of the group. For Plievier, the individual and the collective carry equal weight. Like sailors previously, Kōbis uses the collective words "wir" and "uns" which are instinctively accepted without objection by the other sailors present.

The movement from individual to group suggests mutual support and understanding. One is not lost to the other but co-exist and are mutually dependent. In Plievier's society one can not exist without the other. Thus, even towards the end of the novel, when the action reaches a feverish pitch, there is still inter-play between individual and group. In a scene marked by the urgency of the sailors' voices, "Katastrophenstimmung auf allen Schiffen!" (Pl.319) there is, however, never mob rule. An individual cry, "Ein Schrei - - ein einzelner Mensch schreit!" is, in turn, responded to by a hundred cries (the group), "Aus Hunderten von Kehlen bricht das Echo, Wut und Verzweiflung!" (Pl.320).

In contrast to this idealized relationship between individual and group, Plievier offers the reader an example of a false sense of community. When war is announced there are patriotic songs, nationalistic slogans, and the city feels united; "Die ganze Stadt ist eine Familie geworden" (Pl.38). This false solidarity is, however, brought on by the external forces of war and capitalism. It is, therefore, not the true fraternity Plievier sought through the renewal of the individual. This false, nationalistic, exclusionary unity is contrary to Plievier's inclusive call for universal brotherhood.

Plievier's thematic treatment expressing the mutually conditioning relationship between individual and group is supported in one instance by the structure of the novel. Giving the novel its autobiographical quality, chapter nine contains the 35 page story of the surface raider Wolf. In the novel's chronology of events, the story of the Wolf is a return to the past. It removes the reader from the main fleet both temporally and geographically. The chapter opens with an assertion of the truth by the narrator, who appears for the first time in the story in the "I" form: "Hier ist kein Roman. Hier is ein Dokument.\ Und dann: ich bin doch auch dabei gewesen" (Pl.240). Such an exclamation of being present and involved as a "Kuli", an I-witness, serves to confirm the historical authenticity of the first eight chapters. As well, it changes the perspective of the story from

reportage to an eyewitness account. Conditions experienced and suffered by the sailors are seen through the eyes of Plievier, himself a 'shanghaied coolie', which offers a more intimate relationship with the sailors.

The movement in the story between individual and group is reflected in the relationship between the Wolf (individual) and the group (the main fleet). The Wolf is a microcosm of conditions in the entire fleet with the 'mutiny' of Seaman Kuddl Bülow on the Wolf foreshadowing the impending mutiny in the main fleet. By recounting the voyage, Plievier demonstrates that even on a smaller ship far removed from the main fleet, conditions endured by the sailors were nevertheless the same. Thus, independent of the main fleet and its many possible influences, the sailors of the Wolf both react to their conditions and come to the same conclusions as Köbis and other sailors. While substantiating and justifying the sailors' mutiny in the main fleet, the sailors' actions on the Wolf contradict reports that generally on the smaller ships and submarines the relationship between officer and crew were better. For ideological considerations Plievier has avoided this consideration.

Plievier's style of language welds together the sometimes heterogeneous material of the novel as exemplified by the autobiographic side-bar on the Wolf. A generally laconic style of speech with concise, short main sentences remains mostly in a hard and forward pushing present tense, which carries the reader over the occasional breaks in the composition. Indeed, Plievier himself acknowledged the novel's rather rough construction.¹⁰²

The sailors' passive resistance and even sabotage reflect Plievier's call for the masses to awaken and take action. However, precisely that these acts of sabotage were not committed everywhere in Des Kaisers Kulis indicates that Plievier did not support that particular means of protest. Indeed, the single act of sabotage is only one form of protest

from the sailors. The discriminations against the hungry crews lead to large-scale insubordination. The overflowing jails attest to the growing resentment and anger of the sailors who are desperately seeking means to express their opposition:

Die Arrestlokale sind schon zu klein, auch die neu in Dienst gestellten genügen den Anforderungen nicht mehr. ... Die Strafgewalt der Kompanieführer reicht nicht aus, die massenhaften Insubordinationen zu ahnden. (Pl.169)

