6 Sering, the Star
The Weimar Republic, 1918–1933

Collapse and Rebirth: The Creation of the Lex Sering

November 1918 was as momentous in the life of Max Sering as it was in the history of Germany. Over the course of one week, Sering's only son was killed on the Western Front, revolution swept away the power of the professor's beloved Kaiser, the war was lost, and Sering was asked to be a key leader in Germany's postwar rejuvenation. In a 1969 interview, Erich Keup claimed that both Sering and Schwerin knew by "late Summer" that the war was lost and that nothing was secure in the East, from Posen to the Baltics.[1] As we saw in Chapter 5, the reversal of German fortunes was swift. As late as September a confident Sering bestrode the steppe in Kiev, but by October a vanquished Sering spoke before students in Berlin about the darkening situation. In an article written immediately after the war, Keup explained that, on October 7, the inner colonial specialists of the GFK had gathered to inform the government that a massive settlement plan was going to be required for the soon-to-be returning soldiers. In a meeting held on October 16 to brainstorm potential solutions, Professor Franz Oppenheimer pushed back on Sering's traditional inner colonial plans, arguing that something more akin to a "Garden City" approach to soldier settlement should be pursued.[2] Chancellor Max von Baden had set up the *Reichsarbeitsamt* (Reich Labour Office) in early October, headed by the SPD member and later Weimar chancellor Gustav Bauer, in an attempt to get a handle on the deteriorating situation on the home front. The GFK seems to have gotten its message to the Chancellor and, at the beginning of November, Bauer met with Keup and Sering to discuss the impending

[1] It may well have been Schwerin's relationship with Ludendorff that provided this early information. Karl-Rolf Schultz-Klinken, "Das ländliche Siedlungswesen in Deutschland zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (1919–1939)," in *Raumordung und Landesplanung im 20. Jahrhundert,* ed. Günther Franz (Hanover: Gebrüder Jänecke, 1971), 118.

[2] Erich Keup, "Kriegsbericht der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation," *AFK* 12 (1919/20): 57–69.

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return of millions of unemployed German soldiers. They specifically conceived of these potential settlers as useful tools in the threatened East, especially regarding Wilson's principle of self-determination and the fact that the border with a new Poland would soon be drawn along ethnic lines. Bauer then asked Sering to write a Reich Settlement Law (hereafter RSG), and to in effect shape and oversee a renewed inner colonization in an about-to-be-defeated Germany.[3] Just as the "opportunity" created by conquest in the East had given Sering free reign over "natives" in order to come up with settler plans to his liking, so the opportunity of the fall of traditional power in Germany itself allowed him at this moment to set an agenda free from the old Conservative obstruction. Amidst so much loss Sering must have smiled at the precipitous loss in power of his "eternal enemy," the *Junker*. In fact, on November 10, Sering sent Bauer a copy of a letter he had written on November 17, 1917, explaining that settlement in *Ober Ost*, occupied Latvia, would be best accomplished by seizing one third of the land of the Baltic *Junker*. This, he now argued, should be a model for what needed to be done in Germany itself. In other words, the radical freedom of the war, which had allowed settlement specialists in Latvia to force the landed elite to bow to their will, was now the model Sering was asking to employ in the eastern provinces of Germany.[4]

Tragically, at this very moment of respect and recognition for Sering the academic, Sering the father experienced the greatest loss of his long life. With a mere seven days of shooting left to go on the Western Front, Max Sering Junior was killed in action. While the official date of death is the fourth, with the German army in full retreat and disarray, some time may have passed before the elder Sering was officially informed. Although by far the most devastating, this was only one of many blows that Sering would take in the weeks to follow. Just as January 18, 1871, the crowning of Kaiser William the First as emperor of a united Germany, was the greatest day of Sering's life, surely November 9, 1918, with its abdication and flight of William the Second, was one of the worst. The fall of the monarchy was followed by the Armistice on the eleventh and the full realization that Germany had been defeated. Almost immediately, Polish militias in Posen began taking control of that province, strongly indicating to Sering that he was about to lose his coveted

[3] Schultz-Klinken, "Das ländliche Siedlungswesen," 117–140. See also, Gerhard Zeller, *Rechtsgeschichte der ländlichen Siedlung* (Cologne: Heymann, 1975), 147.

[4] Sering to Bauer, November 10, 1918. See also Ernst Dietrich Holtz, *Deutsche Siedlung im Baltenland. Schriften zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation* 31 (Berlin: Deutsche Landbuchhandlung, 1920), 49–51.

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settler colonial territory, the *Wartheland*. Yet, despite his world collapsing all around him, Sering had his eyes firmly on Germany's immediate future and was hard at work on his new task, creating the RSG. On the ninth, the GFK was holding a meeting in its offices near the Potsdamer Bridge and could hear the ruckus down the street at the *Reichstag* as the abdication was underway. One member of the group later claimed that the future Settlement Law was largely sketched out at this very gathering.[5]

On November 20, Bauer called a meeting at the *Reichsarbeitsamt*. Sering was the first speaker. He told the audience that he had already outlined a Settlement Law that would address the issue of the surplus of workers in the cities, and ideally bring two million men to rural Germany.[6] As the realization that the British Blockade of Germany was not ceasing with the Armistice and national hunger was only increasing, Sering claimed that Germany should become autarkic. Sering then seized this moment of power and prestige to inform the audience that his new law would involve the confiscation of one third of the land on large *Junker* estates. After all, Germany had required such a sacrifice from the Baltic barons for settlement in Latvia during the war, so now was the time to expect the same sacrifice from Germany's own barons. The ensuing discussion involved a lot of pushback, including the usual argument that large estates produced more food than small ones, as well as the fear that such a rash settlement would encompass too many settlers who knew next to nothing about farming. Von Klitzing of Silesia argued that, while such a sudden settlement sounded good, he feared the new arrivals might give up on farming too easily and that they should, therefore, be tied to the land for seven years (an idea similar to what the Nazis would ultimately put into effect). Inevitably, and quite logically, the discussion found its way to the history of inner colonization since 1886. State Commissioner for Housing, Baron von Coels, noted that the Settlement Commission had only set up 25,000 farms at the alarming cost of a billion marks over thirty years. He argued that a defeated Germany simply did not have the money for such an endeavor. Representative for the Agricultural Ministry, Privy Council Krause further emphasized this point, stating that Sering was proposing five times more settlement than the Settlement Commission had managed in thirty years. Keup weighed in to support Sering's plan, while encouraging

[5] They were meeting at Schöneberger Ufer 21. See Wilhelm Friedrich Boyens, *Die Geschichte der ländlichen Siedlung*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Landschriften-Verlag, 1959/60), 33, 38.

[6] BArch K, N1210/46, document 1.

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"caution." Sering rejoined that the reason the Settlement Commission had encountered so much trouble in the past was because the land had been so expensive, but his confiscation plan solved that problem. The session was ended by Dr. Tiburtius, the Representative for the Demobilization Office, who claimed that he liked any idea that would please the homecoming troops, an interest they all surely shared.[7]

The ability of the settler colonizer to see virtually any and all space as empty and ripe for colonization achieved perhaps its most extreme form in the minds of "inner colonizers" immediately after the end of the war. In the first postwar issue of *AFK*, Erich Keup penned the lead article, "What Now?" Well, "inner colonization now" was his answer, of course, asking if there had ever been a better time. Keup argued that, although the cloud of war had stripped Germany of so much, leaving it very poor, it had also wiped clear a faulty foundation, destroying a nation that had nevertheless been a bit too industrial anyway. Now, the silver lining was that Germany could be born anew as a more properly agrarian nation, and the newly unemployed industrial workers and returning soldiers could move straight onto the land. In a final optimistic comment, made here by Keup before the full extent of the borders of the new Poland had been proclaimed, he rejoiced that the creation of a Polish state would soak up all the usual seasonal Polish labour, solving one of the age-old conflicts with the *Junker*, that is, their addiction to cheap, non-German farmhands.[8] The journal then reprinted a recent December speech by Hindenburg in which he promised land to the returning veterans for their "fifty months of undefeated work." Interestingly, Hindenburg suggested that Germany should build garden cities and garden suburbs.[9] The author of the third article in this issue continued in the same heady vein of settlement possibilities in the still amorphous East, and described the land available in Latvia for veterans.[10] In fact, the infamous "Freikorps" episode was well under way at this very moment. Just as the dream of settling Germans in Courland was extinguished with the birth of an independent Latvia on November 18, 1918, a radical settlement scheme appeared to take its place in early 1919. The Latvian government,

[7] BArch K, N1210/46, documents 2 and 3.

[8] Erich Keup, "Was nun?," *AFK* 11 (1919): 25–27. That romantic notions of an agrarian Germany continued to be popular, even across great fissures like 1918, is the central theme to the now classic work, Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[9] "Hindenburg über das bevorstehende Siedlungswerk," *AFK* 11 (1919): 29–30. See David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[10] M. Brose, "Ländliche Bauten in Livland," *AFK* 11 (1919): 38–46.

