4 Settling In

Kaiserreich, Part Three (1897–1914)

In the Spring and Fall of 1896, the *völkisch* author and publisher Heinrich Sohnrey hiked through Posen and West Prussia visiting each inner colonial settlement, often going door-to-door to interview every settler he could find. He published his reflections the following year in *A Hiking Trip through the German Settlement Areas in Posen and West Prussia*. To describe the area, he cited a passage from Sering's 1893 book: "There is no colonial territory on Earth where the prosperity of the settlers was better prepared in such a careful and understanding manner than Posen and West Prussia."[1] Sohnrey admitted that he had begun his adventure tainted by the frustration and pessimism that had long surrounded the inner colonial project in the East. But, akin to this passage from Sering, he said he completed his trip an optimist. Among his detailed demographic data and sketches of settler homes, churches, and schools, Sohnrey had a few things to say about the inhabitants. As someone who would grow increasingly interested in race, it is unsurprising to read Sohnrey complaining that the old Frederickian colonies were now largely inhabited by "half-Polaks" (Halbpolaken) upon whom the newly arrived western Germans looked down. The northern European racial bias comes to its absurd limit with Sohnrey's following reflection: the southern Germans who had arrived to settle here were now healthier, breathing the "harder, stronger air of the East."[2] In other words, even Bavaria was too "tropical" and lethargic for the vigorous Sohnrey. In a telling passage that teased what would increasingly become a divide between *völkisch* elements and Sering, Sohnrey cited a passage from Sering's 1893 book in which Sering spoke of the Settlement Commission as something the Poles should themselves model, in order to alleviate the absurd situation of the Prussian General Commission sometimes providing land to Poles. Sohnrey disagreed, arguing that the

[1] Heinrich Sohnrey, *Eine Wanderfahrt durch die deutschen Ansiedlungsgebiete in Posen und Westpreussen* (Berlin: Schoenfeldt, 1897), vi.
[2] Sohnrey, *Eine Wanderfahrt*, 135–136.

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goal must be the end of Polish settlement altogether.[3] Sohnrey would go on to publish the most significant journal of the inner colonial movement, the *Archive of Inner Colonization* (*Archiv für innere Kolonisation*), and his agrarian romantic, *völkisch* ideology would be praised by proto-, and later actual, National Socialists. For now, though, at the end of the century, agrarian romanticism and the conservatives who benefitted from it would begin a major debate, a significant result of which was to bring Max Sering onto the national stage.

The Question of the Land

At the end of the 1890s, Germany became embroiled in a debate that came to be called "The Question of the Land," the *Bodenfragedebatte*. This was in many ways the culmination of a political dispute that had been simmering since the industrialization of the 1840s and the social changes it had wrought. A walk through the debate is a way to highlight many of the tensions and overriding concerns that surrounded Sering and inner colonization at the fin de siècle. As it turns out, this was also a watershed moment in the personal life of Sering, for it brought him national attention.[4]

The argument surrounding tariffs had risen in volume and pitch throughout the 1880s but, as pointed out in Chapter 3, in 1892, as Chancellor Caprivi began lifting these tariffs on several of Germany's leading trading partners, the *Junker*, who enjoyed these protections, became heavily politically engaged.[5] On the intellectual and cultural level, those academics and authors who were against industrialization, and who had the ear of the reading public and right-leaning politicians, gushed forth a wealth of literature, novels, and political tracts, along with economic analyses, that argued: (a) capitalism was egotistical and immoral, (b) a nation incapable of feeding itself was subject to the whim of "food nations" in case of war, and (c) peasants were the true, healthy (and conservative) heart of Germany, providing strong soldiers and maintaining *völkisch* traditions, unlike the sick, degenerate cities (and their Jews and Socialists). However, there was an additional demand, pushed by a vocal minority often at odds with the *Junker*, namely the reformation of land in the East, and the halting of the seasonal Slavic influx.

[3] Sohnrey, *Eine Wanderfahrt*, 203.

[4] There is no greater evidence for the significance of this debate in the life of Sering than the fact that it was in reading of this struggle that I first read the name of Sering, a moment that culminated in this book, the only biography of Max Sering.

[5] For the argument that *Junker* agricultural practices were in fact rather modern and competitive, see Oliver Grant, *Migration and Inequality in Germany 1870–1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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The *Junker* organized against Caprivi and free trade, first forming a lobby group, the *Bund der Landwirte* (Agrarian League, hereafter BdL). This group, ostensibly representing both peasant and *Junker* interests, co-opted many romantic (and definitely anti-modern) arguments and used them to persuade voters and politicians of all stripes to help them regain their tariffs and the perceived economic stability the *Junker* believed they provided. The clearest indicator that the *Junker* were rarely if ever interested in the *Volkstum* of the peasantry, the overall agrarian situation, or the program of *Germanisierung* in the East, can be most plainly seen in their attempted "gagging" of Sering's proposal for agrarian land reform or halt to the influx of Polish *Wanderarbeiter*.[6]

The Liberal response was just that, a constant reaction, for they perceived no great problems.[7] On the one hand, their rather passive, often muted response fits into the overall *Sammlungspolitik* argument, that the bourgeoisie were happy not to rock the boat too much in return for power-sharing with the *Junker* against the "true Left," that is, Socialists and Communists. On the other hand, the Right arrived too late in this debate, their world had already disappeared, and as the Liberals read every day in the newspapers of both the Right and Left, the evidence demonstrated that the population at large had long since embraced industrialization; Germany's new "Place in the Sun," was everywhere and it was unshakable.

The Debate Begins

The early 1890s had seen the beginning of strife in the "Marriage of Rye and Iron," with the National Liberals coming to the side of the anti-tariff

[6] The most famous work on the BdL is Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914): Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei*, (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1975), 246–251.

[7] One of the clearest indicators of the effects of a rising standard of living throughout the 1890s was Eduard Bernstein's move from revolutionary to evolutionary Marxism. This shift can be traced in the failure of the thesis of the immiseration of the proletariat, for real wages kept rising. Kautsky was strongly against Bernstein, and other pro-peasant SPDers, claiming that they would just slow down the process of the immiseration of the proletariat (here, the immiseration of the peasant), and thereby delay revolution. For a good discussion of the debate within the SPD, see Herman Lebovics, "'Agrarians' versus 'Industrialists': Social Conservative Resistance to Industrialism and Capitalism in Late Nineteenth Century Germany," *International Review of Social History* 12 (1967), 55–56. See also Karl Kautsky, *Die Agrarfrage: eine Übersicht über die Tendenzen des modernen Landwirthschaft und die Agrarpolitik der Sozialdemokratie*, 2 Vols. (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Nietz Nachf, 1899). See also Michael Silagi, "Henry George and Europe: Precursors of Land Reform in Germany; Marx and the Land Question; the Beginnings of the Georgist Movement in the Empire," trans. Susan N. Faulkner. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 51 (1992): 247–256.

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Caprivi. Further, after the death of the head of the Catholic Centre Party, Windthorst, in 1891, Ernst Lieber, a free trader, took over. He especially liked Caprivi's tolerant attitude toward the Poles, who were, after all, fellow Catholics. The Social Democratic Party sided with free trade over tariffs, because higher-priced bread was bad for the urban poor. Finally, even on the Right, many Conservatives believed that free trade was a necessary patriotic sacrifice. Because of this split among Conservatives, several major free trade treaties began to be passed in 1892.[8] By 1893 most Conservatives, along with the BdL, were united in favour of raising tariffs, and began a long, vitriolic campaign against Caprivi. This was a major breaking of norms, as the landed elite were attacking the head of state, the Chancellor, and even sometimes the Kaiser.[9] An argument used again and again by both the academics and the politicians in this debate was that the depopulation of the rural areas was eviscerating the "martial" strength of the nation, for it was the healthy countryside, and not the degenerate cities, that was said to produce the strongest, healthiest lads for the army. Industrialization thus meant weakness by this logic. However, the Kaiser wanted to be a modern emperor with a modern army and did not want to pull out of useful treaties, famously remarking, "I have no desire to go to war with Russia because of a hundred dumb Junkers."[10]

The Right

There was of course a long tradition of romantic agrarian critique of industrialization, going back to Adam Müller and Fichte.[11] This high level, intellectual critique of the modern world reached one of its peaks

[8] Rudolf Stadelmann, "Der neue Kurs in Deutschland," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 4 (1953): 538–564. In his article, "Peasants and Politics in Germany, 1871–1914," *European History Quarterly* 14 (1984): 47–75, David Blackbourn argues that there were many more issues than tariffs that resulted in peasant complaints, and that peasants were not therefore simply dupes when they supported the BdL (and therefore their *Junker* masters). He claims that peasant studies are too Prusso-centric, and that a more regionalized approach would depict a more nuanced situation. This is also the argument in James C. Hunt, "Peasants, Grain Tariffs, and Meat Quotas: Imperial German Protectionism Reexamined," *Central European History* 7 (1974): 311–331, and John Jay Lewis, "The Peasantry, Rural Change and Conservative Agrarianism: Lower Austria at the Turn of the Century," *Past and Present* 81 (1978): 119–143. On the overall political breakdown of those in support of, or against, tariffs, see Kenneth D. Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialization, 1890–1902* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), 54–57.

[9] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 72–73.

[10] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 85.

[11] Friedrich Lenz, *Argarlehre und Agrarpolitik der deutschen Romantik* (Berlin: Parey, 1912).

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during this period with the (in)famous popularity of Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt as Teacher* (*Rembrandt als Erzieher*), with forty-nine printings between 1890 and 1909.[12] This work and others were highly critical of the supposedly senseless activity and spiritual emptiness of capitalism. This was a sentiment held across the political spectrum, as both the Right and Left organized youth hikes to escape the city.[13] Even the radical leftist Karl Liebknecht lamented the "unhealthy concentration of humanity in great deserts of stone."[14] The historian Fritz Stern sums up the "conservative revolution" thus:

> The movement did embody a paradox: its followers sought to destroy the despised present in order to recapture an idealized past in an imaginary future. They were disinherited conservatives, who had nothing to conserve, because the spiritual values of the past had largely been buried and the material remnants of conservative power did not interest them. They wanted a breakthrough to the past, and they longed for a new community in which old ideas and institutions would once again command universal allegiance.[15]

This aggression born of discontent is what Stern deems "the politics of cultural despair."[16] Stern argued that the popularity of Langbehn gave a vocabulary of *Volkstum* and anti-Semitism to such groups as the Conservatives and the BdL, making their main platform of higher tariffs more appealing to a broader base of voters.[17]

[12] Here is Fritz Stern's summation of Langbehn's popular book:

> The bourgeoisie had become "rootless," alienated from folk and nature, had lost its *Volksthümlichkeit* and childlike nature (*Kindlichkeit*) and thus had forfeited the prerequisites of manhood and greatness. Langbehn roundly condemned all urban and especially all metropolitan communities. Berlin epitomized the evil in German culture: "Spiritually and politically, the provinces should be maneuvered and marshaled against the capital." The poison of commerce and materialism, or, as he sometimes called it, the *Amerikanisierung* of Germany, was corroding the ancient spirit of the Prussian garrison town … "the crude cult of money, a North-American and at the same time a Jewish characteristic, predominated in Berlin more and more."

Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of German Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 130–131.

[13] David Blackbourn, *The Fontana History of Germany, 1780–1918* (London: Fontana, 1997), 395. For an argument that peasants were both pro-agrarian *and* pro-industrial, and that they were not so anti-modern, see Thomas Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism, Reactionary Modernism and National Socialism. Technocratic Tendencies in Germany, 1890–1945," *Contemporary European History* 8 (1999): 29–50.

[14] Karl Liebknecht, "Die Natur schützen und dem Volk näherbringen," in *Gesammlte Reden und Schriften*, vol. 5 (Berlin: Dietz, 1963), 481.

[15] Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, xvi.

[16] Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, 152.

[17] Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, 168–169. It must be noted that, while German historians for a long time believed that there was something specifically "German" about this conservative reaction to modernity, many have now pointed out that there were very similar developments in Britain and France. See, most famously, David

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In the 1890s, as conservative academics began to palpably feel change all around them, they reacted. The resulting crisis intertwined two long-running debates: that of industrialization since the 1840s, and that over tariffs since 1879.[18] The professors Adolph Wagner, Karl Oldenberg, and Sering had set the stage with their writings throughout the early 1890s, but things boiled over in 1897, and over the next five years there appeared a slew of publications.[19] It was at the "Evangelical-Social Congress" in Leipzig on June 10, 1897, that Oldenberg really set off a brouhaha with a speech in which he placed agrarianism far above industrialism, and included the sentence, "Without industry one can live, but not without food."[20] (Weber was in the audience, and a tumultuous question period ensued.)

Wrapped up in the Question of the Land, something that was always at the forefront of Sering's thinking, was the issue of food security.[21] This argument claims that there is an inherent instability to "industrial nations," whereas "food nations" are ultimately safe. Certain autarkic nations like Russia and America would always be fine behind huge tariff walls but, unless Germany was to become a "food nation," it would never be safe in a hostile world. A Germany that had completely industrialized would be hostage to a situation where, for instance, Japan flooded the world with cheap industrial product, and the consequent massive unemployment in Germany would result in starvation, or servitude to some other "food nation." Then, Germans would "decline" to the level of Japanese or Chinese workers.[22] In his summation of one of the key works of this debate, Kenneth Barkin clearly enunciates the issues:

> In *Agrar- und Industriestaat*, published in 1901, Wagner took the economic critique of industrialism to its logical culmination. He came to the conclusion that industrialism was a transitory stage that arose in response to rural overpopulation and would disappear with the recognition that the remedy created more problems than it solved. England, a paradigm for economic

Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[18] Martin Steinkühler, *Agrar- oder Industriestaat: Die Auseinandersetzungen um die Getreidehandels- und Zollpolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1879–1914* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 32–33.

[19] "Agrar- und Industriestaat", argued Wagner, not "oder." Also, one should speak of "Industrialisierung oder (Re-) Agrarisierung" says Franz Mendel in his Dissertation, "Die Entwicklung des Weltagrarhandels 1900–1956 und die Konsequenzen der heutigen Agrarpolitik in den alten Industriestaaten" (PhD dissertation, University of Bonn, 1959), 26.

[20] Steinkühler, *Agrar- oder Industriestaat*, 37.

[21] Steinkühler's main concern is modern food security, so his book is strongest on this aspect of the historic argument.

[22] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 150–153.

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liberals, already appeared to him to have passed its peak. Faced with competition from continental Europe and America, British production and exports had slumped seriously in the seventies and eighties. Despite the advantages of technological know-how, England's primacy no longer seemed assured. And Germany did not have Britain's combination of natural and inherited advantages – a colonial empire, an incomparable fleet, and a coastline virtually impossible to blockade. Situated between France and Russia, and without a significant navy, Germany could not afford the luxury of dependence on foreign grain. Rather than boasting of German industrial progress in the nineties, Wagner asked: "Can one really believe that Germany or North America, even if they make further inroads upon British export trade, will in the long run have a better fate?" The answer was a resounding negative: "For Germany [industrialism] would be an insane, ruinous policy, which no patriot, no statesman, no reasonable man could contemplate in earnest."[23]

As will be borne out in Chapter 5, what is crucial here is that, in fact, this argument of food security was "proven" to be correct. The British naval blockade of Germany, and the resulting *Aushungerung* of the army and home front, would be a crucial contributing factor to Germany's defeat in the First World War. In retrospect, it is shocking to read one of the most spirited defenses of the liberal side, that by Heinrich Dietzel. In 1909 he systematically attacked the autarky argument, claiming that modern transportation made blockade highly unlikely and, besides, all of Europe's navies would be against England. In any case, he said, modern capitalism was so fundamentally built upon global trade that no country could afford to cut its economy off from Germany for any extended time period.[24]

Another key argument concerned the immorality of capitalism, which began with the assertion that it was egotistical. The moral climate of urban areas could be shown to be terrible, with high levels of alcoholism and prostitution. One could point out so-called degeneration in unhealthy factories, and the rampant greed in the big cities where one could buy anything. Further, it was argued that the working class had

[23] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 153. It is important to note that Wagner rarely, if ever, fell back on irrational, nostalgic justifications for agrarianism. He was an agrarian for *national* reasons, for the security and health of the *Volk*. Additionally, "Wagner's interest in the 'Jewish Question' was also motivated by a concern for the 'weal and woe of our dear German nation.' He was troubled lest the Jews, through their allegedly unsavory business activities, succeed in exploiting and corrupting – and enervating – the community." Abraham Ascher, "Professors as Propagandists: The Politics of the Kathedersozialisten," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 23 (1963): 299.

[24] Heinrich Dietzel, "Agrar- und Insdustriestaat," *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, 3rd ed. Vol. 1. (Jena: G. Fischer, (1909): 226–237. This of course is the main argument used today as to why the "developed" nations cannot go to war with one another.

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abandoned Christianity, while urban families tended to become smaller and smaller.[25] Oldenberg joined in with his deep concern for falling population numbers brought about by industrialization and he was very worried about the Slavic influence in Germany via seasonal workers. He compared the Poles to the Barbarians who penetrated Rome. Further, a lower birthrate meant a smaller army.[26] These agrarian romantics railed against the "horror" of department stores and big city life, privileging social harmony over economics, at least in theory. And the elite conservative thinkers, along with their *Junker* compatriots, really believed that a return to an agrarian world was what the peasants wanted as well. In an extreme version of the kind of food security Sering always wanted, Oldenberg called for a radical autarky in which thirty of Germany's forty million souls would focus on producing food, allowing for only the remaining ten million to live in cities.[27]

The Liberal Response

Because the pro-industrialists did not perceive a crisis to be afoot, their articles were almost always written in response to the conservatives, and they appeared far less often. Among the heavy hitters in the debate were Lujo Brentano,[28] Friedrich Naumann, Heinrich Dietzel, and Max Weber. Recall that Weber was not an inner colonizer for agrarian reasons, he was much more the modern bigoted nationalist. Weber began his attack in 1897, arguing that it was in fact autarkic states that were unstable: one drought, with no cash to buy foreign food, would destroy a country.[29] Further, these economists were able to show that tariffs in the 1880s had prevented the price of land from falling in response to new competition and, as a result, both "Weber and

[25] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 159–163. Wagner's gravest reservations about the future resulted from the ominous cleavage in wealth that seemed to accompany industrial development. He warned that the cohesive social fabric of the countryside broke down in the city, and the traditional hierarchical system characterized by stability and patriarchal relationships stood in danger of being undermined by one that stirred violent class conflict. Discord seemed to be the hallmark of industrialism in contrast to the concord that distinguished agricultural society.

[26] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 160–164.

[27] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 174.

[28] On Brentano, see Ernest A. Menze, "Historismus, Economic Theory and Social Harmony: Lujo Brentano and the Methodenstreit in Historical Perspective," *Canadian Journal of History* 6 (1971): 257–283, and James J. Sheehan, *The Career of Lujo Brentano: A Study of Liberalism and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1966).

[29] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 187.

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Brentano pointed to the inability of a farmer to invest in machinery, manure, and the like, when all his resources were necessary to pay for his rent or mortgage."[30] Liberals also attacked the "strong warriors" type argument, saying that the high price of food leads to weak soldiers, and the "staving off revolution" argument of agrarians was countered by the bread riots which resulted from tariff-induced high prices.

It is important to point out the findings of Mark Hewitson regarding how this debate played out among the reading public. In his review of many newspapers across the political spectrum, he found that, by the early 1900s, the press on both the Left and Right often stated that France's uneven pattern of industrialization and low birth rate was cause for its decline. Thus, the editorials tended to argue that only an *Industriestaat* could support a large population and heavy armaments for national defense. Hewitson thus shows us that, at the popular level, the pro-*Industriestaat* argument had clearly won. Unlike the doom and gloom about industrialization of the authors referenced, German popular opinion, represented in newspapers, was very happy that Germany had overtaken France, and was now the most important country on the Continent.[31]

The major themes of this debate are crucial for our understanding of Sering's mindset, as a reminder that Germany in the East was always at least as much about the myth of German farming, German farms, and German space, as it was a nationalistic anti-Polish, anti-Slavic "modern" movement. *How* Germans lived within the *Lebensraum* of Germany was the crucial question for many of these thinkers. Although it is hard to know exactly what the term means with regard to the German East, it is important to note that, because of his association with the Right in this national debate, Sering was at this time labeled an "archconservative."[32] Where exactly he fit in this debate will be explored later in this chapter.

[30] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 194–195. See Lujo Brentano, *Die Schrecken des überwiegenden Industriestaats* (Berlin: Simon, 1901).

[31] Mark Hewitson, "German Public Opinion and the Question of Industrial Modernity: Wilhelmine Depictions of the French Economy," *European History Review* 7 (2000): 45–61. See also the interesting findings of Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger, "'Les nations anciennes écrassées …' Agarprotektionismus in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1880–1914," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000): 439–470. For purposes of comparison, she notes that France had a "marriage of iron and wheat," and strongly protected its agrarians, yet this led to very different political developments. The equivalent of the BdL was not nearly so extreme in France, and the agrarian politics were never so "polarizing." A significantly lower demographic growth rate in France both dampened industrial expansion and lessened anxiety about food. There was also no great "flight from the land."

[32] "Der Fall Arons in aktenmässiger Darstellung," *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 1, 1900, where Sering is described as "streng konservativ."