However, according to Plievier the sailors have not yet found the correct path. Their forms of protest are confused and unfocused. Not until the sailors recognize and understand the example set by Köbis do they then act accordingly. The sailors eventually understand that they cannot sit passively by, but must become involved; "auch die Masse geht heute einen andern Weg als den vorgeschriebenen" (Pl.287). The individual must stand up and account for himself, but always with a view to the rest of society. A sailor shouts that the eleven arrested men are not the only concern. Rather, they must all defend themselves, "Wir müssen endlich zeigen, daß wir Menschen sind, und wenn wir getreten werden, müssen wir uns wehren!" (Pl.288). Another sailor laments that the war would be over if they were not so cowardly (Pl.288). Indeed, Plievier had lamented in his pamphlet 1914-1924. Zehn Jahre Geschichte that human apathy and disinterest had allowed evil to rule. Mankind must become actively involved in the transformation of civilization and defend itself against injustice. Thus, from within the throng of sailors are heard similar, increasingly vigorous calls of protest. Wanting to act, the sailors collectively call for a strike (Pl.290). For Plievier's ideology it is imperative that the reader understand that the sailors have freely arrived at this course of action themselves. Active participation in changing society is Plievier's rallying cry.

This ultimately leads to the sailors' second revolt which eventually overwhelms and transforms all of Germany. The sailors offer unequivocal proof of Plievier's assertion that when mankind becomes actively involved society can be changed. For Plievier, the

war and the ensuing November Revolution were the turning point which harbingered the return to individualism.

As with other criticisms, Plievier's censure of the church finds expression in his novel. At the trial on the judges' table sits a crucifix. The naval chaplains are present because of their interest in the case. However, they do not defend the sailors, nor even speak. Their silent collusion with the naval court indicts them as supporters of the navy and the military. In his early Christusdrama, the young Plievier could not reconcile the discrepancies between the church and a society supposedly based on Christian teachings. Instead, he saw society as a heartless organism split by social and economic division, and hatred. His depiction of the naval chaplains' silent collusion suggests that he remains with these beliefs.

Not only does Plievier's ideology call for self-realization of the individual and discovery of mankind's Urreligion, but it also calls on those individuals who have attained this to act as beacons in order to show their fellow man the correct path. The function of Köbis in Des Kaisers Kulis is to embody these ideals. In Anarchie Plievier raised the call for those who have found the light ("das Licht"), in whom man's original religion has awakened, to serve as examples or beacons -- "Leuchtfeuern" -- for the rest of humanity. Köbis is one such example. He will not lead, but through his words and actions he will teach others to rediscover man's lost religion.

The introduction of Köbis early in the story enables Plievier to not only further establish the historicity of the work with an historical figure, but to also establish Köbis' disposition and character (Pl.31). For example, when one sailor belittles new recruits, Köbis rejoins that on his ship solidarity and equality exist among the sailors, "'Wir auf 'Prinzregent' machen keinen Unterschied zwischen Rekruten und alten Leuten. Wir halten alle zusammen'" (Pl.31-2). Making the later depiction of Köbis as martyr for the sailors

more readily acceptable, Plievier will continue to build on this positive and unifying image of Köbis right up until Köbis' execution.

According to Plievier, only within the individual can the long, lost primordial religion awaken and develop naturally. No external forces of any kind must be allowed to interfere and are indeed markedly absent in the novel. At one point in the narrative, the confused and directionless sailors are unsure what action they should take against the officers. Significantly and most demonstrative of Plievier's ideology, Köbis does not tell the sailors what to do. Rather, he advises them that they must arrive at their own decision, "Das kann ich euch auch nicht sagen. Das müßt ihr selbst wissen" (Pl.86). Through personal change and self-realization the individual himself must discover the correct course of action.