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desperate in its war against Russian Bolsheviks, invited German soldiers to help the Latvians in their struggle, in return for a plot of land in the new republic. The men who came, the *Freikorps*, had little problem with the Latvian request to renounce their German citizenship for, after all, they felt betrayed by the new German government they believed had stabbed the nation in the back. This utopia of Teutonic soldiers settling in Courland was, however, not to be, as the behavior of the *Freikorps* resulted in the Latvians rejecting them. Most of the men were marching home to defeated Germany by late 1919.[11]

While some inner colonizers, and to a certain extent Hindenburg, still had their sights on Teutonic colonial territory, Keup was speaking of settling in Germany itself, even as the classic lands of inner colonization, Posen and West Prussia, were already slipping away. By the time Keup's mentor, Max Sering, penned two articles on the subject in 1919, those two provinces were largely gone, and instead land that could be said to be "purely" German was to be the focus of Germany's latest "colonial fantasies." In an article in *Schmollers Jahrbuch* in which Sering described in detail how he wrote the RSG that had come into effect on January 29, 1919, he too mentioned the destruction of industry and how the government, through its support for this new legislation, was very much supporting the idea of getting the now unemployed proletariat out of the cities and onto the land. Crucially, for the man who once saw Prussian Poland as empty, then full when he discovered an empty Courland, Sering now had this to say about the Brandenburg farmland just east of Berlin: it was "emptied," and "there is enough room available to bring in millions of settlers."[12]

He continued in this vein in an April 1919 *AFK* article, stating that remaining industry should be decentralized and that: "The German Empire must again become more of an agrarian land." Sering argued that the only way to keep the unemployed industrialized masses from fleeing to America (and behaving like Italians or Russian Jews) would be to fill the "the wide open spaces in the temperate zone with homesteads."[13] So many Germans had abandoned their farms for the

[11] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 7. See also Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 68–76.

[12] Max Sering, "Die Verordung der Reichsregierung vom 29. Januar 1919 zur Beschaffung von landwirtschaftlichem Siedlungsland. Eine Denkschrift," *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 43 (1919): 587–629.

[13] Max Sering, "Erläuterungen zu dem Entwurf eines Reichgesetzes zur Beschaffung von landwirtschaftlichem Siedlungsland," *AFK* 12 (1919/20): 145.

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cities that there was room throughout Germany for "millions of settlers." Especially, Sering argued, if moors were drained. Sering further explained his rationale for this settlement scheme by pointing out that it was not simply economic flight from the land that had created this vacuum: the war itself had emptied the farms because so many of the fallen soldiers had come from the "healthy" rural districts (as Sering had long predicted they would). Sering argued that this plan would enable Germans to return to the kinds of areas where they naturally belonged. But Sering wanted to make clear that the simple creation of a new *Landproletariat* would be a disaster. Instead, the only way to truly reverse the demographic trend was to make life better for these new small, landowning farmers, and for that a fundamental "class" levelling had to take place: "It is important to remodel the social constitution of the large farmers and landed elite in the democratic sense, to bridge the class contradictions and to more evenly distribute the land, by setting up many smaller farms alongside larger ones."[14] Here, with more power and prestige than he had ever had, Sering was dialing up his ultimately anti-*Junker* rhetoric. Embedded into the RSG was a new ability to annex land, but now, instead of being directed against Poles, it was to be used against the *Junker* themselves.[15] Along with this symbolic shift away from Poles and Polish farmland to Germans and German land, Sering ended this article proclaiming that inner colonization should be able to settle 200,000 to 300,000 families, vastly more than the entire Program of Inner Colonization had ever achieved. Quite simply, Sering, as always, moved and refocused his settler colonial vision to the space he had at his disposal.

This cool and collected academic tone was not so apparent in the public presentation of Sering at this time. In newspaper articles published in early 1919 we find the wartime, immoderate Sering, the one who saw the East through a radical, colonial lens. In "To Arms!," in the February 17, 1919, *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, Sering called for the German Army to guard the threatened eastern border, stating that the Reich would lose 18 percent of its territory if the Poles got their way at Versailles. In a three-part article published in March, in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, entitled "The New Eastern and Western Borders," Sering first reminded his readers of his interpretation of Wilson's

[14] Sering, "Erläuterungen," 149.

[15] In fact, in an article appearing in 1921, Sering discussed the history of inner colonization in almost purely anti-*Junker* terms, barely mentioning the Poles. See Max Sering, "Die Landfrage – Der städtische Boden," in *Handbuch der Politik*, Vol. 4. *Der wirtschaftliche Wiederaufbau,* ed. Gerhard Anschütz (Berlin: Rothschild, 1921), 181–193.

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sentiments, "[t]he equal status of all civilized peoples (*Kulturvölker*) and the just peace of understanding that would result."[16] Shockingly, the normally careful historian stated that long-term history was not so crucial and that, instead, it was the lives of those living today that mattered. He therefore called for a plebiscite in the land of his youth, Alsace-Lorraine, stating that, during the period before 1871, French revolutionary ideas had never really permeated the population and that these people had remained basically German. He then made the classic pivot of the imperial era, where Western or Central Europeans were always treated differently than "others," stating that the eastern border regions were to be conceived of quite differently from the western. Whereas in the West there were natural borders, and therefore natural divisions between peoples, in the East, the only way to create such order would be the forced relocation/unmixing (*Umsiedlung*) of mixed ethnicities.

> In east Elbian Germany however, the Germans have been the greatest colonizing people (*Kolonialvolk*), with their towering churches and town halls, tens of thousands of clean villages and well-established estates, excellent schools, libraries, museums, in short, all culture everywhere established since medieval colonization. These colonists arrived at the time in a completely barbaric country. And this truly creative work has continued into the most recent times. West Prussia and Posen were sloppy and degenerate when the old Polish state collapsed under the weight of is lawlessness and political incompetence in 1772.[17]

Sering described that, in 1916, as he travelled through Galicia and Russian Poland, the peasants in these areas told him they did not care who ruled over them, Russians, Germans, Austrians, only please not a Pole! ("Wenn's nur kein Pole ist!")[18] After detailing the various percentages of who was and was not German in the eastern Prussian provinces, he acknowledged that it was ultimately impossible to separate the various

[16] The article sections appeared on March 18, 19, and 21, 1919 as "Die neuen Ost- und Westgrenzen." Sering sent these articles to Erzberger: "Eurer Excellenz, Übersende ich drei kurze Aufszätze über Deutschlands neue West- und Ostgrenze, in denen ich versucht habe die Wilson'schen Grundsätze zu präzisieren und mit Hilfe einer ethnographisch-historische Entwicklung im Osten und ihre Auswirkung auf die jetzige Gliederung nach 'Nationalitäten' selbst in Deutschland keineswegs noch Gemeingut geworden ist, den Feinden aber vollends unbekannt sein dürfte, schien mir solche Darlegung für die bevorstehenden Friedensverhandlungen von Wichtigkeit." Sering to Erzberger, March 22, 1919.

[17] "Die neuen Ost- und Westgrenzen," March 18, 1919.

[18] He then made this comparison to North America: "So today the Germans everywhere in the Eastern regions of their land have the same legal title as Americans and the English in North America, the English in Australia and South Africa, but with the difference that the German-created culture of the Americans and English is not nearly so old and rich." "Die neuen Ost- und Westgrenzen," March 18, 1919.

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Figure 6.1 The creation of Poland, 1919
(Drawn by graphic company – original created for author)

"language islands" of Germans from Poles. He then went further down this rather new and realistic vein, stating that, unlike West and East Prussia, Posen was in fact "old Polish" land and that, at best, it was a province that belonged to both nationalities. He mooted the idea of a plebiscite, with separate voting for each municipality (*Gemeinde*), followed by the proper drawing of an international border as fairly as possible between the western German speakers and eastern Polish speakers. This process was then to be completed by a years-long program of population exchanges, to purify the language border. Sering admitted this would be difficult, especially for cities, but ultimately worth it. If, instead, the region was simply taken from Germany, Sering prophesized in unusually graphic language: "[s]hould Germany be raped, her entire life energy would be used to close this bleeding wound at the first opportunity."[19] Again, such horrendous upheaval was not suggested for the West, as Sering believed one simple plebiscite for all of Alsace-Lorraine should decide the status of the entire region.[20]

[19] "Die neuen Ost- und Westgrenzen," March 19, 1919.
[20] "Die neuen Ost- und Westgrenzen," March 21, 1919. Then days later, at an event, Sering declared that Germans must take up arms to prevent the break up (Verstuckelung) of Germany, and "Wir bestehen auf der Gleichberechtigung des deutschen Volkes und lehnen eine Vergewaltigung der Schwachen und Wehrlosen ab. Für uns und unser Brüder in Oesterreich verlangen wir das Selbstbestimmungsrecht. (Lebhafte Zustimm.)." See "Volkskundgebung im Zirkus Busch," *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, March 24, 1919.

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The "*Diktat*"

On January 17, 1920, Sering swore an oath to uphold the constitution of the Weimar Republic, as was required of all civil servants. Nevertheless, he would devote the rest of his life to attacking and attempting to "right" the Treaty of Versailles that the Republic had signed.[21] He initially crystallized his opinions about the recent war and the Treaty in a booklet he published in 1920, *The Peace Diktat of Versailles and Germany's Economic Situation*. He began, unsurprisingly, by detailing war crimes and starvation, claiming that, before 1914, civilians were not supposed to be targets in war and that, therefore, the Allies had been correct in their damning of the German army for its actions in Northern France during the 1918 retreat. But, Sering bitterly pointed out, what of the death of 800,000 German civilians due to the British Blockade and the accompanying calculated destruction of a highly developed national economy? These Allied actions, he decried, were worse than anything since Carthage. Sering claimed that the Allied justification for all of this was of course Germany's so-called war guilt, but the documents showed that Germany wanted a localized war in Serbia, never had expansionist or annexationist desires, and possessed a *Mitteleuropapolitik* that was conservative and defensive in nature. Fascinatingly, Sering then conducted a brief overview of imperial history that concluded with his description of what he saw as the new trend by some European powers to not simply limit their colonization to "non-" or "half-civilized" peoples, but instead to now rule over fully European *Volk*, such as the Boers.[22] This was a preface to his bitter denunciation of the current colonization of Germans in Posen and West Prussia by their new Polish overlords. He ended his booklet with an optimistic prophecy that a global alliance would arise, untainted by the "mockery" of Versailles, and that a "planetary balancing of the Great Powers" would be restored and include Germany: "This knowledge shall strengthen our faith in a global moral order, and allows tormented humanity to see a shimmer of the morning glow of freedom on the darkened horizons."[23]

[21] "Vereidigungsnachweis," in Sering *Personalakte* 84, HUB UA.