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Politics and Economics

Bernhard von Bülow became Chancellor in 1900, and in 1902 began negotiating a series of new tariffs. By 1905, due to these tariffs, as well as an exploding US population that meant that the United States could no longer export grain, and three terrible Russian harvests in a row from 1905 to 1908, the price of grain went into the stratosphere. Yet, *Junker* indebtedness climbed under the tariffs, and, contrary to the goal of "food security," Germany imported more grain in 1911 than it had 1901.[33] It must be noted, however, that Cornelius Torp and others argue that these tariffs were crucial to setting up important trade treaties, and that the overall situation of both peasants and workers were not terribly disrupted, as earlier historians had assumed.[34]

While all this was happening, inner colonization continued. Yet, despite this program to alter the demographic balance in the East, the overall trend was unfavourable for the Germans. Richard Blanke walks through the statistics for inner colonization from 1886 to 1918 (though very little occurred after 1914), and these figures give us a good picture of the mounting frustration inner colonizers must have felt in the years leading up to the war. Overall, 734 million marks were spent to purchase 466,750 ha, which represented 8.5 percent of all land in the two eastern provinces. There were 21,886 established German families and, if we can surmise that the majority of such homes housed larger, rural families, then perhaps 150,000 Germans were settled.[35] One set of numbers surely pleased the "purist" (read: anti-*Junker*) inner colonizers: the number of large estates, those over 500 ha, declined by 24 percent, while those measuring 5–100 ha increased by 32 percent. But, a quarter of those Germans settlers had already been living in the eastern provinces, and more than 70 percent of the purchased land had already belonged to Germans. Perhaps the most disheartening statistic for the inner colonizers was this: from 1896 to 1914 Poles increased the amount of land they owned in the eastern provinces by 181,437 ha.[36]

[33] Barkin, *Controversy over German Industrialization*, 259.

[34] Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 278–280. See Cornelius Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization: Economy and Politics in Germany, 1860–1914*, trans. Alex Skinner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

[35] 153,800 is the number the inner colonizers came up with in 1924. That is an average family size of seven, however. It would be safe to say that somewhere between 120 and 150 thousand Germans were settled by the program. Ministerialrat Von Both, "In memoriam der Ansiedlungskommission für Westpreußen und Posen," *AFK* 16 (1924): 1–5.

[36] Richard Blanke, *Prussian Poland in the German Empire (1870–1900)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 191.

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In 1904, in recognition of the success of Polish inner colonization, the National Liberal Miquel attempted to make it illegal for Polish landowners to break up (parcel) their estates, recognizing Sering's argument that such action increased population. In fact, the Prussian *Landtag* did pass legislation forbidding new structures to be built on parcelled Polish land. But this failed to slow Polish gains and Bülow began moving in an increasingly extreme direction, mooting the idea of an expropriation law. The lack of any available Polish land, since at least 1898, had resulted in inner colonization becoming a program of simply buying and breaking up *Junker* estates.[37] The Pan-Germans and Eastern Marches Society applauded these radical legal moves, but this was unacceptable to the Catholic Centre Party. The Centre Party was, however, no longer needed, for in 1907 the Bülow Bloc was formed, encompassing the Conservatives, the National Liberals, and the Progressives.[38]

In this environment, the Prussian government passed an Expropriation Law in 1908. The main stumbling block had in fact been the *Junker*, who feared that such a law might be used against them (not an unreasonable fear, knowing what a lot of inner colonizers thought of the East Elbian elite). The problem was similar to that in 1885, that is, how to treat some citizens differently than others, based on ethnicity. Just as expelling only Poles had been the stumbling block before, this time only allowing for the expropriation of Polish-owned properties involved some careful legal maneuvering. The initial law, which allowed for the expropriation of 70,000 ha, soon brought down international opprobrium. This law has received much attention over the years, and rightfully so, for it represented the constitutional stripping of rights and property from ethnically defined members of a state. At the same time, it is equally important to make clear how little the law actually accomplished. It was only ever invoked in 1912, and then for a total of 1,656 ha of Polish property. As Matthew Fitzpatrick has observed, the *Kaiserreich* flirted with techniques that teased a darker future, but it was nevertheless a *Rechtsstaat*, a country of laws. The same could be said about the life and beliefs of Max Sering.

Bethmann-Hollweg became chancellor in 1909, and early on he found that he would need some Polish support in the *Reichstag*, and he schemed

[37] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 427. See also 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), 39–63.

[38] William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 187. See also John J. Kulczycki, *School Strikes in Prussian Poland, 1901–1907: The Struggle over Bilingual Education* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1981).

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to find it. He was and would remain annoyed by the more radical anti-Polish elements surrounding him and saw an apparent split between conservative and radical *Junker* when it came to expropriation, a fissure that could be exploited. He saw a similar split between conservative and radical nationalist Poles as well. It was in this complicated environment that effective use of the new law was largely prevented and, in March 1914, legislation was introduced that greatly appealed to the conservatives Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was attempting to court, and simultaneously threw a bone to the inner colonizers. Although parcellization was forbidden (the *Junker*'s greatest fear), the Settlement Commission was given the first opportunity to purchase any property that had been owned for less than ten years and came up for sale.[39] The *Junker* breathed a sigh of relief, while inner colonizers finally got the chance to buy bankrupt estates (German or Polish) before the Poles could.[40]

Sering Finds His Voice

At the fin de siècle, Sering found himself involved with the "nationalist pressure groups" Geoff Eley details in his seminal *Reshaping the German Right*. These entities functioned somewhat like modern day lobbyists, and they often sought the alliance of professors in their campaigns, both as propagandists and to have the ear of those in power. Two important groups, the Pan-German League and the Eastern Marches Society, might have appealed to Sering, especially for their lobbying in favour of Germans in the East, but they were far too radical and unconcerned with the "tactical niceties" of party politics for Sering's moderate tendencies.[41] In this atmosphere, from the mid-1890s, Schmoller informally pressed his colleagues and former students to help push for a stronger

[39] Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews*, 197–204.

[40] During this period the Posen-based members of the BdL found themselves in an awkward position in the Conservative arena, when the *Junker* made a move, in 1908, to create even more large estates. The Posen members of the BdL resigned en masse. A mere year later, a new association was formed between the peasants of Posen and the National Liberals. Thus, in the years leading up to the war, an increasingly anti-*Junker* alliance of National Liberals and rural voters was being created, to the relief of inner colonizers. George S. Vascik, "The German Peasant League and the Limits of Rural Liberalism in Wilhelmian Germany," *Central European History* 24 (1991): 147–175. See also, Roland Spickermann. "Germans among Poles: Ethnic Rivalry, Economic Change, and Political Mobilization in the Bromberg Administrative District, 1885–1914," (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994), and Roland Spickermann, "Pragmatism over Tradition: The Agrarian League and the German Farmers' Association in the Bromberg *Regierungsbezirk*, 1909–1910," *German History* 19 (2001): 525–548.

[41] Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 47–93.

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Navy, and even Brentano was supportive, for a strong fleet was as much to protect international trade as it was to secure overseas colonies. In 1897 Sering was anonymously helping write propaganda for the cause. By 1898, a pressure group specifically for this purpose was formed, the Navy League, and its leadership reached out directly to Schmoller for assistance. The group was, however, too radical in temperament for the "Fleet Professors," and ultimately Sering was among those who in 1899 managed to apply enough pressure to remove much of the Navy League's hotheaded leaders and reform it into a body that represented all major supporters of a stronger German Navy. In December he then joined the executive committee.[42] As Eley points out, until the First World War, many Germans with a colonial mindset were interested in both the landward (Posen, West Prussia) element of settlement, as well as having a seaward "Great Powers" empire. The latter was to be achieved partly through overseas settlement (Southwest Africa) but also importantly via the indirect colonialism of a navy-protected merchant marine that funnelled German goods around the world. The author of the later important work *Mitteleuropa* (1915), Friedrich Naumann, joined the Navy League in 1899. His push to turn the League's members into an ad hoc anti-*Junker* alliance would surely have pleased Sering.[43] Sering would remain close to the leadership of the League until at least 1908.

While he was becoming involved in the Navy League, Sering rose to national prominence during the *Bodenfragedebatte*, and many of that debate's themes would shape the next decade of his thinking. Of all the debating points made by his counterparts, the argument that industry was crucial to a modern military was an important one to Sering. As a member of the League, he obviously agreed that a navy was important, that the ships, cannons, and weapons made possible by an industrial economy were necessary to be a Great Power. At the same time, he constantly argued that a modern military also needed a lot of soldiers, and that a robust, healthy and heavily populated countryside was the best producer of such men. On February 14, 1900, Sering delivered a talk in the Berlin Philharmonic, entitled "The Trade Policy of the Great Powers and the Navy."[44] Let us take a moment to remind ourselves of the

[42] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 197–222, 286.

[43] Eley finds Sering as difficult to pin down politically as I do: "His marriage of keen support for the Navy with principled opposition to a full capitalist transformation of German society was further testimony to the complexity of his position. Sering … could not be fitted very easily into the conventional party-political spectrum." *Reshaping the German Right*, 105–106. See also, Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 228–248.

[44] Max Sering, "Die Handelspolitik der Großstaaten und die Kriegsflotte," in *Handels- und Machtpolitik. Reden und Aufsätze im Auftrage der "Freien Vereinigung für Flottenvorträge"*,

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fundamental contradiction of conservative nationalist rhetoric we find here, one that has a through-line to later fascist politics. At the height of the hankering for a rural state that would solve so many of Germany's problems, the same people demanded a massive, ultra-modern steel fleet. Sering began by pointing out that, with its expanding population, Germany had been forced to import rye since the 1850s and wheat since the 1870s. Yes, he admitted, Germany had managed to survive just fine so far without a Navy, but one need only recall the Continental Blockade to know that Germany was at the mercy of the British fleet. For all its talk of free trade, in the end, Sering claimed, power is what mattered most to Britain. He then, once again, pointed to America as the example for Germany to follow. Firstly, it was the mix of mid-sized-plot farmers and cities in the North who had defeated the large land-owning elite of the South (this meant that a model of inner colonization had beaten the *Junker*). And now, that perfect northern mix of rural farms and industrial base had created a railway system that extended throughout the Americas, making both continents an American domain, and a fleet was built that had captured the Philippines and made the Pacific also an American domain. Further, the American empire, like the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, was becoming an enclosed trading system with no need for foreign trade. In an interesting anecdote, Sering told a story about how the British Empire feared losing their territories that ran along the American border. He mentioned meeting a Canadian businessman, in an English officer's uniform, at a party for the Governor-General of Quebec. The Canadian argued that Canada would be best off in an economic and political union with the United States. Sering drew upon this moment to point out to his audience that it was in response to the huge standing army in the post-bellum United States that resulted in the confederation of Canada in 1867, and a continent-wide railway that was able to get troops from Montreal to Esquimault, on Vancouver Island, in two weeks.[45]

Thus, strategic uses of industry, transport networks, and of course settlement were all necessary in the new geopolitical configuration. Sering quoted Harry Huntington Powers on "the ethics of expansion," pointing out Powers' Darwinian ideas about rising and falling races, and how this all helped explain the danger to Germany of both the Anglo-Saxons as well as the Russians. Although there were some, Sering claimed, who argued Germany should lay down the weapons of war

ed. Gustav Schmoller, Max Sering, and Adolph Wagner, Vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1900), 1–45.

[45] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 228–233.