For Plievier it would seem that the truth alone suffices as the catalyst which will start the process of man's inner transformation. Responding to the despair of the crew in an emotional cry reminiscent of Plievier's earlier writings, Köbis assures the sailors that they need only truth on their side: "Die rechnen nur in Schiffen und vergessen, daß nicht Schiffe, sondern Menschen kämpfen! ... Alles, was wir tun können, ist: die Wahrheit hinausschreien, jedem Deckskuli und jedem Stoker sagen, was los ist!" (Pl.110-1). By ensuring Köbis' purity of intent, Plievier continues to enhance Köbis' image. The sailors respond to Köbis in a unified voice that they will indeed do as he suggests. Believing that the truth will be enough to change their state and thus raising the sailors' cause to high moral ground, Köbis' final words in chapter four reiterate this call: "Aber nur die Wahrheit, kein Wort mehr!" (Pl.111). This process of self-understanding gives evidence both of spontaneous rebellion and political helplessness. Demonstrating a still economical opposition, the sailors' trust in "die Wahrheit", their hate for their superiors -- "Gott strafe England und unsern Flottenchef" -- (Pl.85), and a preliminary verbal readiness for individual resistance remain directed at the oppression embodied by the officers. The truth

as the motivating factor has caused the masses of sailors to actively participate in changing society.

Köbis continues to act as an example right up to his execution. When sailors look for some means with which to express their anger at the imprisonment of their fellow sailors, they turn to Köbis. However, when Köbis speaks he pointedly asks the sailors how they should protest: "Kameraden! Die Deckskulis und Stoker auf »Prinzregent« wollen von uns einen Vorschlag. Wir müssen uns einig werden, was geschehen soll! Auf welche Art wollen wir protestieren? (Pl.285). The sailors are looking for direction. Significantly, Plievier is clear that the answer does not come from Köbis. Now, as earlier, Köbis tries to elicit from the sailors themselves the correct course of action. The sailors are now closer to understanding what Köbis represents according to Plievier. Showing Köbis as a reluctant volunteer, the sailors intuitively recognize the correct qualities in Köbis and have instinctively pushed him to the head of their group.

Speaking later to the sailors, Köbis clearly expresses Plievier's own view of the war. Köbis says that they do not need a victorious peace or riches, and that all people must come together in understanding:

Wir brauchen keinen Siegfrieden, keine Länder und Reichtümer. Die Eroberungsziele sind unser Verderben, ohne sie wäre Frieden. Wir könnten wieder arbeiten und hätten zu fressen. Und die andern sind doch Menschen. Die Völker müssen zusammenkommen und sich verständigen. Das Morden ist sinnlos (Pl.290)

As Plievier's ideology is inclusive, Köbis extends a hand to the others -- "die andern" -- whoever they might be in the human family: the military, capitalists, industrialists, society's outcasts, or any others who fall outside of those who seek fraternity and are open to accepting his ideology. The sailors themselves display concern for their fellowman, even the military. Upon encountering guards and police who are blocking a gate, the rebellious sailors tell them to move along so they will not be hurt. As

demonstrated in his pamphlet Aufbruch, Plievier's philosophy calls for care and concern for one's fellow man.

Throughout Des Kaisers Kulis, Plievier has characterized Köbis as worthy of martyrdom. Taking the blame for the walkout, Köbis offers to sacrifice himself (Pl.292). As well as refuting violence, Köbis had waited for the other sailors to develop their own thoughts and actions without eliciting any direct response or action from them. In his pamphlet Hunger Plievier had lamented that the workers had not given enough of themselves to the starving in Russia. Through Köbis Plievier demonstrates that it is not sufficient for one who has discovered the primal religion to simply act as an example. Ultimately, he must be ready and willing to sacrifice his life freely for his fellow man.

Plievier calls for his revolutionary brotherhood -- 'Ahasveraturen' -- to act as beacons for the unenlightened through Köbis. In prison Köbis tells Beckers that they themselves must be the signal: "...jetzt müssen wir selber das Signal sein! Du, Hans - - und ich - - und die andern!" (Pl.297). Köbis implores Beckers and the other sentenced sailors to think the same, to be the 'guiding light' for others. Köbis says that their death will only have meaning if they face it with courage and not try to talk their way out of it (Pl.298).