[22] Language like this, alongside the earlier comments on accommodating western European Alsatians while deporting huge populations of eastern peoples for border reasons, all point toward an understanding that Poles, Latvians, and Belarusians fell into some vague "non-European" category for Sering, at most "half-civilized" if not "uncivilized."

[23] Max Sering, *Das Friedensdiktat von Versailles und Deutschlands wirtschaftliche Lage* (Berlin: Mittler&Sohn, 1920), *passim*, final quote is at 46–47.

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Around the same time Sering penned a piece for *AFK* which laid out the latest evolution of his "eastern" thinking. Like many in Germany, he had transitioned from the 1917 thinker who saw almost limitless opportunities in the conquered East, to the bitterly conquered and defensive spouter of fear and prejudice. He began with some details of the agrarian mess in Russia caused by Communists, and cited Bertrand Russell on how this new regime was more Asiatic than European, functioning much like Britain's India. Sering went one step further, buying into a powerful strain of antisemitism: "It is known that foreign elements, the Jews, are playing an overwhelmingly large role in the Soviet regime."[24] He continued his rhetorical tour through the conquered East and the many wrongs done to Germany. In Latvia and Estonia land had been stolen from the old German population and now one encountered Baltic barons relegated to the status of beggars. (At this point, Sering did not indicate his joy in 1918 when Hindenburg promised to expropriate a third of the same property!) Lastly, he walked through the humiliations being committed against the very Germans he had helped settle, in Posen and West Prussia, by a Polish regime that was behaving in a barbaric fashion. What is more, he warned, the Polish state, which had descended upon German land like a great fortress, was already thickly settled and this growing population was going to need more land. This should not have been a problem, Sering declared, as "indeed Poland had conquered rich colonial territory in the White Russian and Ukrainian speaking areas."[25] In fact, a December 1920 law had promised this land to Polish veterans.[26] Yet, Sering opined, the Poles clearly had their expansionist eyes on Upper Silesia and East Prussia. He ended this screed against the Slavic Flood with an urgent call for renewed German inner colonization at the eastern border.[27]

Sering continued his diatribe against the Allies and Versailles with the publication two years later of a pamphlet entitled *The Crisis of the Global Economy and Foreign Economic Policy*.[28] Here he blamed Germany's

[24] Max Sering, "Die Umwälzung der osteuropäischen Agrarverfassung," *AFK* 13 (1920/21): 139.
[25] Sering, "Die Umwälzung," 147.
[26] Robert L. Nelson and Justin Fantauzzo, "German Veteran Settlement on Conquered Land: Soldier Settlers in East Central Europe, 1915–22," in *The Central Powers' Responses*, Vol. 3: *Russia's Great War and Revolution*, ed. Heather Perry, Emre Sencer, and John Deak (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2020), 281–299.
[27] Keup argued that the westward movement of Poles must stop, "before the Oder is reached." See his, "Innere Kolonisation und Bevölkerungspolitik," *AFK* 14 (1921–1922): 134. See also, Ludwig Klein, "Lehren aus der Zeit der Kgl. Ansiedlungskommission," *AFK* 14 (1921/22): 255–261.
[28] Max Sering, *Die Krisis der Weltwirtschaft und die auswärtige Wirtschaftspolitik* (Jena: Kommissionsverlag von Gustav Fischer, 1922), 3–24.

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deepening crisis on both the lost war as well as the terrible impositions of Versailles. After decrying how much of the East was lost, he could not believe that the Western Powers continued to drone on about the so-called Red Terror in light of what the Allies had already done and were currently doing to Germany: plunder, expulsions, abuse, and the murder of 800,000 via Blockade. The Allies were no better than the Russians, he concluded.

By 1923 the mood in the now thinner issues of *AFK* was one of frustration and impotence. There was of course no money available to run the program like the pre-war days and, in fact, the old Settlement Commission was officially terminated in 1922.[29] At the same time, the new expropriation laws, the ones directed against the *Junker*, were full of legal loopholes and no progress was being made on this front either. In addition to these financial and legal obstacles inner colonizers were under sustained attack from those arguing that thickly settled, small farms were inefficient in terms of food production. Sering argued against this, and the managing editor of *AFK*, Max Stolt, stated in an article entitled, "On the Question of 'Food Insecurity' due to Settlement," that such anti-inner colonization arguments were poppycock.[30] In a fascinating and starkly honest article from the previous year, Erich Keup claimed that inner colonization had never been about food production but, instead, had always been about thickly settling the land. A goal that Keup argued should now, especially in the threatened East, be paramount.[31]

It is in this period that we get a rare hint of home life in a May 1923 letter in which Sering wrote that, in the midst of his dark mood regarding the French Occupation of the Ruhr, the grandchildren in his house reminded him how to smile.[32] In a letter of the following year, Sering noted that his mandatory retirement was looming. One can only imagine how hard such a thing would be for someone whose entire identity was being an engaged professor.[33] As mentioned in Chapter 5, Dietrich

[29] Ministerialrat von Both, "In memoriam der Ansiedlungskommission für Westpreußen und Posen," *AFK* 16 (1924): 1–5. Von Both's calculation of the 21,886 families settled resulted in his calculation of 153,800 total settlers.

[30] Max Stolt, "Zur Frage der 'Ernährungsgefährdung'," *AFK* 15 (1923): 263–265.

[31] Keup, "Innere Kolonisation und Bevölkerungspolitik," *AFK* 14 (1921–22): 125–34.

[32] Hannes Gebhard to Sering, May 19, 1923. In BArch K N1210/127, document 1. (This Finnish economist was a student of Sering's in the 1890s.) The son of the famous Admiral von Tirpitz, Wolfgang, was captured at sea in 1914. Upon his return to Germany after the war, he began studying under the tutelage of Sering. In class, he met fellow student, and daughter of the professor, Elisabeth Sering, and they soon were married.

[33] Schmiesing (almost illegible), from the office of the Preussische Minister für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Volksbildung to Sering, December 5, 1924. The letter stated that Sering would reach the "Altersgrenze," age limit, on March 31, 1925.

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Schäfer published a pamphlet in 1919 attacking Sering for suggesting to the German government that the founding of a Kingdom of Poland would result in hundreds of thousands of Polish troops for the German Army.[34] In 1924, Schäfer pressed his attack with the publication of *Eastern Europe and We Germans*. Schäfer described how Bethmann-Hollweg had sent Sering to Warsaw after it was liberated in 1915 and that there Sering was informed that a powerful Poland would be good for Germany. But, seethed Schäfer, the clueless Sering never understood that a strong Poland would threaten German land, and that the promises Sering received from the Polish "temporary politicians" (*Augenblickpolitiker*) he spoke to in Poland had no guarantee of being kept after the war. Even Schmoller got on board, Schäfer wrote, and joined Sering in the claim that Poles would never pursue German land. Schäfer railed against what he saw as the continual lack of judgement (*Urteilslosigkeit*) of the best educated men that was on display during the war.[35]

This book led a certain Kurt Haase, four years later, to ask Sering for a memorandum he had written during the war about Poland, and whether there was any truth to Schäfer's accusations. In the exchange of letters that followed, in what appears to be the only case of which I am aware, Sering openly and knowingly lied. Sering replied that he had never dealt with Bethmann-Hollweg in any way and that he had told Schäfer that he was wrong in his description of the events and Schäfer had simply ignored him.[36] At the time, in late August 1928, Sering was ill and, thus, the final letter in this exchange was dictated to an assistant. In it, Sering once again correctly pointed out that he did not personally engage with the Chancellor, and that Schäfer was wrong to claim that the Chancellor sent an unprepared Sering to Poland, "the entire episode is made up out of thin air."[37] At most, Sering claimed, Bethmann-Hollweg might have seen his memorandum after it had been written. Sering then stated that he had written about Poland only twice. First, in August 1915, he went on a trip "of his own volition," to research the agricultural situation in the Baltics, and only thereafter informed the Foreign Office of his findings. He stated that he had met Beseler in Warsaw at the end of that trip, and afterward wrote a short report. Second, one year later, in May and June of 1916, he journeyed east under contract with the Ministry of War, of

[34] Dietrich Schäfer, *Die Schuld an der Wiederherstellung Polens* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1919).
[35] Dietrich Schäfer, *Osteuropa und wir Deutschen* (Berlin: Elsner, 1924), 124–127.
[36] Kurt Haase to Sering, June 4, 1928; Sering to Haase, June 12, 1928; Sering to Haase, August 8, 1928; Haase to Sering, August 29, 1928. All in BArch K, N/1210/121, document 6.
[37] Sering to Haase, October 8, 1928. BArch K, N/1210/121, document 6.

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which he was a member as Chair of the Scientific Economic Commission. He was to study the entire Polish economy, such as the Lodz textile industry. Here he noted that, when he spoke to the factory workers, they made it clear they wanted Poland to be economically tied to Germany, not Austria–Hungary. This journey resulted in his report "The Future of Poland." Such topics as "military potential" were not in the report, as Sering stated he would only have spoken about such things as a "private man." In any case, Sering claimed that independence discussions were well underway in Poland at the time, and thus in no way could his report be said to be the prime mover for the November 1916 declaration of the Kingdom of Poland. He admitted that he was asked throughout his trip for his opinion, but so was Schäfer. And his opinion was very much along the lines of Adolph Weber's, or those of Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*, published in 1915. To sum up, Sering declared, "Schäfer's statement in his book 'Osteuropa und wir Deutschen' is pure fantasy." But, as was pointed out several times in Chapter 5, in his confidential advice, to Beseler and anyone who would listen, Sering was in fact a serious and dogged lobbyist for exactly the very mistake Schäfer accused him of pursuing, especially his suggestion that supporting the Kingdom was worth it as the Poles would provide 700,000 soldiers to Germany.