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and pursue its place in the world peacefully, they were wrong. Instead, Sering argued Germany needed colonies to become stronger, and that perhaps there were still possibilities in the tropics. Although the importance of inner colonization was invoked in this speech, Sering at this moment was obviously speaking about "overseas" colonies.[46]

In an article published the following year, Sering tied some of these themes into the debate around tariffs, and began laying out his linkage between an agrarian economy and the number of soldiers a nation could produce.[47] Against the argument that tariffs unnecessarily increased the price of food for city dwellers in Germany, Sering asked, what would happen to the farmers of Germany were the tariffs to be dropped? Whereas America was usually Sering's exemplar nation, England tended to be described as a nightmare that he urged his fellow Germans to avoid. Britain's dropping of tariffs, and the resulting devastation of agriculture there, Sering argued, had led to cities full of a simple *Lumpenproletariat*, while Germany's strong, protected rural order provided a steady stream of healthy young people for the growing cities, and simultaneously produced a great number of excellent soldiers for the Reich. Ever the pragmatist, Sering first buttered up his real target, stating that he understood that the *Junker* were the drivers of progress in the agrarian East, striving to protect their agrarian realm. But, Sering continued, the *Junker*'s reliance on seasonal Polish workers undermined this project. Thus, only with the provision of more funding for inner colonization would Sering back the raising of tariffs to protect agriculture. In fact, without simultaneous support for inner colonization, Sering would be against tariffs, as there would be nothing to protect were Germany unable to stop the Slavs from pouring into the vacuum of a thinly settled East. It is fair to say that, at this point, in publications such as this one, Sering was using ethnic chauvinism to further his political project, as he would surely have known that the vast majority of inner colonization at this point involved buying up failed German estates, not Polish ones. Importantly though, he did see the ultimate result of breaking up German estates as bolstering German settlement and, therefore, keeping out the Poles.

[46] A month later, Sering gave another speech, rehashing much of this material, with an interesting twist. When it came to global economic competition, yes, America was a problem for Germany, but the newest competitor was a powerful Argentina. "Aus dem volkswirtschaftlichen Referat," Verhand. Kollegium, March 12–14, 1900, in BArch K, N1210/49.

[47] Max Sering, "Die deutsche Bauernschaft und die Handelspolitik," *Deutsche Monatsschrift für das gesamte Leben der Gegenwart*, 1 (1901/2): 228–241.

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As a powerful companion piece to the "industrial" need for a fleet, Sering simultaneously argued that it was the "agrarian" world that produced the men required for Germany's land army. At both the 1902 and 1904 plenary meetings of the German Agrarian Council (*Deutsche Landwirthschaftsrath*), Sering produced a bevy of elaborate colour-coded maps that he argued proved that the higher the concentration of farmers in an area of Germany, the more children (meaning future soldiers) they produced.[48] In 1902, he directly invoked the threatened "colonial land" of the east, and how many more recruits it produced than the city of Berlin. Not only was Berlin the per capita worst creator of recruits, the men it produced were woeful physical specimens, and Sering ascribed this to the lack of "fresh air" in the capital. The fecundity of women was much worse in the city, Sering claimed, and the death rate among men much higher. Finally, the factory work atmosphere was terrible for the men, and Sering pointed out that there were many examples in England indicating how much worse it could become. In any case, England only had food because of its overseas Empire, while Russia, because of its agrarian base, was producing many more men, much faster.

In 1904 he repeated many of his points, and pressed his degeneration argument even further.[49] After arguing that the space to play and run free in the countryside resulted in far less of the "nerve problems" witnessed in the city, Sering wanted to see statistics about the origin of the parents of the best soldiers, believing that generations of countryside living were necessary for a strong army. Yes, Sering admitted, industry and technology had made Germany powerful, but they had to compensate for what big cities did to the "life and soul" of Germany. He finished by saying no, Germany did not need to become a "pure agrarian state" but, at the same time, the opposite was also not true.

Overwork, Illness, and Duels

The years at the opening of the century held illness as well as a staggering workload for the increasingly influential professor. In the letters Sering sent to the *eminence grise* of Germany's academic system, Althoff, we see traces of this life. Sering struggled with a serious illness during the first half of 1904, undergoing several operations and having to curtail some of

[48] Max Sering, "Bericht über die Verhandlungen der XXX. Plenarversammlung des Deutschen Landwirthschaftsraths vom 6. bis 8. Februar 1902," *Archiv des Deutschen Landwirthschaftsraths* 26 (Berlin: Parey, 1902).

[49] Max Sering, "Die Bedeutung der ländlichen Bevölkerung für die Wehrkraft des Deutschen Reichs nach den von dem Herrn Reichskanzler angeordeten Erhebungen," *Archiv des Deutschen Landwirthschaftsraths*, 28 (Berlin: Parey, 1904), 282–298.

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his teaching.[50] From 1905 to 1906, Sering complained constantly of his workload and low pay. He encouraged Adolph Wagner and Schmoller to push the ministry to hire a third *Ordinarius* for his seminar in Berlin to relieve some of his workload. Sering begged that he only teach in Berlin, and by 1906 he was asking for permission to inform his colleagues in Bonn that that was now the case. To this late date, he had been travelling back to Bonn to carry out some of his teaching duties.[51] Regarding his pay, Sering claimed that, although professors of astronomy and history were poorly paid, it did not necessarily follow that this should also be the case for him.

The end of the Althoff-system brought about what was surely one of the most personally stressful episodes in Sering's long life. Sering's letters detail how, since the 1880s, attaining a professorial position at a German University was absurdly dependent on one's relationship with Friedrich Althoff. Thus, when Althoff retired in 1907, the government moved quickly to replace the "System Althoff" by asserting ministerial control over the appointment of professors. In one such infamous instance, this led directly to a threat upon Sering's life. Ludwig Bernhard, a recently appointed professor in Posen, had made a reputation for himself as a firebrand and advocate in favour of Germanization in the Eastern Provinces. He was a sophisticated thinker who spoke and read Polish and praised the organizational quality of the Polish counter-colonial program underway in the same region. He had allies in the Prussian government, and in 1908 Bernhard was appointed to the University of Berlin. The three old "Socialists of the Chair," Schmoller,[52] Adolph Wagner, and Sering, were not pleased, and from the outset did not make life easy for the newcomer. Things came to a head in the Fall of 1910 in what can only be regarded as an extreme example of Sayre's Law: "In any dispute the intensity of feeling is inversely proportional to the value of the issues at stake … That is why academic politics are so bitter." The 1910 Berlin version of this involved the scheduling of lectures. Sering set the timetable, giving the less important "special lecture" to Bernhard.

[50] Sering to Althoff, March 10, 1904; Sering to Althoff, July 4, 1904.

[51] Sering to Althoff, August 12, 1905, November 12, 1905, November 13, 1905, November 15, 1905, November 24, 1905, March 7, 1906. Sering's father lived until 1901, and it seems as though Sering continued to visit his parents in Strasbourg, perhaps combined with trips to Bonn.

[52] At the same time, in 1908, Sering appears to have been the lead organizer in putting together a *Festschrift* for Schmoller, as well as an accompanying seventieth birthday party. There, Sering's mentor enjoyed an eight-course meal served with 1893 Chateau Lafite. BArch K, N1210/152. The volume appeared as Verein für Geschichte der Mark Brandenburg, ed., *Festschrift zu Gustav Schmollers 70. Geburtstag. Beiträge zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1908).

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Bernhard was not happy with the timetable, and in response challenged Sering to a pistol duel. Sering's faculty colleagues were rather relieved when, according to the *New York Times*, a parley took place under the Christmas Tree in the Ministry of Education, with both sides retracting their more incriminating statements.[53] Although this was surely a difficult and stressful time in Sering's life, such challenges were frequently thrown around at the time for even less significant reasons. In the same year, a young Joseph Schumpeter challenged a librarian to a duel in order to speed up access to books for his students.[54] With regard to Bernhard, however, the government made clear it was now in charge. On 9 January 1911, because of the whole incident, the three older "establishment" professors officially called for Bernhard's demotion. On 13 March, in the Prussian House, the Conservatives supported the Minister's keeping Bernhard in place, while the National Liberals backed off. Bernhard had won.[55]

Sering continued to proffer his thoughts on inner and overseas colonization, giving major talks in 1906 and 1907 on these themes, and while his journey of 1883 was always in the back of his mind, often in these speeches, it bubbled up to the front and centre. Speaking on the morning of October 7, 1906 to the German Colonial Congress, Sering began by declaring to his audience that North America was the "showplace of a colonial movement."[56] And the space of that colonial movement, a mere hundred years earlier, had been "not much more than a massive hunting territory of nomadic Indian tribes."[57] He recounted that when he visited in 1883, settlement was in full motion and the largest group among the foreign born settlers were Germans: "The North American Union was the first among modern colonial powers to understand that unsettled land should be parceled into lots and reserved for

[53] "Professors' Duel is Off." *New York Times*, January 1, 1911.

[54] See also, "Professor Wants a Duel", *New York Times*, December 11, 1910. I thank Steve McClellan for the Schumpeter anecdote and much of the information in this paragraph. See Rüdiger vom Bruch, *Wissenschaft, Politik und öffentliche Meinung. Gelehrtenpolitik im Wilhelminischen Deutschland (1890–1914)* (Husum: Matthiesen, 1980), 130–138. See also Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte seit 1789*. Vol. 4. *Struktur und Krisen des Kaiserreichs* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1969), 967–968.

[55] Weber was very interested in the whole scandal. He explains this last part in Max Weber, *Briefe 1911–1912*, ed. M. Rainer Lepsius and Wolfgang J. Mommsen. Vol. II/7, 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998). Letter, Weber to Rickert, January 15, 1911, 49, fn. 8.

[56] Max Sering, "Die deutsche Einwanderung in die landwirtschaftlichen Distrikte Nordamerikas," *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Kolonialkongresses 1905 zu Berlin am 5., 6. und 7. Oktober 1905*, edited by editorial committee. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1906), 844.

[57] Sering, "Die deutsche Einwanderung," 844.

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middle-sized and small farms."[58] But now, he claimed, only the great western deserts were left unsettled, and thus North America no longer belonged to the "colonial areas of the world." The colonizing work of the "grand variety" (*grossen Stils*) was over and instead attention was now being paid to "filling up the already settled districts."[59] Sering explained that this meant that people now had to purchase land, many becoming mere tenants, resulting in a much slower settlement. Owners of the land sought agricultural workers, like in Germany, and in the eastern regions Poles and Swedes tended to fill these jobs, while in the South, such as in Mississippi, Sering claimed that owners desired "to replace the lazy Negroes on the cotton plantations with Swedish and German workers."[60] Sering further explained that, for the most part, immigrants in North America now sought industrial jobs. In other words, the jobs provided by German industry were keeping Germans from leaving to find similar jobs in North America. Sering pointed out that, instead of Germans, American farms ended up attracting cheap labour, like the "*Landproletariat*" from Italy, Slavs from Austria, and Jews from Austria and Russia. There was one location, however, that Sering believed might still attract good German farmers: the Canadian Prairies. At this point Sering indicated the ways in which Canadian settlement appealed to him. First, there was the obvious way settlement along the forty-ninth parallel combined agriculture with security. The CPR was both facilitating rural settlement and, by being built along the border, also served the function of demarking territory and repelling uncontrolled American immigration. Further, unlike the Americans, Canadians employed immigration agents both in eastern Canada as well as abroad to get the kind of settlers they wanted. Finally, Canadian colonial societies were formed whose sole focus was the organized settlement of people on the Prairies. There had been a development since 1883 that was, however, discouraging to Sering. The Mennonite settlements he visited then had been allowed to function in a virtually "German" manner, maintaining their Germanness. Now, it appeared, communities were no longer sticking together, and Germans in Canada were losing their identity just as quickly as they did in America. This was slowing German migration to the Prairies, as it was coupled with the obvious problem evident to discerning farmers, that of the six-month winter of this area called American Siberia by some. Sering noted that these factors resulted in the arrival of much less attractive settlers, such as Ruthenians

[58] Sering, "Die deutsche Einwanderung," 846.
[59] Sering, "Die deutsche Einwanderung," 847.
[60] Sering, "Die deutsche Einwanderung," 848.

