5 The Radicalization of Inner Colonization
The First World War, 1914–1918

"Dear Friend," began Max Sering's September 5, 1914, letter to his long time colleague and specialist on Russian settlement, Otto Auhagen.[1] At this early moment in the war, Sering told Auhagen about both his major strategic concerns, as well as his most personal worry. Referencing earlier correspondence, he agreed with Auhagen that an independent Poland (closely linked to Austria–Hungary) should be the result of any peace but wondered how long Germany could last in a prolonged conflict. The impending terror of the British naval blockade could already be foreseen. Sering stated that Germany had enough food for a year, but her sworn enemy [*Todfeind*], England, would have to be defeated. On a personal level, Sering was deeply impressed that the forty-five-year-old Auhagen had personally taken up arms, but was proud to say that his own son, Max, had taken part in the action at Gumbinnen, as well as in the final phase of the great battle of Tannenberg. Over the next four years, Sering would see the creation of the Kingdom of Poland, he would watch fellow Germans starve, he would not see England defeated, and while the middle-aged Auhagen would manage to come through, Sering's son would tragically be killed in the last of the fighting of 1918. Although the journey of 1883 was surely the most important moment in the shaping of Max Sering's career, his journeys to the Eastern Front during the Great War in many ways mark the culmination of his settler colonial thinking that had been spawned on the Prairies some three decades earlier.

1914: The Opening of Possibilities

A few weeks after writing the letter to Auhagen, on November 6, Sering gave a ninety-minute-long speech with the rather Hegelian-sounding title, "The Causes and World-Historical Importance of the War," to an

[1] Sering to Auhagen, September 5, 1914, in BArch K, N/210/121.

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enthusiastic audience in an "overcrowded hall" in Berlin.[2] There was a sense of betrayal in his claim that Russia and France would never have attacked Germany had England not pledged its allegiance to them. With regard to the question of "guilt," Sering asserted that England and France would have broken Belgian neutrality if Germany had not done so first.[3] But Sering quickly got to the ideas that drove his imagination and explained almost everything for him: settlement and space. The last thirty to fifty years had been the "era of imperialism," he claimed, with Great Powers creating huge empires that included "large temperate settlement areas for their white populations and extensive warm dominions that offered space for many hundreds of millions of inhabitants."[4] After laying out the rather *Raum*-oriented, Ratzellian theory that "freight wagons" and "row boats" created nations through traffic networks, he pointed out that steamboats and telegraph cable lines led to the desire to create huge empires ten times the size of the original state. Countries once comprised of small coastal settlements had since expanded deep into their interior,

> Now the United States, the British possessions in Canada, Australia and South Africa, eastern Russia and Siberia have become the arena of the largest colonization of all time. Hundreds of thousands of settlers follow the railroads to cultivate land far from the coast and the watercourses.[5]

Then, as settlement technology had continued to develop, the cooler nations were now expanding settlement into the tropics. This had resulted in colonial conflicts, and he listed the wars of France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia, claiming Germany had been at peace for forty-three years. Apparently wars in Southwest Africa and Tanzania were invisible to the professor, only wars between colonizing powers counted. Just as only certain kinds of farming were legible to Sering, so too were certain forms of violence. Then, he reasoned, despite their huge empires, these states nevertheless felt the need to attack Germany: "It is a struggle of the land-rich versus the land-poor, a war of extermination by the empires against the two powerful nation-states of Central Europe."[6] Sering's explanation was that, as Germany had risen in great power status, especially with its fleet, the

[2] *Vossische Zeitung*, November 7, 1914, and *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, November 7, 1914.
[3] It is indeed well known that Joffre was not averse to such an invasion.
[4] Max Sering, "Die Ursachen und die weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung des Krieges. Rede am 6. November 1914," in *Deutsche Reden in schwerer Zeit*, ed. Zentralstelle für Volkswohlfahrt und dem Verein für volkstümliche Kurse von Berliner Hochschullehrern (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1914), 7.
[5] Sering, "Die Ursachen," 9. [6] Sering, "Die Ursachen," 12.

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United Kingdom had become nervous of its own status and decided to attack.

Sering had begun this speech asking what Germany's goal was, if, God willing, "we" were to win. The threat that Germany might actually lose appeared again when he spoke of what the results of a defeat would be: industry would be destroyed, emigration would begin again, and Germany would lose both the land west of the Rhine, as well as Posen and Silesia. Sering then became a Europeanist, pointing out the danger to the West of a German defeat, suggesting that only a strong Germany could provide the proper counterweight to Russia. Without Germany, the land from Scandinavia to Sicily and Greece would be ruled by Russia, and European culture would come to an end. Sering then vividly described what he thought would appear in its place:

> I have travelled to Russia. From the Polish border to the Pacific, one continually encounters the same image: a village in its gray misery exactly like the last one; the rare cities, creations of the state administration, tasteless and uniform; everywhere pretty much the same church, the same train station. The people, the peasants, certainly have their charming qualities, are soft-hearted, musical and not without a sense for the melancholy beauty of monotonous nature. But they are like a large herd; medieval people, constrained by an agrarian communist order.[7]