Transition to Stability

In 1921, Sering founded the German Research Institute for Agriculture and Settlement, later known simply as the "Sering Institut." Here, Sering would supervise many doctoral students, oversee (and often edit) the publication of a steady stream of books, and cement his position by this time as one of the most famous agrarian economists in the world. At the VfS conference in Stuttgart in 1924, Sering gave the opening keynote entitled "Protective Tariffs or Free Trade?" At the outset of his lecture he laid out the global and national agrarian crisis and argued that the agrarian sector was having a particularly difficult recovery, as its prices had flatlined while industrial prices were on the rise. Somehow, foreign powers had to be convinced to lower the "tribute money" (reparations) for Germany to get back on its feet. For now, because of the precarious nature of the agrarian sector, and because foreign powers were protecting their own markets, Sering said he was in favour of tariffs. In a further move away from any courting of the *Junker*, however, Sering claimed that, although he had been in favour of tariffs in previous crises, such as in 1879, he was now a firm believer in free trade, and his current attitude was merely temporary. However, Sering was no Manchesterite, as he

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believed the radically free market reign throughout the world had fomented the very competition that had led to the war. Chairman Adolf Weber's obsequious thanking of Sering at the end of the keynote seems to indicate Sering's status by the 1920s.[38]

Sering's formal mandatory state retirement in early 1925 had little effect on the professor's output. In that same year he published *Agrarian Crises and Agrarian Tariffs*. In this deeply comparative work, Sering began in the foreword stating that he had followed agricultural developments since his very first research trip to the United States and Canada in 1883. On these themes, the Sering-Institut had already produced I. A. Stevenson's *Aussichten der Landwirtschaft in Canada* (Prospects for Agriculture in Canada) as the very first volume in its series "Studies in Agriculture," and two other specialists were hard at work producing volumes on Argentina. These latter works were to focus on the problem in Argentina of the farmers not owning their land. The *estancieros*, an Argentinian version of the *Junker*, had only rented out their farmland and so, with the arrival of an economic downturn, the farmers had simply abandoned the land. The roots of this crisis had already been compared to Canada, where farmers owned their land and thus stayed, and, as Sering predicted, the latter was declared to be a much better, proper inner colonial, model.[39] Harkening back to his youthful days on the Prairies, Sering did, however, point out that too much land had been given away to the CPR, and speculation had been damaging to Western Canada. Sering's book-length historical study ended with the upswing in agricultural prices in 1924, and his expression of pleasure that many specialists continued to go to the United States to study that gargantuan country.[40]

[38] Max Sering, "Schutzzoll oder Freihandel?," in *Grundfragen der neuen deutschen Handelspolitik. Handelspolitische Verhandlungen des Vereins für Sozialpolitik in Stuttgart 1924* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1925), 8–37. Sering was, however, far from invincible. During this period, he fought a losing war with the government over the publication of the economic studies he had overseen during the war. He had planned to publish several monographs produced by his team but, in the end, it was deemed that too much state information was contained in such studies and only three were produced, with very limited access. Sering was furious, stating that the more the economic errors of the war were understood, the less likely Germany would repeat them. The three volumes have recently been republished, alongside a fourth volume with useful essays on the wartime economy. See Marcel Boldorf and Rainer Haus, eds., *Die deutsche Kriegswirtschaft im Bereich der Heeresverwaltung 1914–1918*, 4 vols. (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016). It should be noted, Sering had actually argued against the 1879 tariffs in his dissertation.

[39] Carl E. Solberg, *The Prairies and the Pampas: Agrarian Policy in Canada and Argentina, 1880–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univesity Press, 1987).

[40] Max Sering, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarzölle* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1925). In this book, Sering specifically thanks Professor Henry Taylor. Throughout this period, Sering had

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A historian today can literally feel the emergence of Germany from the inflationary crisis when picking up and leafing through a copy of volume seventeen of *AFK* from 1925. The paper is of a substantially better quality. But the improving situation in Germany did not help the inner colonizers surrounding Sering in their fight against the *Junker*. This very same issue of *AFK* in fact signaled a major changing of the guard and, in effect, a capitulation. Sering's long-time partner, and head of the GFK, Friedrich von Schwerin, had died. Keup opened the volume with a eulogy to the old warrior, focusing on how he had been one of the few Prussian civil servants to not go along with the weak policies of Bethmann-Hollweg and had in fact been reprimanded twice by the former Chancellor. Keup ended his remembrance of Schwerin by specifically mentioning his close relationship with Sering, stating that they had fought side by side, were both true conservatives, one through his words and one through his actions. But the effect of inner colonization losing its most powerful anti-*Junker* was immediately felt with Schwerin's replacement, Wilhelm von Gayl. In the very same issue announcing the death of Schwerin, Gayl stated: "There is enough land. As I have stated elsewhere, the time for expropriations has past."[41] He then announced the "Abandonment of Expropriation for the purposes of Settlement," while admitting that yes, it had found its way into the 1919 RSG, inner colonizers were no longer in favour of seizing the property of the *Junker*.[42] As Sering would of course never have agreed to such a change, 1925 signals the slow but sure parting of the ways between certain elements of inner colonization and Sering.

A Shift to Race

Sering had met Gayl in *Ober Ost* during the war, when the latter was one of the strongest advocates for forced population transfer. In Gayl's memoir, finished around 1942, he indicated that he was deeply antisemitic while at *Ober Ost*. He did write that Sering was very helpful to him when he took the reins of the GFK, and that they had a "frictionless relationship" into Sering's later years. Gayl's claim in his memoir that Sering was the loudest, most powerful voice for inner colonization, owing to his international fame, is all the more notable as

American PhD students and, as we shall see, returned to America in 1930. Thus, unlike the shift to an anti-American attitude traced by Guettel, those like Sering involved in international circles, experienced no such shift. See Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States, 1776–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch. 4.

[41] Wilhelm von Gayl, "Geleitwort," *AFK* 17 (1925): 57–58.

[42] Wilhelm von Gayl, "Verzicht auf Enteignung für Siedlungszwecke," *AFK* 17 (1925): 59–61.

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it was written just as Sering's Jewish background was being decried, as we shall see in Chapter 7.[43] In any case, even before the GFK was under the control of Gayl, certain biological views were seeping into inner colonization, such as in a 1921 *AFK* article by Paul Lazarus, "The Health of the Volk via Hygienic Colonization." After lamenting the loss of two million soldiers at the front and 800,000 civilians due to the Blockade, Lazarus argued that the most "racially weakening" factor was in fact "flight from the land," as it placed people in "sick" cities with a declining birthrate: "The great biological remedy is hygienic colonization. The Volk must return to a more intimate relationship with Mother Earth." This had happened in America, he argued, and now the miraculous results could be seen. His seemingly incongruous evidence was this: Sunday was still holy and healthy there, while Germans partied and drank that day away.[44] In any case, soon racial thinking would turn more directly to the Poles.

As the national recovery continued and Germany was increasingly in the position to "act," the Poles came more clearly into national view as the target of racial vitriol. By 1925 the latest version of an ethnonationalist wall in the East to stem the Slavic Flood was appearing in the national press. In 1925, the Poles passed a law allowing for the expropriation of German farms in the former Prussian provinces, and, unlike the Prussians from 1908 to 1914, the Poles were much more effective in carrying out such forced removals. The national press reacted with the realization that Germany was on the way to losing those provinces permanently.[45] Such a theme had been simmering in the pages of *AFK* since 1919, but began to boil at this time with a piece from a member of the editing team, Max Stolt, a man who importantly would later become the editor of the journal when under the control of the Nazis. In "Duties and Goals of Eastern German Settlement," Stolt opened with what was ostensibly an argument about the economics of

[43] Wilhelm von Gayl, "Aus einem Vierteljahrhundert deutscher Binnensiedlung 1908–1933," BArch F, N1031, document 1, 66. And in an article celebrating Sering's seventieth birthday, Gayl was claimed to have said that every "piece of paper" (Blatt) with regard to inner colonization had Sering on it, and that he was the "Meister." "Max Sering zum 70. Geburtstage," *AFK* 19 (1927):1–3.

[44] In fact, stated the author, Americans had completely banned alcohol. Paul Lazarus, "Volksgesundung durch hygenische Kolonisation," *AFK* 19 (1921/22): 134–142.

[45] Claudia-Yvonne Ludwig, *Die nationalpolitische Bedeutung der Ostsiedlung in der Weimarer Republik und die öffentliche Meinung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 53. Fully 96 percent of the property purchased by the Settlement Commission was now in Polish hands. See Scott M. Eddie, "The Prussian Settlement Commission and Its Activities in the Land Market, 1886–1918," in *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 through the Present*, ed. Robert L. Nelson (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 56.