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(Ukrainians). Many Germans who had originally settled in the Prairies had become disenchanted by the region's dwindling Germanness and low temperatures, and had decamped for the United States where, Sering claimed, "truer" people of the land were to be found.

Enthusiasm for overseas colonialism burst onto the German political scene at this time, during the so-called Dernburg era, 1906–1910. As Erik Grimmer-Solem describes, the evolving link between professors and colonialism first seen around the push for a Navy by the likes of Sering, came into full national view during the "colonial crisis" of 1907.[61] The continuing military situation in German Southwest Africa, involving the genocide of the Herero and Nama, had become quite costly and controversial by 1906, and that year the Centre and Social Democratic parties withheld government funding for the mission. This led to Chancellor Bülow's calling for a snap election in 1907, the so-called Hottentot Election. In January of that year, Schmoller gathered dozens of professors to lend their moderate, sophisticated, pro-colonial discourse to counteract the often-off-putting language of the Pan Germans, among others. At the Royal Academy for Music, on January 8, after a long speech by the "Colonial Director" Bernhard Dernburg, several others gave talks. Sering opened his speech by laying out the reasons why Germany had so few overseas colonies, pointing out that, like Italy, Germany was late to unify and most of the world had been gobbled up by then. Germany did need colonies he argued, both for raw materials, but also (in a Ratzellian sense) because the German people needed space to grow and have "elbow room."[62] It should be noted here, when it came to inner colonization in the German East, Sering believed there was more than enough "elbow room" for Germans, without any kind of border "expansion." It is thus fascinating that, when speaking of the tropics, Sering suddenly felt that Germany was too small. He argued that Germany ought to get more colonies or the globe would be monopolized by Britain and America. Sering then provided an overview of Germany's colonial position, and claimed that the current colonies were good, possessing some twelve to thirteen million "coloured" inhabitants, with a great deal of land to cultivate. Sering also pointed out that not all land was ideal for agriculture, citing the example of Canada in which only 10 percent was cultivable (*anbaufähig*). While conceding that at that time no German colony was excellent for agriculture, Sering pointed to what

[61] Erik Grimmer-Solem, "The Professors' Africa: Economists, the Elections of 1907, and the Legitimation of German Imperialism," *German History* 25 (2007): 313–347.

[62] Max Sering, "Volkswirtschaft und Kolonialpolitik," *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 18, no. 3 (1 February 1907): 117.

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he had observed in California and proposed that any land could be irrigated. In terms of what was left to colonize, specifically for raw materials, Sering named the tropics of Africa and South America, urging Germany to pursue these opportunities. He ended by admitting that these places were full of races that did not want German colonization, however, he stipulated that, as one of the *Kulturvölker*, Germans had a duty to colonize. Germany would raise these people up. At the end of all the speeches, a committee was formed to gather funds for a new lobby group; both Sering and Schmoller became part of the small organizing board. Just as Sering always attempted in his professional life to be "above" politics, so this committee and the many professors involved in this *Gegenaktion* (counter-action, as they termed it) attempted to maintain the fine line between academia and politics, never openly supporting any political party.[63]

As Sering's interests expanded well beyond the threatened East with the discussion of overseas colonies in the tropics, he was simultaneously shifting his focus in the opposite direction of normal inner colonization, from Germany's east to the northern and western borderlands. Throughout these years, the Sering family vacationed in Schleswig-Holstein, and it appears that the tireless Sering studied the northern borderlands while supposedly at rest. Although this was arguably an ethnically "threatened" land, for the most part the in-depth study that Sering would produce focused upon another central issue in settler politics in inner colonization: land distribution. In 1908, Sering published *Inheritance Law and Agriculture in Schleswig-Holstein from an Historical Basis*.[64] Unsurprisingly, Sering made his usual assessment. In the areas of western Holstein, where there were middle-sized plots of land and very few large landowners, agriculture flourished, and was nicely mixed with ship-building and other industrial endeavours. Eastern Holstein was another story, where, as Sering characteristically viewed it, the problem, it turns out, were, in the end, "Poles" and *Junker*.

Early in the book Sering discussed the "threatened" borderland, comprised of the three most northern districts (Kreise), where Danish was spoken in the countryside, though German was more often heard in the

[63] Erik Grimmer-Solem, "Imperialist Socialism of the Chair: Gustav Schmoller and German Weltpolitik, 1897–1905," in *Wilhelminism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley and James Retallack (New York: Berghahn, 2003): 107–122.

[64] Max Sering, *Erbrecht und Agrarverfassung in Schleswig-Holstein auf geschichtlicher Grundlage. Mit Beitragen von Rudolf Lerch, Peter Petersen und Oskar Büchner* (Berlin: Parey, 1908). This book was dedicated to Schmoller for his seventieth birthday.

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towns. As Matthew Fitzpatrick illustrates, the Danes of north Schleswig had been viewed as a national threat since their incorporation into the Empire in 1864. In 1898, more than a thousand Danish subjects were expelled for nationalist "agitation." While Fitzpatrick points out that, especially when compared to the Slavic East, this was more a difference of "nationalities" than "ethnicities," he does make clear in his analysis of the ex-post-facto *Reichstag* debate about the expulsions, in 1899, as well as in the language used in the press, that some contemporaries saw both threatened areas as rather similar.[65] In Sering's book, after pointing out that added to the linguistic mix were also some Flemish speakers, he had little to say about the most "Danish" part of the "threatened" North, for, as he claimed, they were all "*germanisch*." In other words, despite not yet being fully assimilated, these people were not a threat to *Deutschtum*. Sering claimed that, although the Angles had left long ago, they had been slowly but surely replaced by the Jutes (Germans), adding that the "history of Schleswig can be seen as the gradual replacement of the Danish Empire both politically and nationally."[66] In a footnote, however, Sering remarked that there were additionally 4,236 Polish speakers, in his words, "*Wanderarbeiter*!" (seasonal labour). But, Sering asserted, the Polish problem in eastern Holstein was much, much deeper, for that territory had originally been settled by the Wends, medieval western Slavs. Although conquered by the twelfth century, proper settlement by the Germans only got under way with the end of eastern colonization in 1410. Sering claimed that some long-term racial effects were apparent, in that the slavery practiced among the Wends could be seen physically in the "body composition" of the landless labourers in eastern Holstein. Further, 90 percent of the *Junker* of Schleswig-Holstein lived in eastern Holstein, possessed the largest estates, and created an attendant class of landless labourers. Despite ostensibly speaking here about Germany's north, Sering managed to once again make what was really an argument for inner colonization in Posen and West Prussia.

Sering's comments in these last two sections, on Africans, Danes, and Poles, warrant some comment on the intersection of race and colonization. While Sering was probably least concerned with Danes because they were culturally and linguistically most like Germans, it is also the case that they were politically and numerically the least threatening. The Poles were more problematic, not only because of their linguistic, cultural, and "racial" differences but because of their considerable power in

[65] Matthew Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire: Mass Expulsions in Germany, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 6.
[66] Sering, *Erbrecht und Agrarverfassung*, 20.

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eastern Germany. Sering described Africans as needing German civilization to raise them up, language that might appear to be more "racial" in tone than he used for Poles. Yet Sering was later comfortable echoing similar language to that of the German occupiers of Eastern Europe in 1915 when speaking of the mostly powerless civilian populations under their control: Germans were a *Kulturvolk* that would civilize the "dirty," "backwards," "lazy" "little peoples" of the East.[67] From 1905, marriage between Germans and Africans was banned in some German colonies but such rules regarding Jews and Slavs in Germany only came into effect under the Nazis. Ultimately, the racialization and othering of colonized peoples, whether in Latvia or Namibia, relied on many more factors than simply the colour of one's skin.[68]

The pathbreaking research of Dörte Lerp allows us to further compare and contrast German colonization in Eastern Europe to their "settler" colony of Southwest Africa.[69] "Germans depended on African and Polish workers," claims Lerp, detailing how Germans worked to convert each group from independent land owners into landless labourers.[70] Once again, it was only the legal framework *within* Prussia that prevented Poles from being treated even more like Africans, for Poles at least had legal status in Prussia and could use the courts and banks to frustrate German goals. In 1903, the Germans formally implemented a government controlled, organized settler colonization modelled on the very structure of the Prussian Program of Inner Colonization, in German Southwest Africa with 300,000 marks allocated to undertake this project. The conflict that erupted there the following year, however, put an end to this scheme. Once the hostilities were over, the settlement plan that was instead put in place was the

[67] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[68] See Sebastian Conrad, "Internal Colonialism in Germany: Culture Wars, Germanification of the Soil, and the Global Imaginary," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 255–256.

[69] Dörte Lerp, *Imperiale Grenzräume. Bevölkerungspolitiken in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und den östlichen Provinzen Preußens 1884–1914* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2016).

[70] Dörte Lerp, "Ruling Classes and Serving Races: German Policies on Land, Labor, and Migration in Trans-Imperial Perspective," in *German and United States Colonialism in a Connected World: Engtangled Empires*, ed. Janne Lahti (New York: Palgrave, 2021), 133. A fascinating work on both the Polish point of view, as victims of German colonization, but also ironically Polish schemes for a kind of colonization in Africa, see Lenny A. Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities: Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840-1920* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019).

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antithesis of Sering's inner colonization; a rather *Junker*-like system of large estates was encouraged (with the resulting vastly lower German population density).[71] Nevertheless, Lerp powerfully argues for the overall structural and conceptual symmetries between these two "colonial" spaces and for their adherence to an overall global connection between colonization and territoriality:

> Legal, administrative and military control no longer sufficed to uphold permanent state sovereignty over a territory, especially not on the edges of empires. The settlement programmes … were all designed to secure imperial frontier spaces by populating them, generally with members of whichever group was considered the ethnic or racial elite. The new concept of territoriality turned the American West, Eastern Europe and Southern Africa as well as Siberia and Manchuria into spaces of struggle for political dominance through spatial means.[72]

The Institutionalization of the Field of Inner Colonization

It was during this heated "colonial" period that some long-term academic projects got underway. The theme of overseas settlement in the tropics interested Sering to the point that he oversaw the production of five volumes for the VfS on the topic, though he did not write any of them himself.[73] At the same time, the movers and shakers behind inner colonization moved significantly beyond a government program and laid down the foundations of something more akin to an academic field. This occurred in two stages, first, in 1908 with the inaugural issue of the *Archive for Inner Colonization* (*Archiv für innere Kolonisation*, hereafter *AFK*), a journal that brought together specialists and politicians. Then, in 1912, with the opening meeting of the Society for the Advancement of

[71] Lerp, "Ruling Classes," 136–141. The man responsible for this new settlement scheme was Paul Rohrbach. Born in Courland, the Baltic German colonialist Paul Rohrbach was always in Sering's circles, but never became involved (or seemingly interested in) the inner colonization of the German East.