Köbis is an example of the reborn individual who will change society, for not only has he discovered Plievier's primal religion, but he is also willing to give his life for others. In response to the politics of the time, Plievier had written in Wahlrummel (1924) that only in the autonomous individual will the true path be found which leads to the rediscovery of humanity. It is the individual who will renew civilization: "Ich bin Voraussetzung zum gemeinsamen Aufbruch des Volkes, bin Ursprung und Urheber, Umwerter aller Werte, Erneuerer der menschlichen Gesellschaft." Thus, at the very moment when Köbis could plead for leniency, he instead remains steadfast to his ideals. This is Plievier's 'new man', devoid of self-interest and only concerned for his fellow man.

Like Plievier the prophet, Köbis' final works are a passionate cry for universal brotherhood. Gazing beyond the judges, he laments that they wanted peace without annexation, "'Wir wollen keine Annexionen! Wir wollen einen Frieden der Verständigung!' (Pl.300).

Plievier offers demonstrable evidence of the effectiveness of an individual as a guiding light. Recalling what Köbis and even his shipmate Karl Kleesattel had said earlier about showing some backbone, Jan Geulen ponders the notion of resistance: "Was hat Köbis gesagt: 'Zeigt ihnen die Zähne, den verfluchten Lumpen! [officers]' Und was hat Kleesattel hinzugefügt: 'Aber seid klug!'" (Pl.129). With an act of passive resistance -- while coaling a ship Jan dumps his load into the water -- Jan offers proof that individuals, such as Köbis and Kleesattel, can and do influence others. Another example is offered by the character Klaus Möller (Pl.158). Thus, Plievier's call for individuals, such as Köbis, who have found the 'light', to act as a beacons for others is actualized in Des Kaisers Kulis. Through street-corner endeavors as prophet and pamphleteer, Plievier had taken on this task in his own life. In Des Kaisers Kulis sailors, according to Plievier, instinctively recognize the individual who displays the proper qualities .

Finally, through Köbis the sailors themselves now realize that the truth is all they need to support and defend their cause: "'Und daß auf unsrer Seite das Recht ist, wenn sie uns auch einsperren!'" (Pl.292).

Like Köbis, Beckers' function in the story is to serve as an example. Beckers, however, is an example of someone on the path to self-realization but who is either misguided or still learning. In contrast to the stylized ideal of Köbis, Beckers falls short of Plievier's 'new man.' During the mutiny, Beckers and other sailors get trapped on board ship. Displaying initiative and a desire to lead, Beckers urges the sailors to leave: "'Los, kommt schon! ... ich hab den Weg schon gefunden!'" (Pl.286). Köbis, by contrast, had

simply implored the other sailors to discover for themselves the proper course of action. According to Plievier, the autonomous individual must not simply be a follower, but must understand and decide himself what direction to take. With his desire to lead, Beckers demonstrates he has not reached the same level of self-realization as Köbis. He, therefore, plays a much smaller role in the novel.

Through Beckers, Plievier illustrates that the sailors' process of self-realization, and therefore that of mankind, does not take place uniformly and indeed may contain wrong turns. At the trial Beckers deposes that he is only interested in philosophy and is opposed to war (Pl.292). On a philosophical plane Beckers' testimony offers no indication of political influence. As well, Beckers had said earlier in the novel that, along with Köbis, he too would accept blame. However, although the apolitical Beckers is anarchically inclined, his later unwillingness to totally and unconditionally sacrifice himself for his fellow sailors makes him unsuitable for martyrdom in the manner of Köbis.

Throughout the novel Plievier does not construct any individualized heroes in the traditional sense. Rather, he lets the mass of 'coolies' act themselves. Characters individually named such as; Jan, Karl, the historically authentic Alwin Köbis and Gregor Gog, or the author himself - the "Ich-narrator" of the last chapter - are not elevated to heroic proportions out of the collective. Instead, they appear as members of the crew who are subjected to the same conditions as the others. Nevertheless, and most important to Plievier's philosophy, the individual is in no way so homogenized as to be de-individualized. Beyond the objectively established mutuality between group and individual, there is distinct differentiation throughout the novel in the characterization of the persons. For example, there is Turuslawsky, who denounces oppositional comrades; or Karl Kleesattel, who proves to be an experienced sailor expert in technical military matters; or Beckers, who stumbles along the road to self-realization; and not least in the persons of Köbis and the narrator himself. Often interrupted or broken off, the sailors' episodically

presented personal lines of action shift from individual to group and back again. Coupled with both the named figures and the other, partly anonymous figures, this narrative technique produces the mosaic picture of the collective fate and struggle of the coolies.¹⁰³