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settling more Germans and food production. He then pointed out that farmers did not detest harvesting turnips, instead what they hated was doing so alongside culturally backward Slavs. "German Work for German Workers!," he wrote.[46] He argued that the new border was bleeding, and Slavs were permeating the "still" German land in the East, lowering the overall level of humanity. He then invoked the ancient description of Tacitus, that Germans had spread as far as the Bug and the Njemen, in order to plea that they therefore should again do so, but noted that in the endless struggle with the Slavs, the Germans had never been the aggressors. In an invocation of what would become an increasingly important question among German scientists, he asked if there was in fact enough *Lebensraum* for the German people and, with such aggressive neighbours, might Germany's current space ultimately shrink? He then sided with the Sering faction when it came to the *Junker*, stating that large estates had to be broken up and filled with German settlement. Further, a new version of the wartime *Grenzstreife* (border strip) idea would not work, Stolt insisted, as Poles would simply infiltrate through it and settle behind the lines, so to speak. Instead, all of Germany had to be inner colonized, to take away all *Raum* from the enemy. He ended the article by citing Chancellor Luther, who had claimed that settlement was not "a vital issue," instead it was "the vital issue."[47]

The language of being on the defensive, of Germans as the victims of colonization, was widespread, and even appeared in an *AFK* piece about South Tirol and the attempt by Italian fascists to "denationalise" the Germans there.[48] But of course the main German victims of aggressive colonization were always to be found in the East. Two *AFK* articles from 1924 depicted the ruination of the old Teutonic lands. One detailed how the worst moment in the 700 year history of the German Balts was currently underway as Latvians "reformed" the land.[49] The other was a bittersweet story of how an entire village of Germans had created a new settlement in Chludowo in 1914 only to be expelled by the Poles in November 1921, and were now resettled together inside the new German borders.[50] In 1929, Max Stolt further pushed his theme of the

[46] Max Stolt, "Aufgaben und Ziele des ostdeutschen Siedlungswerkes," *AFK* 18 (1926), 18–19.
[47] Stolt, "Aufgaben und Ziele," 28.
[48] N.A., "Italienische 'Kolonisation' Südtirols," *AFK* 19 (1927): 19–20. See also, Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ch. 3.
[49] Otto Korfes, "Agrarreform in Estland und Lettland," *AFK* 16 (1924): 16–23.
[50] Pagenkopf, "Die Siedlung der Flüchtlinge Chludowo im Kreise Franzburg," *AFK* 16 (1924): 249–262.

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porous border, arguing that many Poles continued to flow into Germany's East, working as seasonal labour. He then ramped up his anti-Polish position, stating that the Poles were simultaneously drawing up actual invasion plans.[51]

By this time Sering's own rhetoric crossed into perhaps the most anti-Polish he had ever been in his life. In a speech in 1929, in which the initial focus was on Soviet redistribution of land, Sering eventually spoke of East Central Europe where he decried how "agrarian laws" were being used as "war materiel" (*Kampfmittel*) against Germans (or, as Sering deemed them, the "ruling class" [*Herrenschicht*]), and that Poland was the worst culprit. The audacity of the father of German inner colonization, who had used agrarian laws as methods of war against the Polish minority in Eastern Prussia for decades, crying foul as the Poles now mirrored the Prussians, is truly astounding. The irony was inescapable as Sering complained that the Poles were using the actual Prussian "option to repurchase" (*Wiederkaufsrecht*) to buy up German estates. He proclaimed "[a]ll in all, injustice and inhumanity in the new or enlarged countries has unleashed a monstrous horror, increased national strife, and enflamed ethnic hatred (*Völkerhaß*), whereas before the war – in places like Upper Silesia – a peaceful coexistence reigned."[52] Near the end of the speech he began to move more clearly into the language of the "threatened East" and *Raum*, pointing out that the new west of Poland was already much more thickly settled than Brandenburg, Pomerania, East Prussia, and the borderlands, and that Poles were having babies at more than twice the rate of Germans. This demographic and spatial time bomb was only exacerbated by the reality that the sapping effect of inflation in Germany had deeply hurt inner colonization's speed of settlement. Stepping back somewhat from his more inflammatory rhetoric, Sering finished by stating that Germany should do whatever it could through "peaceful politics" to help its brethren inside Poland.[53]

[51] Max Stolt, "Industrie und Handel zur Siedlungspraxis," *AFK* 21(1929): 51–54. On the idea of the porous border, see Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914–1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[52] Max Sering, *Agrarrevolution und Agrarreform in Ost- und Mitteleuropa. Sonderausgabe aus den Sitzungsberichten der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Phil.-Hist. Klasse. 1929*, Vol. 25. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter: 1929), 12.

[53] Sering, *Agrarrevolution*, 13–15. Winson Chu argues that, while the Poles believed they could still assimilate non-Poles in their East, Germans in their west had fully developed their nationalism and could thus no longer be reached. Thus, the land, and not the people, in the new Polish west, was to be polonized. See Winson Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64. See also Richard Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles: The Germans in Western Poland 1918–1939* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993). Earlier, in a book that had originally been published in Russian in 1925, Sering whined that, while the Poles were constantly

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Then, in an article that appeared in *AFK* the next year, Sering became explicit in his use of "reverse colonialism," stating that Poland "desired *Lebensraum*."[54] I have often referenced Sering's ability to "see emptiness" when required as a settler colonizer to do so. As it turns out, Sering was even able to project this gaze into the eyes of his enemy. Although Poland as a whole had a population density of seventy-eight PPSKM, western Poland had one hundred PPSKM, while Brandenburg, Pomerania, East Prussia, and the borderlands (Grenzmark), had sixty, sixty-two, sixty-one, and forty-three PPSKM, respectively. To Sering the settler, there could only be one solution to such an imbalance. He once again framed Germans on the eastern frontier as the metaphorical pioneers of the American West. Yes, he admitted, it was difficult and expensive to settle Germans onto the failing *Junker* estates of the East, but surely America, Western Canada, and southern Brazil had proven that if you gave a German settler his own land, he would succeed. In fact, doing so in the United States had produced "the strongest empire of the European race in North America."[55] In effect, Sering was arguing that, with a successful inner colonial program the German "cowboys" could hold off the Polish "Indians."

In fact, already in a GFK speech at the end of 1927 Sering had managed to invoke the American frontier right in the heart of Germany itself. Keup had introduced Sering, and claimed that "inner colonization," as a movement and an idea, now had virtually no enemies in Germany. Sering agreed, stating that the war had moved agrarian settlement to the most prominent position it had ever enjoyed in Germany. Yes, Germany was an overpopulated land but, even in its current borders, it had more than enough space for the excess, with a mere thirty-seven PPSKM. Indeed, Sering pointed out that the land between Berlin and Hamburg was not much denser than the steppe of the western United States or southern Russia.[56]

There was an increasing interest in settlement in Germany after 1925. In addition to relative stability beginning that year, high rates of

expropriating farms, the Germans had "only" used the 1908 law three times, and then in an appropriately "orderly" fashion. See Max Sering, "Einleitung. Die geschichtliche überkommene Agrarverfassung, Übersicht der Reformgesetzgebung und ihrer Wirkungen," in *Die agrarischen Umwälzungen im außerrussischen Osteuropa*, ed. Max Sering (Berlin: Gruyter, 1930), 21.

[54] Max Sering, "Die Notwendigkeit intensiver Siedlungsarbeit im Osten und die Mittel zu ihrer Durchführung," *AFK* 22 (1930): 151.

[55] Sering, "Die Notwendigkeit intensiver Siedlungsarbeit," 155. Two years earlier, Sering received a letter from Henry Taylor. In the letter, Taylor outlined an experiment involving 200 people in Vermont, to improve rural life. Sering underlined the word "eugenics." Taylor to Sering, December 29, 1928.

[56] "Kundgebung die landwirtschaftliche Siedlung," *AFK* 20 (1928): 11.

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unemployed workers in the cities piqued interest in getting this possibly "dangerous" element onto the land. But the RSG did little to actually alter the situation on the ground.[57] At the end of the decade there were a few other pathetic schemes taking place to repopulate the land in the "threatened East." One, *Osthilfe*, or Eastern Aid, was government assistance used to prop up *Junker* on the verge of bankruptcy. It is difficult to imagine something more grotesque to Sering. In a paper from 1931 in which he requested that more unemployed industrial workers be settled in the East, Sering directly asked that the *Osthilfe* funding be diverted directly to such a purpose.[58] As it turned out, by late 1932, in what came to be known as the *Osthilfeskandal*, the *Junker* beneficiaries of this aid were outed as using it to buy automobiles and go on vacation. The other program, much more in line with Sering's desires, was the so-called *West-Ostsiedlung*, West-to-East Settlement. Along the lines of the defunct Settlement Commission, German settlers were found in the "west" and provided parcelled land in the German East. From 1927 to 1931, the program settled a grand total of 2,484 people.[59] Inner colonization had never been successful, but this was abominable.[60]

The Professor at the Centre of It All

It is often the case that professors in the Humanities and the Social Sciences are never busier than when they are "retired." Some combination of a career of publications and achieving status, as well as decades of accumulating knowledge, all significantly alongside the curtailment of a regular teaching load, results in situations like Sering's in the mid-

[57] Heinrich Becker, *Handlungsspielräume der Agrarpolitik in der Weimarer Republik zwischen 1923 und 1929* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990), 280ff.

[58] Max Sering, "Arbeitslosigkeit, Bodenverbesserung und ländliche Siedlung. Ein Gutachten für die Gutachterkommission zur Arbeitslosenfrage," *Jahrbuch für Bodenreform* 27 (1931): 143–154.

[59] Four issues of a special journal series, *Flugschriften der Reichsstelle für Siedlerberatung*, were produced by someone who would become the editor of the *AFK* in the Federal Republic of Germany, Johannes Schauff.