[72] Dörte Lerp, "Beyond the Prairie: Adopting, Adapting and Transforming Settlement Policies within the German Empire," *Journal of Modern European History* 14 (2016): 240. See also, Andreas Eckert and Michael Pesek, "Bürokratische Ordnung und koloniale Praxis. Herrschaft und Verwaltung in Preussen und Afrika," in *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 87–106.

[73] Max Sering, ed., *Die Ansiedlung von Europäern in den Tropen*. 5 Vols. SdVfS 147 (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1912). See also Sering's notes on this project, BArch K, N1210/147. And see Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 407–408.

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Inner Colonization (*Gesellshaft zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation*, hereafter GFK).

The Archive for Inner Colonization

In his 1933 editorial, looking back on twenty-five years of the *AFK*, Heinrich Sohnrey detailed how the journal got started. Dr. Hugo Thiel, at the Ministry of Agriculture, was the first to suggest a journal devoted to inner colonization. This occurred in his office one day in 1908 and, sitting there beside Sohnrey was Friedrich von Schwerin. Soon thereafter, these two had a meeting with Sering, who, it turned out, was concerned that inner colonization was itself too narrow a theme to support an entire journal, and instead suggested a "Zeitschrift für Agrarpolitik" (Journal of Agrarian Politics). Sohnrey remained convinced, launched the journal, but indeed did have difficulty at first. Luckily, Thiel and the Ministry kicked in financial support to keep the journal afloat in the earliest days, and then, with the founding of the GFK, the *AFK* became the house journal of that body and was safe thereafter.[74]

In the opening edition of *AFK*, in 1909, the editors stated that this journal would be a place for academics and non-academics to come together with the shared goal of furthering inner colonization, throughout Germany, but especially in the threatened East.[75] During this initial period, from 1909 to 1914, although there was no call for a physical expansion of the eastern borders, the envy for spaces of seeming emptiness was apparent throughout the journal. In an intriguing 1912 piece, southern Spain was said to be largely empty and ready for colonization and that this same area had long ago been conquered and initially settled by the Castillians, just as Prussian Poland had once be conquered and settled by the Teutonic Knights.[76] One of the primary examples of an inner colonizing European power, Russia, was featured throughout *AFK*. The eastern migration of settlers to Siberia was analyzed, especially in an article that discussed the veterans of the Russo-Japanese War as having received plots there. The author, Charles de Beaulieu's jealousy for vast, "empty" space was overt.[77] Beaulieu was based in Frankfurt an der Oder

[74] "25 Jahre Archiv für innere Kolonisation," *AFK* 25 (1933): 1–3.
[75] "Programm," in *AFK* 1 (1909): 1–5.
[76] R. Leonhard, "Innere Kolonisation in Spanien," *AFK* 4 (1912): 113–126. A similar argument claiming emptiness in of all places, Sweden, was the subject of: D. J. Frost, "Die innere Kolonisation in Schweden," *AFK* 6 (1914): 69–80.
[77] Charles de Beaulieu, "Gemeinheitsteilung und innere Kolonisation in Russland," *AFK* 2 (1910): 293–303. See Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and*

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yet did not directly reference the shared struggle of Germans and Russians to settle among Poles in East Central Europe. Although not mentioning Poles, the article "Agrarian Reform and Inner Colonization in Russia" did discuss the Stolypin land reforms that were active in Russia's Polish space.[78]

"Overfilled" spaces of inner colonization were also analyzed, especially within the greatest of colonial empires, Britain. A collection of articles in 1912 focused on the United Kingdom; B. Skalweit's two part "Settlement Efforts in England" stands out as an in-depth analysis of the situation in Britain. From his perch working inside the German embassy in London, Skalweit detailed England's extreme "flight from the land," underway since 1870. He praised the many governmental efforts, established in the 1880s, to legally protect and distribute smallholdings and direct families out of the cities and onto the land.[79] Skalweit concluded by arguing that only when in the hands of the government, and not local lords, was settlement successful in England.

Intriguingly, also in the 1912 volume, the journal's authors made clear that they considered "inner colonization" to be part and parcel of a colonialism that encompassed "overseas colonization." The previous year, a strange piece by the famous journalist Paul Rohrbach had appeared in the pages of *AFK*, entitled "Settlement Efforts in Our African Colonies." Here, Rohrbach emphasized that overseas German settler colonies in East Africa, Cameroon, and Southwest Africa needed to retain their Germanness, but he was honest in his assessment of the land, describing it as desolate, with poor soil and too much rain.[80] Perhaps as a reaction to this piece, the special "Colonial Issue" of 1912 made the connection to the East very clear, arguing that each form of settler colonialism could learn from the other but that, although the overseas colonies were significant, in the end the "nearby" colonies were more important. In fact, the editor's introduction stated that 1,000 farmers in the German East were more important than 5,000 in East Africa. And yet, despite this, the editor complained, due to its popularity,

Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[78] Hollmann, "Die Agrarreform und innere Kolonisation in Russland," *AFK* 5 (1913): 313–344.

[79] In England, B. Skalweit argued, experiments in "social colonization" were much more in evidence than in Germany, where the nationalities struggle was prevalent. "Ansiedlungsbestrebungen in England," *AFK* 4 (1912): 1–36, 53–72.

[80] Paul Rohrbach, "Siedlungsbestrebungen in unseren afrikanischen Kolonien," *AFK* 3 (1911): 71–86. Rohrbach's language here gives some background for his championing of large estate settlement in Southwest Africa over smaller farms. See Lerp, "Ruling Classes," 138.

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overseas colonization received much of the money that would otherwise be directed to inner colonization. In reference to the "natives" of the German East, he did however concede that it was easier to deal with Africans when it came to competition over farmland. He ended the editorial arguing that both strong inner colonization, as well as resilient overseas settlement, would result in the motto that he recommended that the *AFK* adopt: "A Bigger Germany It Must Be!" (*Das grössere Deutschland soll es sein!*)[81]

In his economic report in this special 1912 issue, Professor Kurt Weidenfeld noted that Germans were migrating only as far as German cities now, and there was no need for the "safety valve" of overseas migration. By 1912, German emigration had shrunk to 10 percent of what it had been in 1885.[82] Nevertheless, two other articles discussed overseas colonies in a manner that made them appealing. One dispelled the notion of difficulties with climate, noting that the hill station at Moschi (German East Africa) was rather similar to Central Europe, and further argued that in any case Africans lacked the cultural level to farm properly, being a full thousand years behind Germans, and thus German settlement was necessary.[83] The other piece referenced Africans as well, noting that their sheer number was the biggest obstacle (a situation rather similar to Prussian Poland, though this was not openly stated).[84] The relationship of the two forms of settlerism was made clear in the special issue's select bibliography: "Overview of publications in the area of inner colonization of domestic and overseas areas in 1911."[85]

[81] "Besiedlung im Inlande und in den Kolonien," *AFK* 4 (1912): 145–147. Note that ultimately Germany would settle five times as many people in the Eastern Provinces as in all their overseas colonies combined. Conrad, "Internal Colonialism," 254.

[82] The Society for German Colonization was founded in 1885. Kurt Weidenfeld, "Volkswirtschaftliche Betrachtungen über die Besiedlung der deutschen Kolonien," *AFK* 4 (1912): 148–154.

[83] L. Külz, "Ist eine Akklimatisierung des Europäers in den Tropenländern möglich?" *AFK* 4 (1912): 165–174. Moschi is described in D. A. Leue, "Die Siedlungen am Meru (Deutsch-Ostafrika)," *AFK* 4 (1912): 175–184.

[84] D. C. Winkler, "Die Besiedlung der deutschen Kolonien," *AFK* 4 (1912): 155–164.

[85] "Uebersicht der Veröffentlichungen auf dem Gebiete der inneren Kolonisation des In- und Auslandes im Jahre 1911," *AFK* 4 (1912): 214–219. The article mentioned literature on Palestine, and there is in fact an intriguing connection between German inner colonization and Zionism. For the story of the German Jews who were affiliated with and influenced by the Settlement Commission in Prussian Poland, and then went on to found the Palestinian Land Development Company, see Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 149–160. See also, Robert L. Nelson, "'Inner Colonization' and Race: Germany, Canada, and Globally Transferrable Concepts from the 1880s to the 1940s," in *Wissen – Transfer – Differenz. Transnationale und interdiskursive Verflechtungen von Rassismus ab 1700*, ed. Claudia Bruns and Michaela Hampf (Göttingen: Wallenstein), 274–295.

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Thus, the overall tone of this special issue very much confirms Lerp's thesis that *all* spaces of German colonization belonged to an "imperial formation" that connected local factors in a colonial situation to both macro-political German thinking as well as forms of settler colonialism around the globe.[86]

It was in the pages of *AFK* that Sering's major ally, Friedrich von Schwerin, began to publish. A speech of his appeared in 1911 in which he described the "old Prussian project" of inner colonization, which had begun with none other than Frederick the Great. Schwerin made the vacuum-based argument that, unless Germans were settled onto every square inch of empty land in the East, the same space would surely be filled by the Poles. Indeed, the space was filled every harvest, Schwerin pointed out, with the Slavic Flood of seasonal Polish workers doing the work that settled small-plot German farmers should be doing. How would the nation not avoid starvation, Schwerin argued, should a war prevent the arrival of said Poles?[87] The language of war appeared in *AFK* when reference was made to the counter-colonial behaviour of Poles, such as in a 1910 article that referred to Polish inner colonization as a "*Feldzug*" (military campaign), or a 1911 piece referencing Polish "fanaticism" as being behind the rise in the price of land.[88]

Alongside articles directly about the war over land between Germans and Poles, the more agrarian romantic notion of inner colonization came out in *AFK* pieces about "social colonization." The core idea was that getting prisoners and the urban unemployed out of the cities and onto small farming plots would both help basic settler needs but also alleviate overcrowding in the cities and the resulting health problems. Further, as Sering had earlier argued, the thicker the rural population, the more future soldiers that would be produced. One author, Hans Ostwald, went so far as to claim that such progress might result in Germany winning land by tilling the soil (and draining swamps) instead of spilling blood.[89] Along these same "social" lines, the journal discussed the role of

[86] Lerp, "Beyond the Prairie," 239.

[87] Friedrich von Schwerin, "Die Förderung der inneren Kolonisation in der Provinz Brandenburg, insbesondere durch Ausdehnung der Tätigkeit der 'Landgesellschaft Eigene Scholle' auf den Bezirk Potsdam," *AFK* 3 (1911): 223–238. Athens defeated Sparta, he interestingly claimed, by way of inner colonization.

[88] "Feldzug" appeared in "Polnische Kleinarbeit in Westpreussen," *AFK* 2 (1910): 80–84, and "Fanaticism" in "Die polnische Parzellierungs-Genossenschaft," *AFK* 3 (1911): 65–68. Another article referred to Polish "Kampfinstituten." (institutes of war) See, Schilling, "Die polnische Parzellierungsbanken im Jahre 1909," *AFK* 3 (1911): 87–99. On the controversy as to whether the battle for the land led to an increase in property value, see Eddie, "Prussian Settlement Commission and its Activities," 39–63.