The officers, on the other hand, are rarely named. Whether as individuals or in groups, they appear mostly as one-dimensional bit players. They do not develop as the sailors, nor do they demonstrate an awaking awareness of a deeper understanding of themselves and mankind. Their excesses and military failure exemplify the inner morbidity and parasitism of the Wilhelmine feudalized bourgeoisie. There are exceptions, however, which demonstrate that even within the spiritually blunted officer corps there exists the possibility for self-realization. For example, the captain of the Wolf demonstrates not only competence, but also concern for his crew (Pl.242).

Plievier's anti-chauvinist, anti-nationalist, anti-war stance is heard clearly throughout the novel. In the Berliner Tageblatt Plievier had stated that he had written Des Kaisers Kulis as a response against the war-mongering of the right. While not yet anti-war early in the novel, Karl begins to question the nationalist rhetoric and jingoism he hears at the outbreak of the war. Although he sees through the social demagoguery of those who want war, and indeed felt like thrashing a baker on account of his chauvinistic slogans, when the "Deutschlandlied" is played he springs along side the baker and sings along: "... über alles, über alles in der Welt!" (Pl.40). Thus, Karl demonstrates that already within the sailors there are anti-war sentiments that simply need to be roused. Indeed, the fact that none of sailors had even volunteered for the navy suggests there already existed a latent, anti-war sentiment. The sailors, however, are nevertheless ready and willing to fight for their country when called upon (Pl.50).

In a direct rebuttal of the heroic literature of his time and the navy's own propagandizing, Plievier as narrator agrees with the character Jan, who said he would

rather drown than die a hero's death and have the navy use it as propaganda for the next war, "Aber die andern sollen ... keine Reklame damit machen. Ich pfeif' auf den Heldentod, schon lieber einen Sprung in den Bach und ganz einfach versaufen!" (Pl.253). Expressing the depth of their commitment, Jan and Plievier are willing to pay the ultimate price to hinder nationalist war efforts (Pl.265).

Plievier offers proof that the prerequisite "Weltwende" has occurred and thus the time is ripe for society to change. The novel's final line is a clarion call proclaiming the end of an age. Unwilling to die at the head of his troops, the Kaiser flees Germany undercover of night saying, "Die Zeit der heroischen Geste ist vorüber!" (Pl.327). Thus, with his own words the ultimate head of both the German military and the capitalist society concedes the collapse of the very system which supplied his power base.

Conclusion

The hugely successful Des Kaisers Kulis is much more than a well-crafted, documentary novel. It is the propagandization of Plievier's doctrine which continues in another form his earlier efforts as prophet and pamphleteer. Contrary to the prevailing interpretations of the political parties during the Weimar Republic, Plievier invests the genre of the war novel (Kriegsroman) with a highly individualistic, anarchistic interpretation of the sailors' revolt of 1917. While Plievier was revered by the left of the Weimar Republic and censured by the right, an objective reading disappoints the stereotypical thinking of both sides.

Giving the novel its documentary quality, Plievier fulfills his wish to record the story of the German Imperial Navy. As well, the sailors' anti-war sentiments demonstrate Plievier's own anti-chauvinist intent when writing the novel. Des Kaisers Kulis is, however, much more than a simple record of events and attitudes in the navy. With unwavering conviction Plievier communicates the main tenets of his ideology throughout the novel. His rejection of communism, socialism, politics, political parties or any organizations whatsoever is clearly understood from their omission. Passionately expressed in his earlier pamphlets, Plievier's belief in the materialistic inhumanity of capitalism resounds in the novel's scathing attack on the system. His dualistic call for both individual anarchy and universal fraternity is expressed through the sailors' language and actions, either as individuals or as a group. As well, supporting his doctrine in the novel, Plievier alludes to his own gods, Nietzsche and Stirner.