[60] Boyens, however, who was personally involved in this program, claimed it was a success. After all, he wrote, its purpose was to fill the physically "empty" farms they had identified in the East, and this they did. Boyens, *Die Geschichte der ländlichen Siedlung*, Vol. 1, 291ff. Dietze was also supportive of these measures. See his memorandum, "Die veränderten wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der ländlichen Siedlung," Denkschrift der Direktoren des Deutschen Forschungs-instituts für Agrar- und Siedlungswesen Sering-Berlin, Seraphim-Rostock, Lang-Königsberg, von Dietze-Jena. March 1930. BArch K, N1210/34, document 1. There was an even more radical form of settlement proposed at this time, "primitive settlement." If the American pioneers could settle on land without any fixed structures, then so should Germans. See Silvio Broedrich, "Primitivsiedlung," *AFK* 22 (1930): 235–237.

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1920s. The bustling Sering Institut was churning out students, some of whom Sering published in the institute's own series that he oversaw.[61] He was attracting students from around the world and has since become lauded in Women's History circles for his supervision of some of the first female PhDs.[62] From 1927 to 1930 Sering was a part of the German editorial team overseeing the series "Economic and Social History of the World War."[63] He became a member of the editorial board of Otto Hoetzch's important journal *Osteuropa*.[64] He appeared at this time to be less involved in the GFK directly, and perhaps this had something to do with the rise of Gayl, though again Gayl later claimed they worked closely together.[65]

Interestingly, the famously pro-German Polish politician Wladyslaw Studnicki reached out to Sering in August 1926. He explained that he and others were founding a German Scientific Institute in Warsaw and requested that Sering suggest which teachers in Berlin circles might be willing to come. Sering, always wanting to appear the moderate, responded that he hoped, along with Studnicki, that there would be some economic rapprochement between Poland and Germany: "in place of overheated nationalism we must put in place the feeling of European solidarity."[66] However, any relationship would have to be on an equal footing and the Allies had made this impossible, with their hypocritical stance on human and minority rights when it came to Germans in Poland. Sering ended the letter informing Studnicki that he would not be able to find a German teacher that would help him in his honourable

[61] He edited a series published by his institute, *Der Weltmarkt für Agrarische Erzeugnisse. Untersuchungen des Forschungsinstituts für Agrar- und Siedlungswesen zu Berlin*. Through it he published the work of his students, such as the first volume, Aleksander W. Tschajanoff, *Die Landwirtschaft des Sowjetbundes; ihre geographische, wirtschaftliche und soziale Bedeutung* (Berlin: Parey, 1926).

[62] Irene Stoehr, "Stille Dienste, hoher Knall: Professor Sering und die Frauen," in *Geschichte in Geschichten: Ein historisches Lesebuch,* ed. Barbara Duden, Karen Hagemann, Regina Schulte, and Ulrike Weckel (Frankfurt: Campus, 2003), 24–34.

[63] *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des Weltkrieges*. The series was sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the general editor was James T. Shotwell. Some of the series volumes include volume 3, Friedrich Aereboe, *Der Einfluß des Krieges auf die landwirtschaftliche Produktion in Deutschland* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-institut, 1927), volume 4, August Karl Friedrich Skalweit, *Die deutsche Kriegsernährungswirtschaft* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-institut, 1927), and volume 8, Otto Goebel, *Deutsche Rohstoffwirtschaft im Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-institut, 1930).

[64] See papers in BArch K, N1210/141, and N1210/143.

[65] See papers in GStA PK, I. HA. 193C/7.

[66] Studnicki to Sering, August 27, 1926. BArch K, N/1210/115, document 1. The letters are signed "W. von Studnicki," and Wladyslaw did have a younger brother, Waclaw, who was a historian, but the more activist of the two, and likely this one, was Wladyslaw.

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cause.[67] A few months later Studnicki followed up, reminding Sering of his pre-war position, when he had argued that the only way to save Poland from Russia was a closer relationship with Germany. He expressed the hope that in the future their two countries, along with Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, and Turkey, would form a central European bloc, and that Germany would get Alsace back.[68] Sering forwarded the letter to Erich Zechlin in the Foreign Office, pointing out that Studnicki had not addressed any of his points and thus his position was unchanged.[69] Nevertheless, this outreach from Studnicki was indicative of the persona that Sering exuded as a relatively safe, seemingly moderate player in this arena. Along those lines, the Breslau-based Law Professor Axel Freiherr von Freytagh-Loringhoven, sent a letter to Sering in February 1930 in which, after laying out his argument that he feared the Poles would soon be receiving reparations through the Young Plan, he appealed to Sering's reputation as crucial to help support and lend credence to his position, arguing that: "such an authoritative personality, one not wrapped up in day to day politics, would doubtlessly massively increase the impact of my warnings."[70]

The international status of Sering was further recognized when he addressed the World Economic Conference in Geneva, on May 10, 1927.[71] Once again, a major focus of Sering's thinking was the United States and, by extension Canada, as he discussed the global agricultural crisis, and especially its effects upon Germany. During the war, Canada and the United States had increased land cultivation by ten million ha. But with the end of American credit to its allies in 1920, and therefore the latter's ability to purchase American wheat, the price of wheat had plummeted, and from 1922 to 1925 some 25,000 farms had failed in the United States and three million people left the land for the cities. Thus, global prices were low, but the situation was even worse in Germany, for inflation and tariffs made it very difficult for Germans to export their industrial goods, and there were indeed no finances available for German

[67] Sering to Studnicki, September 29, 1926. BArch K, N/1210/115, document 1.
[68] Studnicki to Sering, January 21, 1927. BArch K, N/1210/115, document 1. Studnicki continued to try to make this dream a reality, right up to the summer of 1939. Fascinatingly, as we will see in Chapter 7, by the late 1930s, this "dream" would be exactly what Sering was indeed working to make a reality.
[69] Sering to Zechlin, January 27, 1927. BArch K, N/1210/115, document 1.
[70] Freytagh-Loringhoven to Sering, February 9, 1930. BArch K, N/1210/115, document 2.
[71] Sering had recently celebrated his seventieth birthday, and the well wishes in the archives make clear his status. The rector of the University of Berlin sent Sering a letter stating that, in addition to being a top researcher, he was also an excellent teacher. Rector to Sering, January 18, 1927. HUB UA *Personalakten* 84. See also the many notices in newspapers, in BArch L, R 8034-III/442.

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agriculture to invest in mechanization and the intensification of agriculture.[72] Although there had been a recent stabilization of the economy and some rising prices, for now, Sering argued, Germany needed tariff protection. He hoped, nevertheless, that America would lead the way in freeing up the global economy. What Sering did not articulate at Geneva was his additional hope that the Americans would lead the charge in relieving Germany's debt burden. This talk was published in an expanded form in 1929.[73]

Sering's full position on Versailles was made abundantly clear in his 1928 publication, *Deutschland unter dem Dawes-Plan*, which was translated by S. Milton Hart, and appeared the following year as *Germany under the Dawes Plan*.[74] Sering regurgitated many of the talking points of the Right in the Weimar Republic, including the idea that the military was not so much defeated as starved by the British Blockade and forced to surrender when so many fresh American troops were provided to the Allied forces. He went so far as to claim a quasi-stab-in-the-back idea: that although Germany had itself decided to disband its army, it had still been so strong that the Allies themselves would never have dared to suggest such a thing. He then delved into some strange conspiracy to rationalize how Germany had lost its long fought-over eastern provinces, claiming that the Polish leader Dmowski had threatened to mobilize American Poles against Wilson if the president did not capitulate to Polish demands. After providing a lot of economic detail about Germany during the last decade, Sering claimed that ultimately Germany's difficult economic position was closely linked to Germany's lost land.[75] Invoking no hard division between inner and outer colonization, Sering listed these territorial losses as both the distant

[72] *Report and Proceedings of the World Economic Conference held at Geneva*, May 4th to 23rd, 1927. Volume 1. Edited by the Economic and Financial Section. (Geneva: Publications of the League of Nations, 1927), 183. See also, Max Sering, "Zinsfuß und internationale Verschuldung der deutschen Wirtschafts-Enquete," *Sonderausgabe aus den Sitzungsbericht der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophischen-historische Klasse* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931), 815–826. This was a December 3, 1931, talk Sering gave in which he decried the high rate of interest making it difficult to invest in good equipment, and that this situation was unlikely to change as long as the *Diktat* was in force.

[73] Max Sering, "Internationale Preisbewegung und Lage der Landwirtschaft in den außertropischen Ländern," *Berichte über Landwirtschaft*. 11th Special Issue. (Berlin: Parey, 1929).

[74] Max Sering, *Deutschland unter dem Dawes-plan. Entstehung, Rechtsgrundlagen, wirtschaftliche Wirkungen der Reparationslasten* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1928). Max Sering, *Germany under the Dawes Plan: Origin, Legal Foundations, and Economic Effects of the Reparation Payments*. Trans. S. Milton Hart. (London, P. S. King & Son, 1929).

[75] Sering, *Germany under the Dawes Plan*, 147.

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overseas colonies, as well as Alsace and the eastern provinces. This lost soil equalled lost wealth: "The only reliable basis of national wealth is the natural wealth of Mother Earth."[76] Finally, on the agricultural land that remained in Germany, brutal indebtedness was leading to a steady flight from the land to the cities, a situation caused by the radically unfair reparations. Any reasonable analysis, Sering argued, would indicate that the Tribute had already been paid.