[89] Hans Ostwald, "Soziale Kolonisation," *AFK* 3 (1911): 161–174.

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women in inner colonization. An article on the "Exhibition of Women in the Home and at Work," in Berlin, featured a stand set up by the East Prussian Association which attempted to shame the city visitors by pointing out that, while urban women were "consumers," women on the land were "producers." The author used this occasion to call for more research on how women contributed to the "manly" work of inner colonization.[90]

The Society for the Advancement of Inner Colonization

In its opening 1909 edition of *AFK*, the editorial team had directly stated that this journal was to be an organ where politicians and scientists could come together to further the goals of inner colonization.[91] And a glance at the list of authors shows the editors at their word, with professors and politicians sharing the bylines. This hybrid model is also apparent when one works through the list of attendees for the opening conference of the newly formed GFK, on December 7, 1912. First, there was the mix represented by the three founding directors, the academic Sering, the politician Friedrich von Schwerin, and the industrialist and publisher Alfred Hugenberg. Beyond them, the academic interest in the Eastern question was represented by the doyen of German–Polish history, Manfred Laubert, as well as Dr Erich Zechlin of Posen, Professor Johann Viktor Bredt of Marburg, Professor Fritz Curschmann of Greifswald, a specialist in the early modern colonization of the East, as well as Professor Heinrich Sohnrey, the publisher of *AFK* and for many the true guardian of the romantic dream of a better, agrarian Germany. Representing the media were Samuel Breslauer, editor-in-chief of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, Heinrich Rippler, the editor of the *Tägliche Rundschau*, and, of a decidedly more polemical bent, Georg Cleinow, from the *Grenzbote*, as well as Ernst Hunkel of the *Ostmark*. Along with the latter two editors, representing the more radically right-wing section of the population were both the business director of the Reich Alliance against Social Democracy and the general secretary of the Eastern

[90] L. Maass, "Wirtschaftliche Frauenaufgaben in der inneren Kolonisation," *AFK* 4 (1912): 410–416. In a later article, the same author gave a detailed account of life at the first "worker settlement" at Zabikowo. Here again he rejoiced at how inner colonization kept women at home instead of packing them off to factories. Further, he emphasized the trope that rural women had more children, and thus inner colonizing women contributed to the military strength of the nation and fulfilled fundamental national-political goals. L. Maass, "Das ostmärkische Kleinsiedlungsdorf Zabikowo," *AFK* 5 (1913): 391–421.

[91] "Programm," *AFK* 1 (1909): 1–5.

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Figure 4.1 Max Sering in 1910
(Photo by Bildarchiv preußischer Kulturbesitz/Wilhelm Fechner/Art Resource)

Marches Society. Another participant worth noting was General von Beseler, soon to be the commander of occupied Poland.[92] These various groups and actors may have had many differences, but they all shared a vision of Prussian Poland as a colonial space, a frontier that had, somehow, to be both "cleared" of undesirable elements and simultaneously filled with Germans. The Slavic Flood had to be first dammed, then drained.

[92] "Liste der Teilnehmer an der Konferenz der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation," *AFK* 6 (1914): 253–257. A total of 232 attendees are listed. For correspondence regarding this meeting, see BArch K, N/1210/28. See also Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 106–108.

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The speeches at this inaugural conference dispensed with the niceties such events often proffered, and the participants jumped right into the most contentious debates of inner colonization. Sering obstinately refused to let any *Junker* in the audience off the hook and returned to one of his oldest arguments: that the slavery and indentured labour found in the American South was the clearest model of how *not* to conduct inner colonization. Reflecting upon what he had just learned on a recent trip to Russia, discussed in the next section, he remarked that the Stolypin reforms showed anyone who took the time to look at them that free and independent farmers who owned their own land were by far the strongest yeomen to be found.[93]

Sering and Inner Colonization on the Eve of War: 1909–1914

The Junker

A wonderful illustration of Sering's complicated relationship with the *Junker* can be found in two speeches he gave at the annual Royal Prussian Agrarian Economic College, as well as in the repartee that occurred during the Q&A immediately afterward. Sering kept his dagger sharp whenever there was an opportunity to attack the *Junker*, and indeed there was a rather lively exchange in February 1909. Sering began his address complaining that inner colonization was not some program designed to provide a workforce to *Junker*. Instead, it was fundamentally about changing the distribution of land and simultaneously solving the problem of landless labour. Of course, Sering knew such a radical argument had to be immediately couched in terms of racial and national necessity, and thus claimed that inner colonization of the East would also stop the "colossal flood wave of Slavicness" and would provide a "constant defense." Numerous German families were the most powerful way to do this, and "neighbouring rows of populous (*volkreich*) villages" would "defend to their last drop of blood."[94] Sering then said that although he was often accused of calling for the dissolution of *Junker*-dom, this was not true. Yet, if a mere one million of the six million hectares of *Junker*-controlled land could be colonized, Germany would be in incredible

[93] He contrasted the Stolypin reforms to what he called the "Agrarkommunismus" found in Siberia. Max Sering, "Das Gesetz über das Fideikommisswesen und die Interessen der inneren Kolonisation," *AFK* 6 (1914): 260–287.

[94] Max Sering, "Die innere Kolonisation mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Besiedlung der Moore und der Arbeiteransiedlung auf den königlichen Domänen," *Verhandlungen des Königlichen Landes-Ökonomie-Kollegiums* (Berlin: Parey, 1909), 139.

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shape.[95] In the discussion that followed, it must be admitted that some of the *Junker* participants lived up to the oafish caricatures that history has given them. One claimed that as opposed to what Sering had said about "defending to the last drop of blood," the peasants he knew were more interested in "money and schnapps." Further, good, married peasants were staying in the East, and only "day labourers" fled west, because the latter could not stand that their wages were paid to their parents, people who knew to only give out what they thought appropriate. In the West, he asserted, these wasters were their "own lords." His transcribed comments end with: "Herr Professor Sering appears – at least this is what I feel – to be a little on a war footing with the *Junker*. (Professor Sering: No! – Laughter.)"[96]

The lively exchange in the room then continued with Sering responding that yes, words like "freedom" were very popular and led many farmers to flee to cities in the hopes that they might find it there. But, argued Sering, they could have freedom right where they already lived in the East, if the *Junker* would only give them their own farms. And yes, claimed Sering, they would defend their soil (*Scholle*) to the last drop of blood. Sering said he travelled often among the settlers and stated that they were a hard-working sort who paid off their debts. The Conservative politician Conrad von Wangenheim then countered that speeches like Sering's today would only increase *Junker* resistance to inner colonization. Another cited Sering's words from the *Dictionary of National Economy* in which he declared that the *Junker* were necessary to stop the monopoly of power in the cities: "Gentlemen, those words pleased me, much more so than the words I've heard him say today. (Laughter)." Sering retorted: "But there is no contradiction!" Sering was then attacked with the charge that the new colonists neither got along with, nor understood, the *Junker*. "Not true!" yelled Sering, who then stated that he wanted to be very clear: Germany needed "Leaders (*Führer*) on the Land."[97] He noted that, since the defeat of the American South, the farmers there no longer knew what to do, that is, they lacked leadership. Sering, who definitely believed in hierarchy, then claimed that he had never called for the destruction of the *Junker* and stated that he in fact wanted to restore a form of entailment that would work to maintain truly independent *Junker*. He finished with, "I ultimately reject being painted

[95] As we will see, when Sering eventually writes the 1919 Reich Settlement Law, he will double this number, demanding a third of all *Junker* land be given over to inner colonization.
[96] Sering, "Die innere Kolonisation mit besonderer Berücksichtigung," 162–163.
[97] Sering, "Die innere Kolonisation mit besonderer Berücksichtigung," 186–190.

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as an enemy of the *Junker*." Another member spoke up to defend Sering and stated that no one was suggesting a war against the *Junker*.[98] Perhaps a cold war is the best way to describe the simmering tension between Sering and the *Junker*. It is in fact difficult to see any way in which Sering's denials could be true; although he could never say so directly, he was, without a doubt, an enemy of the *Junker*.

Sering was clearly not cowed by the reaction he received in 1909 because exactly a year later he was full of vim and vigour again in his assault on the evils of *Junker*-dom. In his February 11, 1910 talk at the same *Royal Prussian Agrarian Economic College*, he had three elaborate maps to illustrate the direct link between large *Junker* estates and the flight from the land of the peasantry. His frustration with Polish counter-colonization was also clearly on display. In the areas of the eastern provinces where there was an ideal mix of small Polish farmer plots and industry, the Polish population was increasing. In regions where the Settlement Commission had achieved such proper land distribution, the same was happening with Germans. Alas, decried Sering, there was no more Polish land to purchase and the only answer was to buy and break up German estates. After lamenting that Poles were not great additions to the German Empire, he again claimed that ultimately *Junker* were the greatest threat, and that both groups were guilty of degeneration in Germany. Sering lamented that the "supremacy" of the *Junker* led to depopulation and surmised that, had it not been for *Junker* estates, there would be three times as many Germans living in the East, Germans who would be strengthening the race. Unusually, Sering admitted that yes, large estates did produce more food, but immediately pointed out that such purely economic considerations were only paramount in a system where food production was *all* that mattered. Further, Sering argued, "a purposefully directed colonization would result in a steady growth of agricultural production, and supporting this was a legion of objective evidence."[99] Sering further claimed that doubling Germany's agricultural production had become key to its political position in the world, and thus inner colonization was the fundamental answer to all of Germany's problems. Sering was nothing if not a true believer.

By the following year's address, Sering was attempting to soften his direct assault on the *Junker* and, instead of naming them directly, shifted

[98] Sering, "Die innere Kolonisation mit besonderer Berücksichtigung," 190. The next day Sering gave another speech, entitled "Die Vererbung des ländlichen Grundbesitzes im Königreich Preussen und die Reform des ländlichen Erbrechts," 218–237.

[99] Max Sering, *Die Verteilung des Grundbesitzes und die Abwanderung vom Lande. Rede, gehalten im Königlich Preussischen Landes-Ökonomie-Kollegium am 11. Februar 1910* (Berlin: Parey, 1910), 33–34.