Through narrative technique and historical reworkings, Plievier idealizes Köbis as an example of his 'new man' who to his mind should serve as a beacon for the rest of mankind. Plievier's iconoclastic call for a return to anarchism, his primal religion (Urreligion), is validated through the self-realization of Köbis and other sailors. They embody Plievier's wish for the rediscovery of the autonomous individual. For Plievier, the

war and Germany's ensuing internal collapse represented the prerequisite turning point of world history (Weltwende) after which civilization could then renew itself. Contrasting with his earlier, fiery evangelical sermons -- and with the history on his side -- Plievier's novel expresses his ideology in a more readily acceptable form.

Des Kaisers Kulis' extensive and somewhat exhausting anarchistic criticism of both authority and capitalism is directly focused at the ruling civilian and military authorities. The criticism is based on the measures of oppression by these authorities on the ships crews and workers, and even society. Rather than be replaced by chaos and disorder, however, the current system would be replaced by Plievier's individualistic community formed by universal fraternity engendered through man's discovery of his natural, primal religion.

Insightfully summing up the novel, one reviewer noted that it was written from the spirit of the struggling lower-classes with the simple intention of changing society: "aus dem Geist der unten ringenden Klasse geschrieben und - ohne immer klar zu sein - doch ganz und gar auf den Willen zum Handeln, zur Änderung der Gesellschaft gestellt."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Plievier had written that the aim of revolutionary literature was to arouse man's energies against the current capitalist order. Plievier remained true to his convictions right up to his death in 1955. Despite revolutions, two world wars, and a life filled with many hardships Plievier still believed in the possibility of the renewal of the individual and therefore of mankind through revolutionary means. Reflecting in 1953 on both the turbulent contemporary history of Europe and his own difficult life, Plievier emphasized the ultimate significance of the vital, individual human spirit:

... das Licht brennt noch immer in unserem alten, durch Wirtschaftskrisen und von Kriegen ausgebluteten Kontinent: der Geist, der immer neu den Körper schafft, ist noch lebendig. Das ist der tief wurzelnde Glaube, der auch in mir über alle persönlichen und gesellschaftlichen Katastrophen hinweg unerschütterter blieb.¹⁰⁵

Notes

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- ¹ Michael L. Hadley, Count Not the Dead: The Popular Image of the German Submarine, (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995) 49.
- ² Cited in Hans-Harald Müller, afterword, Des Kaisers Kulis: Roman der deutschen Kriegsflotte, by Theodor Plievier (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1984) 334.
- ³ Müller, Kulis 334.
- ⁴ Cited in Walter Fähnders, and Martin Rector, Linksradikalismus und Literatur: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der sozialistischen Literatur in der Weimarer Republik, vol. 1 (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1974) 319.
- ⁵ Harry Wilde, Theodor Plievier: Nullpunkt der Freiheit, (München: Kurt Desch, 1965) 32.
- ⁶ Müller, Kulis 335.
- ⁷ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 320.
- ⁸ Fähnders, vol.1 320.
- ⁹ Cited in Wilde 36.
- ¹⁰ Theodor Plievier, Haifische, (München: Kurt Desch 1953) 310.
- ¹¹ Wilde 33-34.
- ¹² Plievier, Haifische 309.
- ¹³ Müller, Kulis 338.
- ¹⁴ Müller, Kulis 340.
- ¹⁵ Cited in Wilde 13.
- ¹⁶ Müller, Kulis 340.
- ¹⁷ Wilde 14.
- ¹⁸ Cited in Wilde 88-89.
- ¹⁹ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 323.
- ²⁰ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 324.
- ²¹ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 324.
- ²² Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 323.
- ²³ Cited in Müller, Kulis 341.
- ²⁴ Fähnders, vol.1 326.
- ²⁵ Fähnders, vol.1 326.
- ²⁶ Fähnders, vol.1 322.
- ²⁷ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 327.
- ²⁸ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 327.
- ²⁹ Cited in Fähnders, vol.1 327-8.
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