Back to the USA: 1930

Sering was very ill in 1928 and 1929 but recovered in time for one last adventure.[77] In the midst of the difficult Weimar economic situation, Sering managed to return to the very land where his inner colonial thinking had begun: North America. Luckily, we have extensive details about this trip due to the diary kept by Sering's star student and travelling companion, Constantin von Dietze.[78] They departed along with Sering's wife on August 6, 1930, on the *Hamburg*, with Dietze noting that the first-class clientele was two thirds American, one third German. These poorly paid academics were, however, stuck in second class. While Dietze woke up seasick on the Atlantic, the now seventy-three-year-old Sering informed him that this was a remarkably calm voyage, and then proceeded to sit down and work on the speech he would be giving at the International Conference of Agrarian Economists at Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. Dietze seemed to be constantly captivated by the society with which he was intermingling while on the way to New York. He played shuffleboard with an African American woman and remarked that the American women at dinner seem to be wearing virtually nothing at all. A professor Pearson greeted them at the dock in New York and handled and paid for everything from there to the Knickerbocker Hotel.[79] Dietze, and one must assume Sering, were awestruck driving through Times Square, and then looking over New York City from their twelfth-floor hotel room. Forty years had passed since Sering's last visit, and this was now a very different city. The next morning, they would ascend even higher, to the thirty-fifth floor of the Chase Morgan National building. Chase Morgan, Jr., himself escorting the two gentlemen, had

[76] Sering, *Germany under the Dawes Plan*, 148.
[77] References to Sering's illness are in the preface to Sering, *Germany under the Dawes Plan*, as well as in "Max Sering zum 75. Geburtstage," *AFK* 24 (1932), 2–3.
[78] The events here described are in the manuscript of Dietze's memoir, found in ALUF UA C100/1031.
[79] The famous Knickerbocker Hotel, on Times Square, had been converted to an office building in 1920, so perhaps another hotel had taken its name at this time.

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personally met Sering in the 1880s. Dietze later took a stroll with Mrs. Sering and, while they got lost twice, each time kind New Yorkers set them back on course.

The three of them took the overnight train to Ithaca to attend the multiday Conference. Sering gave his talk, "Causes of the International Depression of Agriculture," his main thesis being that a combination of new, highly productive mechanized harvesting techniques, alongside the catastrophic drop in purchasing power of Central Europe (due to reparations), were the two main reasons for the decrease in the price of wheat. Sering argued that if not morally bound to end reparations, America should at least understand that for global economic reasons they should do so. He told his audience at Cornell that his journeys to America, thirty-seven and forty-seven years earlier, were some of his "most cherished memories."[80] During the conference there were day trips to nearby farms, in Canandaigua and Rochester. After visiting Niagara Falls, the trio travelled on to Chicago where the General Consul, Hugo Ferdinand Simon, greeted Sering. Simon reminded Sering that they had met during the war in Warsaw, when he had been adjutant to Beseler. Dietze was then immensely flattered when Simon asked him if he was in fact the son of the famous professor von Dietze (Dietze's father was not a professor). On the journey to the Great Plains, they visited some "German" farms where, as Sering had feared and predicted so long ago, they found that no one spoke German anymore. Sering re-visited farms outside of Fargo and explained to Dietze what he had seen then and compared that to what they now encountered. He pointed out that the farms of the Red River Valley, with their big families, required no external help. Here Sering was, in 1930, continuing to point out the errors of the ancient *Junker*. They got off the train in Des Moines and took a bus to Ames where they visited Iowa State University. They then had a nice evening with soon-to-be Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace and his family, a relationship that would result in Sering's later interaction with the American Ambassador to Nazi Germany, William Dodd. The travelling companions eventually returned to Manhattan, and left America on September 10.[81]

1930 was a busy year for Sering. Before his departure from Germany, he, along with Dietze, edited a book for the VfS, entitled *Inheritance in*

[80] Max Sering, "Causes of the International Depression of Agriculture," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference of Agricultural Economists*, held at Cornell University, Ithaca NY, August 18–29, 1930 (Menasha, WI: The Collegiate Press, 1930), 21.

[81] Sering had hoped to return to the Canadian Prairies but did not have time. Sering to Dietze, June 27, 1930.

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Rural Property in the Postwar Period.[82] This was in many ways a primer for the VfS conference to be held in September in Königsberg, with several chapters written by members of the Sering Institut. Further, Sering produced an exhaustive study of the effects of his 1919 law upon agriculture in Germany. In 1927, a questionnaire had been sent out across the country inquiring about the law, and now, three years later, that data had been fully fleshed out in this "Sering Institut"-produced study, whose findings can be summed up as: the law is good, but a huge increase in state funding will be required in order to make it truly function well and increase the population and productivity of the agrarian sector.[83]

Two weeks after his return from America, Sering spoke about his recent journey at the annual meeting of the VfS. He opened by pointing out that his theme, "The International Agrarian Crisis," was identical to that given at the VfS gathering in 1924. He therefore proffered that there was a six-year cycle in the global economy, and began by first recapping the developments of 1918 to 1924, before then analyzing the most recent six years, capping his talk with a discussion of what he had just seen in America. In that country, he had witnessed the degree to which modern irrigation had opened vast swathes of the west to cultivation and settlement, areas closed to such when he had last visited America in 1893. This irrigation was functioning in conjunction with large combine harvesters. For example, he had visited a farm in Kansas where one combine harvested twenty-eight ha per day. He further noticed the many cars and impressive highways in America, the ever-larger urban concentrations, and remarked that the flow of people from the countryside to the city showed no sign of abating. In a rather candid moment, Sering said that everywhere in Kansas there were big farms, of 250–1,000 ha, as big as *Junker* estates, that were run by a father and son, and maybe a daughter, on a tractor. The audience laughed when Sering reminded them that he had long ago prophesized that such farms were on their way out.[84]

[82] Max Sering and Constantin von Dietze, eds., *Die Vererbung des ländlichen Grundbesitzes in der Nachkriegszeit*. SdVfS 178 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1930). Interestingly there was a chapter on the now "lost" lands, Dr. Albrecht Schubert, "Die Vererbung des ländlichen Grundbesitzes in der Wojewodschaft Posen," 159–202. In a letter to Dietze, Sering indicated that he wanted either Jacob Rappaport or Schubert to write the entry for Poland, but not the former if he was a Jew, as the audience would believe he was biased. Sering to Dietze, December 14, 1929, in ALUF UA C100/854.

[83] N.A., *Das ländliche Siedlungswesen nach dem Kriege. Verhandlungen und Berichte des Unterausschusses für Landwirtschaft. (II. Unterausschuß)*, Vol. 10 (Berlin: Mittler & Sohn, 1930).

[84] Max Sering, "Die internationale Agrarkrise," *Verhandlungen des Vereins für Sozialgeschichte in Königsberg 1930*. SdVfS 182 (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1931), 105. At the same time, however, he was not about to give up on the importance of inner colonization, that owning your own land was the ultimate reason for high production.

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Nevertheless, his now ancient point, that big farms meant less people, was proven again and again in the thinly populated landscape of Kansas.

The Rise of the Nazis

Unbeknownst to Sering, the very agricultural crisis that he was writing about would set in motion a development that proved crucial to the rise of the political party that would first topple him from his academic heights, then radicalize the entire program of inner colonization and, finally, destroy Germany itself. Although Hitler took a long time to realize it, if ever there was a constituency ready and willing to support the most radically anti-Versailles, anti-Weimar political party, it was the agrarian communities of the heartland of inner colonization, in the North and especially the East. The era of favouritism for the agrarian elite was over. The new reality of government in Germany in the 1920s was a massive and powerful voting urban proletariat coupled with a bourgeois middle class that favoured industry over agriculture. Fear and resentment ran deep among the agrarians and they had had to fight tooth and nail for some form of tariff protections in 1924, 1925, and 1927, protections that they lost completely in 1929 with the German–Polish trade agreement. The political mouthpiece for agricultural interests was represented by the German National People's Party (DNVP), which found itself in the ruling governmental coalitions of 1925 and 1927, but under the guidance of its new leader Hugenberg, it had largely given up on democracy by 1929. The so-called Green Front, combining agrarian interests across several regions, pushed for the complete ban of all foreign agricultural products and massive subsidization of domestic agriculture. This already quixotic campaign was cut short with the Crash of 1929. At this moment the largely urban-based Nazi movement sensed a real opportunity.[85]

In March 1930, the Nazi Party laid out its first proper agricultural program. Over the previous year, elements of a program had appeared in the Nazi Yearbook, ideas that borrowed heavily from the more radical interpretations of a Sering-like style of inner colonization, such as the expropriation and break up of *Junker* estates for the settlement of small

See Max Sering, "Entwicklungslinien der landwirtschaftlichen Weltproduktion. Eine Entgegnung," *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv* 32 (1930): 223–234.

[85] Dieter Gessner, "Agrarian Protectionism in the Weimar Republic." *Journal of Contemporary History* 12 (1977): 759–778.

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German farms, and a quasi-feudal form of entailment that would prevent many new farmers from selling their land. By the time an official Nazi agrarian program was made available, however, it was declared that "foreign policy" would find the land for new settlers, and thus the *Junker* could breathe a sigh of relief.[86] Already in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's Ratzellian thinking had convinced him that "inner colonization," as practiced in the *Kaiserreich*, that is, within existing German borders, would never suffice. Despite technical advances, Hitler argued that existing German soil alone could never feed the entire, expanding German population.[87] In any case, to settle for old school inner colonization would have weakened Hitler's expansionist ideas for the eastern border. Further, the agrarian *Junker* elite were potentially very powerful allies, and that same *Junker* elite continued to supply a huge proportion of the officer class to Germany's military. Despite garnering *Junker* support, the official agrarian program bowed to Nazi racial politics in one significant way, as all foreign workers were to be banned. However radical sounding, such had always been the goal of Sering's inner colonization.