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his argument to simply stating what the positive effects of the inner colonization of the East would be for all Germans. For instance, he sought to show how a return to rural life would produce soldiers. This speech combined his colourful maps from a decade earlier, depicting rural areas and the production of soldiers with his more recent theme of global, land-based great powers and their use of railroads and colonization to settle their rural areas. Because Germany had to make do with the land it had, once again Sering declared Germany must turn to inner colonization as the only way to create "a safe wall against the slavicization of the East," and simultaneously to create workers and soldiers for the Reich. After all, Sering pointed out, it had been free land that pulled Germans to that space in the first place, long ago.[100]

The very next year he went much broader, with a global comparison of Great Land Empires and their small plot farmers. This 1912 speech, "The Politics of the Distribution of Land in the Great Empires," opened with a global transnational settler colonial comparison of North and South America, Australia, Siberia, North and South Africa, describing the way each had built railroads that brought settlers into empty prairies where they removed the forests, assimilated or removed the natives, and built homesteads. Sering expressed regret that Germany was late to the game of carving up the globe and therefore would have to settle for less land. He further argued that with less land at stake much more attention would have to be paid to the distribution of land ownership so that it

[100] Max Sering, "Die Bearbeitung der Landarbeiterfragen durch die Landwirtschaftskammern und das Landes-Ökonomie-Kollegium," *Sonderabdruck aus den Verhandlungen der I. Tagung der XII. Sitzungsperiode des Landes-Ökonomie-Kollegiums am 11. Februar 1911 zu Berlin* (Berlin: Parey, 1911), 38. Sering had discussed these themes in 1910 in two newspaper articles: "Wie erhalten wir einen ausreichenden Teil unserer Jugend auf dem Lande für die Landwirtschaft?" and "Zentralversammlung aller der Landwirtschaftskammer für die Provinz Sachsen angeschlossenen landwirtschaftlichen Vereine," both in *Hallesche Zeitung*, 23 November 1910. Judging by the amount of press reports on this speech, Sering's talks received a lot of attention by this point in his career. See the collection of press reactions in BArc K, N1210/42, document 4. Sering continued with the theme of military power in the new year with the publication, Max Sering, "Die Verstärkung der deutschen Wehrkraft. Eine finanzwirtschaftliche Betrachtung von Max Sering, Professor an der Universität Berlin," *Die Flotte* 15, no. 4 (April 1912): 62–63. This was Sering's contribution to the "Encirclement" (Einkreisung) debate, pointing out that as the three Great Powers surrounding Germany were getting bigger and bigger, Germany was forced into the role of a middling power. He then produced tables to show that Germans per capita spent much less on the military than either the French or the English, and Germany was in fact much closer to America. The Germans, Sering claimed, had massively increased their standard of living and their wealth, yet did not pay properly for their security. He then stated, rather prophetically, "A lost war would make beggars of us, and a peace forced on the weakling at the cost of his honour would increasingly restrict our work opportunities."

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could be administered as efficiently as possible. Comparison to these empires was important to Sering, but the settlement politics of the United States was the archetype for him. After making his usual comparison of the yeoman farmer with his own plot of land in the victorious North, to the slave-owning large land owning elite of the vanquished South, he noted that the expansion into the American Prairie was carried out by "a population that was largely of Germanic descent."[101] After pointing out the use of immigration agents in Canada, and his preference for the more organized settlement of that country, he referenced the "climate" problem of Canada, as well as that of Australia. Such "climate" issues were in fact like what Germans had to deal with in Southwest Africa, Sering admitted to laughter from the audience. Sering also made an interesting reference to the success of Ireland in providing farms for settlers, arguing that this had led to social peace.[102] Then, in reference to the land he would soon be visiting, Sering praised the massive new organization of Russian land undertaken by the recently assassinated Stolypin. Sering called this a massive "inner colonization" at the same time that a massive "outer colonization" to Siberia was taking place.[103]

With these global comparisons completed, Sering claimed that it was high time to indicate where Germany stood. Land was properly divided and in healthy shape in the "old Empire," but in the colonial area (the eastern provinces), despite the fact that the *Junker* had a close relationship to the land, much of the lower orders did not own the land, and there were many Slavs (though they were at least somewhat Germanized). Sering claimed that Germany had many colonists but lacked the farms to put them on.[104]

[101] Max Sering, "Die Politik der Grundbesitzverteilung in den grossen Reichen," *Verhandlungen des Landes-Oekonomie-Kollegiums am 9. Februar 1912* (Berlin: Parey, 1912), 363.

[102] In a strange aside that could equally apply to the German East, Sering admitted settlement in Ireland had been possible only because of the huge emigration of Irish. Sering, "Die Politik der Grundbesitzverteilung," 372–374.

[103] Sering, "Die Politik der Grundbesitzverteilung," 379. It is interesting to note here that, for some reason, Sering is calling Russia's colonization of Siberia "outer," but what is the difference from the American West, an "inner" colonization for Sering? Sering continued with his transnational comparisons, noting that, as Andrew Jackson had pointed out in the 1830s, it was individual farmers that made up the nation. This was not only a view espoused in the United States, for such thinking was behind everything from Australian farms to post-(Japanese)war Russia and post-(civil)war Ireland, where the government made concerted efforts to create a strong agrarian middle class as the safest guarantee against revolution. Again, Sering reinforced that everyone already knew that such a system created healthy young soldiers for all these nations.

[104] Discussion then got underway, first with Wangenheim, who asked about the perception that inner colonization had increased the cost of land. And, if the Germans who were leaving were simply going to the industrial centres, was not the push for

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During this period, Sering organized two "*Studienreisen*," study trips with several colleagues. The first, in May 1910, was in many ways a trial run of the much bigger journey two years later. The initial excursion saw Sering guiding 150 participants over six days throughout the *Moselland*, the area that he had explored and studied during his time in nearby Bonn. After moving through the Eifel region of the lower Mosel, they visited the old Roman city of Trier, before moving into the *Reichland* of Lorraine. In his introductory essay to the accompanying published study,[105] Sering admitted that this region was a heavily mixed "language frontier," but that Germanization had been effective over the last forty years. Sering continued, lauding the German civilizing mission, this time in the West, claiming that "Lotharingians" were now doing better than ever, "because we have provided the individual breathing space required to freely develop their powers."[106]

Two years later Sering departed for a major journey to Russia. Professor Otto Auhagen accompanied Sering on this trip, a massive research journey with some 108 participants. Several would write up their findings, which Sering then edited into a volume that appeared the following year. In his introduction, Sering began by stating that the German people knew far too little about their largest trading partner, the great nation of Russia. Sering explained that, despite westernization, Russia was still 90 percent agrarian, and "in a state of economic and spiritual bondage," as it was "under the pressure of serfdom and the state poll tax."[107] Despite the "emancipation" of 1861, Sering argued that Russian peasants were still in a feudal state and were only emerging from it with the 1906 and 1910 laws, reforms much more akin to "European" understandings of culture and private property. Sering agreed with Auhagen, who had now made two recent trips of his own to Russia, that massive change was underway there because men were being given their own farms, and thus they were achieving independence, an outcome

industrialization hurting Germany? He then indicated that there was a lot of government funding for inner colonization in Ireland, and Sering agreed. Sering, "Die Politik der Grundbesitzverteilung," 397–398.

[105] Max Sering, "Das Moselland in der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Einleitender Vortrag," in *Das Moselland und die westdeutsche Eisenindustrie*. Volume 1, ed. Max Sering (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1910), 1–35.

[106] Sering, "Das Moselland," vol. 1, 11–12, and quote is at 33.

[107] Max Sering, ed., *Russlands Kultur und Volkswirtschaft: Aufsätze und Vorträge im Auftrage der Vereinigung für Staatswissenschaftliche Fortbildung zu Berlin* (Berlin: G. J. Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung, 1913), iv. There are several interesting contributions from Holl, Brückner, Neubecker, Hoetzsch, Ballod, Auhagen, Koefoed, Goebel, Wossidlo, Wilkow, and Wiedenfeld. For more details on the journey, see Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 432–434.

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right in line with the developments one could see in "old Europe," as well as in overseas settler colonies. The travelling group saw Kiev, St. Petersburg, and Moscow, as well as industry, schools, infirmaries, and prisons. They travelled out onto the fruitful steppe near Kharkov, the forests near the Volga, and saw villages still in their old configuration, newly parcelled farm plots, and yes, large landed estates. All-in-all, the Russian hosts made everything very easy, and were an example of the greatest hospitality, enthused Sering. What is most fascinating about this volume is that, a mere four years later, Sering would publish another tome on settler colonialism in the Russian lands, only this time from a perspective of the colonizing conqueror.[108]

There was a moment in 1913 that profoundly hurt Sering, and surely served to deepen his anger toward the *Junker*. I have uncovered only one instance of Sering speaking in front of his great hero, the Kaiser, and on that occasion he was mocked. Let us recall that the greatest moment of Sering's life was his fourteenth birthday, the day William the Second's father had been crowned emperor of Germany. February 12, 1913 was to feature Sering giving a major talk on inner colonization at the German Agrarian Council. In the audience sat Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, one of the oldest and loudest *Junker* and a vocal enemy of inner colonization, as well as Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, and the Kaiser. The proceedings opened with the Kaiser giving an address in which he pointed out the necessity of Germany securing "bread and meat" for a safer future. Such a theme would have pleased Sering, and he then took the stage to provide an impassioned plea for more support for inner colonization. After detailing American and Canadian inner colonization, he described Russia and her ten million hectares ready for settlement, indicating that such programs made these empires strong and ensured social peace. In reference to the Kaiser's previous comments, Sering declared that unharvested fields in the event of war would be a disaster for Germany and that continued and unabated industrialization would simply turn Germany into England. Unfortunately for Sering, the nasty Oldenburg then immediately took the stage after him, mocked his entire project, made jokes about "free farmers" becoming liberals, suggested that this would lead to a radicalized population, and emphasized that

[108] Sering was involved in founding the German–Russian Society (Deutsch-Russische Gesellschaft), a body that failed to receive government support. See Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 435–438. See also, James Casteel, "On the Civilizing Mission of the Global Economy: German Observers of the Colonization and Development of Siberia, 1900–1918," in *The Nation State and Beyond: Governing Globalization Processes in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Isabelle Löhr and Roland Wenzlhuemer (New York: Springer, 2013), 209–233.

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what Germany needed instead were "dependent tenants" (*abhängig Pächter*). The *Junker* were good for Germany, he claimed, always managing to keep their farmers happy. Sering surely steamed as this elicited huge laughter from the audience, including the Kaiser.[109] But the dagger in Sering's heart would surely have come when he rose to answer this mocking challenge, only to see the Kaiser leave the hall. Although we cannot know exactly how Sering really felt about Poles, we can safely say that he utterly despised certain *Junker*.[110]

Sering's frustration in the presence of the Kaiser was a microcosm of his and his colleagues' impatience with the entire inner colonial project by the Summer of 1914. The intractable forces of an obstinate *Junker*, coupled with a legally protected and ever-growing population of Prussian Poles, had resulted in the truly Sisyphean settler colonial project in the East: no matter how hard the inner colonizers toiled, the demographic balance was not changing. Sering and his colleagues never imagined that it would be the crucible of war that would seemingly solve their problems. At the same time, war would radicalize their understanding of settler colonialism in the East and expand the German mental horizon regarding Empire and the imperial organization of space and the people living therein.

[109] Max Sering, "Die Entwicklung der sozialen Verfassung auf dem Lande," *Verhandlungen des Landes-Oekonomie-Kollegiums* (Berlin: Parey, 1913), 276–286. Details of this event can be found in: *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, February 12, 1913, and *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, February 12, 1913, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, February 13, 1913, and *Täglicher Rundschau*, February 13, 1913. In an editorial upon the 100th anniversary of Sering's birth, this episode is mentioned. Sering surely spoke of it later in life. See N.A., "Max Sering," *IKO* 2 (1957): 1–2.

[110] Sering answered Oldenburg-Januschau by stating that the latter had so many caveats that they would simply destroy inner colonization. Sering, "Die Entwicklung der sozialen Verfassung," 90.

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