In 1930, Chancellor Brüning of the Centre Party, a big fan of Sering, was feeling the effects of the agrarian crisis and moved to shut down all food imports but did not have the money for any subsidies. He then instructed his Reich Settlement Commissar Hans Schlange-Schöningen to buy up *Junker* estates and sell the land.[88] It was at this moment that a fundamental schism among "inner colonizers" emerged. Gayl had long disagreed with Sering when it came to *Junker* estates and, as an old *Ober Ost* confidante of the now President Hindenburg, Gayl chose this moment to move in, speak for the aggrieved *Junker*, and managed to turn Hindenburg against Brüning. Despite having often railed against "agrarian Bolshevism," Hindenburg's intervention on behalf of the "red" *Junker* led to Brüning's government falling in May 1932.[89] Gayl then became Minister of the Interior in the new von Papen regime. Although in his memoir von Papen would claim that he never cared a fig for *Junker*

[86] J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany, 1928–45* (London: Sage, 1976), chs. 1 and 2.

[87] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, [1925] 1971), 133–138. However, in a speech to a group of generals in February 1933, Hitler claimed that inner colonization was an excellent way to deal with the problem of unemployment. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 143, fn 3.

[88] Gessner, "Agrarian Protectionism," 143.

[89] Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 32. See also Ludwig, *Die nationalpolitische Bedeutung*.

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interests, in a radio address in September 1932 he claimed the "agrarian sector" was the most important in all of Germany.[90]

The Radicalization of Sering

At the February 2, 1932, meeting of the GFK, Sering praised the inner colonial push of the Brüning regime, while sharing the stage with Schlange-Schöningen. Sering spoke of the half million ha that had been settled since his law of 1919 had been in force, but pressed that the government should quickly settle another 1.5 million ha, in order to achieve their goal of "transforming a third of the estates in the East (as of 1907) into village districts, and thereby terminating the situation that has existed among farm land since the end of the Middle Ages, bringing it back into balance."[91] Here, Sering was openly stating the obvious, that an agrarian utopia of small farming families was what he desired. In a nod to how things were to get done (and how they soon would be accomplished) he admitted that rapid settlement had occurred because "all obstacles had been removed," a clear echo of the First World War in the occupied East. Schlange-Schöningen followed Sering, claiming that the latest inner colonial mission followed in the footsteps of the Teutonic Knights and Frederick the Great, and then directly called for government assurances that farmers settled on parcelled land could not later be forced off it. Hans Ponfick, a specialist on agrarian law, then followed up with the language of feudalism that normally no one else dared to so openly use. He claimed that such a settlement as was now envisioned could never work under current rules and that instead a full break must be made with a return to the medieval way of doing things, including the use of *Lokatoren*, mentioned in Chapter 1, agents who specialized in finding settlers in western and southern Germany. In the article "National Socialism and Settlement," that appeared shortly thereafter, in *AFK*, Carl Hartwich argued that the soil belonged to the *Volk* and so speculation should be banned. Further, while admitting that Hitler ultimately wanted more "*Raum*," Hartwich proposed that this was a question for the future and that, in the meantime, inner colonization was crucial.[92]

In the late Summer of 1932, Sering contacted von Papen to emphasize the importance of inner colonization in the current economic crisis and used language for the first time that indicated the influence of Nazi agrarian thinker Richard Darré and his ilk. In a letter to Magnus von

[90] Ludwig, *Die nationalpolitische Bedeutung*, 89–94. [91] "Tagung," *AFK* 24 (1932), 77.
[92] Carl Hartwich, "Nationalsozialismus in der Siedlung," *AFK* 24 (1932): 126–128.

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Braun, who was von Papen's Reich Minister for Food, Sering wrote: "With great vigor you and Baron von Gayl have voiced the national, racial-biological, and demographic-political meaning of settlement … in order to advance eastern settlement."[93] Hoping that a push for *Junker* estate parcellization might again find favour, Sering claimed that putting villages in place of the big estates "would result in the blooming of small and mid-sized cities, for after all the peasantry was the heart of the middle class." The work of the Settlement Commission was more than enough evidence of this.[94] In an aggressive move, Sering pointed out that his 1919 Law could do the job if only the clause that allowed for the expropriation of a third of large estates was implemented. Then, perhaps in order to point out that he was not some out of touch Romantic with no regard for industrial might, he stated: "Our settlement work in the East … can only find continued success if our industry is put in place in the countryside or in small cities, much more than has been the case thus far."[95] Finally, to hammer home the point that there was simply nothing terribly radical or "un-German" about all of this, he reminded Bauer that "this was about a colonization along the lines of what Frederick the Great had done."[96]

In a letter the following week, addressed directly to the Chancellor, Sering again invoked Frederick the Great, but, fascinatingly, not the Program of Inner Colonization. In this second letter, knowing full well that politically any future inner colonization had to work in tandem with industrialization, he called for settlement on the outskirts of cities (*Stadtrandsiedlung*).[97] Again, astutely acknowledging and praising the man who had only recently stepped down from heading the GFK, he agreed that Gayl (and Braun) were correct to point out that a simple "mass settlement" on estates in the East alone would not reduce unemployment in the cities. Instead, he insisted that the program they

[93] Sering to Braun, August 26, 1932. This exchange can be found in BArch L, R 43 I/1287.

[94] Sering to Braun, August 26, 1932. Also, at this time Sering produced a massive thousand-page collection of the work of his students and others that "proved" the importance of small plot farming. See Max Sering, ed., *Die deutsche Landwirtschaft unter volks- und weltwirtschaftlichen Geschichtspunkten* (Berlin: Parey, 1932). An especially interesting chapter is, A. Hesse, "Die Einwirkung der Gebietsverluste und Grenzveränderungen auf die Landwirtschaft des deutschen Ostens." See also Silvio Broedrich, "Unsachliche Bekämpfung des Siedlungsgedankens," *AFK* 24 (1932): 346–350, and Gustavo Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants: Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930–1939* (New York: Berg, 1990).

[95] Sering to Braun, August 26, 1932.

[96] Sering to Braun, August 26, 1932.

[97] Sering to Von Papen, September 1, 1932. In a 1931 article, Stolt also pushed the idea of settling at the edges of cites. Max Stolt, "Grundsätzliches zur vorstädtischen Kleinsiedlung," *AFK* 23 (1931): 461–475. The sketches accompanying the article are very reminiscent of "Garden City" planning of earlier in the century.

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had been running, using his 1919 law, had successfully prevented the agrarian revolutions seen in Soviet Russia and East Central Europe. Further, this program had stemmed the Slavic Flood, and thus should be supported. He asked for one hundred million Reichmarks, the identical sum as in 1886, in order to speed up settlement. The State Secretary to the Chancellor responded that von Papen agreed with Sering and, in a follow-up letter in late September, stated that the regime was unanimous (*einmütig*) in this endeavor.[98]

In this last year before Hitler's seizure of power, Sering continued to publish short booklets that furiously argued against Versailles and veered powerfully into the language of the "lost East," a fixation that, as we shall see, would later make him welcome among "eastern researchers," or *Ostforscher*. In English, in the British journal *Central Landowners' Association*, Sering made the claim that it was in fact the pre-historic Teutons who were displaced by the Slavs east of the Elbe. He then pointed out to his English readers that the Settlement Commission, begun in 1886, acted as a safeguard "against the Poles, with their many children and primitive standard of living."[99] Finally, in a diatribe entitled, *The World Crisis and the New Order of Europe: Reparations, Disarmament, Danubian Space (Raum)*, in 1932, Sering ranted about how reparations had been both terrible for Germany but also for the global economy and, therefore, France, the biggest supporter of reparations, was enemy number one.[100] He further argued that, with the loss of *Lebensraum*, Germany now found it much harder to acquire crucial raw materials. And in a move that would increasingly become his focus throughout the 1930s, he made a Naumann-esque nod toward the economic potential of German control of the Danubian basin, claiming that there were 180 million people in fourteen different states, currently restrained by myriad border tolls. In a gesture sure to please the increasingly powerful geopoliticians, Sering included a map that presented an encircled Germany, a *pax gallica* as it were. Incredibly, Russian bombers were depicted as being based in Poland, as if these two countries were allies, something Sering surely knew not to be true. The map revealed a

[98] State Secretary to the Chancellor to Sering, August 8, and September 22, 1932.

[99] Max Sering, "Land Tenure in Germany," *CLA Journal*, 13, (1932): 8. Sering continued in the article to claim that, thus far (1931), only 500,000 ha of the 1.5 million ha of *Junker* land had been distributed. He further stated that, during the Settlement Commission, towns that had been surrounded by German farmers saw a big increase in population, as industry relocated to these areas.

[100] Max Sering, *Die Weltkrise und die Neuordnung Europas. Tribute, Abrüstung, Donauraum mit einem Anhang über die Höhe der deutschen Leistungen* (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1932).

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measly hundred thousand German soldiers defending the Fatherland, a number Sering was hoping to increase. Sering then argued that the space of the "Polish Corridor" (formerly West Prussia) was being heavily armed by the Poles, and that this represented a grave threat. Further, invoking the incredibly slanted "memory" of German inner colonizers, Sering stated that, while there were now no rights for minorities in that contested space, in an earlier (German) period there had been peaceful coexistence. He ended the booklet with a return to the topic of the Danubian basin and an unabashed bid for a pseudo-colony. Just as England soaked up raw materials from Canada, and France from North Africa, so Germany and Italy should create a trade bloc with the *Donauraum*.

Thus, in the late Weimar years, Sering was fanning the flames that would assist in the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. Sering's final years could have been spent occupying a safe and quiet place in the Third Reich. In fact, on his birthday, January 18, 1932, President Hindenburg bestowed upon Sering Germany's highest civilian honour, the *Adlerschild*, the Eagle's Shield. Yet, as we will see in Chapter 7, Sering was no Nazi, and he did not go quietly to his grave.

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