In early November, Sering saw the war in terms of East Central Europe. Whoever controlled it, controlled the future. Indeed, he went so far as to lay out his dream of a German-controlled *Mitteleuropa*:

> We will demand security against the renewal of aggression. Our goal however is not submission, not a Central European Empire of the Napoleonic type. We will undertake a work of liberation for the foreign peoples oppressed by the great empires, a liberation for all Central European states.[8]

A few weeks later, at the end of December, Sering had an exchange of letters with the editor of the *AFK*, Erich Keup. In the years leading up to the war, Keup had been studying agriculture in Berlin, had befriended Schwerin, and was managing the GFK alongside his duties at the *AFK*. He became a central figure of inner colonization at this point and will indeed be with us to the end of our story. Keup, at this early stage of the war, laid out his understanding of Germany in the East, a vision that, to an astonishing degree, would become Sering's own set of beliefs. We can see in these letters, and to a certain degree in Sering's November speech, that as of December 1914, Sering was still the moderate "inner"

[7] Sering, "Die Ursachen," 32–33. [8] Sering, "Die Ursachen," 34.

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colonizer, one whose settlement dreams stopped at Germany's current eastern border. Keup's letter of December 21 informed Sering that he would like to have a small gathering of experts in colonial thinking, that Sering was number one on such a list, and asked Sering if he had suggestions of others to invite.[9] Sering wrote back on Christmas Eve, inquiring as to whether Keup was speaking about inner colonization or the "expansion" of Germany's settlement area eastward. In any case, Sering noted, without knowing how things would turn out in Poland, it was best to at least await military results.[10]

Then, on December 29, Keup wrote a detailed letter to Sering that set out an incredibly early, radical shift in thinking at the heart of the inner colonial intellectual enterprise, a letter that could be read as a Nostradamean prediction of almost every stage of Sering's settler colonial career in the East, from 1915 to 1918. Keup began with a disarming statement: "The meeting won't merely discuss inner colonization but also the goals for the East, as both problems are closely connected." He then attached a report that he had already circulated to some people in early October that laid out the argument for the military and political control of Poland. The attached report made the following arguments: (1) although in the West, the war was all about access to markets and the oceans, in the East the concern was land; (2) due to increasing urbanization, Germany needed more land in the East, because the only way to stop people moving to the cities was to give them their own piece of land (this was pure inner colonization language); (3) the acquisition of colonial land in the East was a prerequisite for such a program (this was new in the mouth of an "inner" colonizer); (4) this could be attained both through inner colonization, but also through new acquisitions, such as Courland in Latvia, a historically German space with much agrarian land but only thirty people per square kilometer (hereafter PPSKM); (5) Estonia on the other hand was not as agricultural and in any case the Finno–Ugric population would not assimilate so easily with German farmers, as opposed to Lutheran Latvians; (6) Kaunas and Suwalki would be needed in order to connect Courland to East Prussia; (7) Poland was now as thickly populated as Germany and so no longer useful as colonial land (this was a radically new statement for inner colonizers); (8) by creating a Kingdom of Poland that would be deeply allied to Germany, Germany's Prussian Poles would self-deport to the new Poland, while Germans living in the Russian Empire (Deutschrussen)

[9] Keup to Sering, December 21, 1914. This exchange can be found in BArch K, N/210/116.
[10] Sering to Keup, December 24, 1914.

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would come home to Germany; (9) the black earth of Belarus would be given to Poland in order for it to have its own eastern settler colonial frontier; and, finally, (10) as opposed to the struggle for the expensive land in Prussian Poland, the land to be provided for settlement in Courland would cost Germany nothing.[11] With this letter, as we will see, Keup largely forecast Max Sering's political program during the First World War. Schwerin and Hugenberg had always been more aggressive and radical in their thinking about the East, and Keup worked closely with Schwerin at the *AFK* and the GFK, so one may reasonably assume that Keup was channelling the ideas of these more extreme members of the inner colonial circle. In any case, Schwerin and Hugenberg's ideas about the East were about to become more widely known and accepted.

Schwerin and Hugenberg were at the heart of the infamous "border strip" discussions that began in December 1914. Sering had given his November speech not long after Hindenburg and Ludendorff's massive eastern victories at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. The newly minted Supreme Commander of the East, Paul von Hindenburg, was in fact a man of the *Wartheland*, having been born in Posen in 1847. It was in that city that he established his Eastern Front headquarters, and it was to those headquarters that he invited Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg in early December. There they discussed strategies for a reformation of the eastern frontier. They spoke of a border strip, a long frontier to the East of Prussian Poland, to be emptied of Poles and Jews and populated with hardy German colonists.[12] What is most fascinating for our purposes is to consider to whom exactly the regime immediately turned for expertise on such radical colonial plans. It was the inner colonial thinkers. Indeed, the very three chairmen of the GFK,

[11] Keup to Sering, December 29, 1914.

[12] As historian Fritz Fischer writes, in an echo of Keup's letter to Sering:

> the motives behind the idea of the "frontier strip" were very various: to get strategic security and facilitate the defence of the eastern provinces; to round off the Upper Silesian industrial area; to separate the Prussian Poles from their countrymen in a future Polish state by a Germanised "frontier wall" and thus to isolate them; to acquire free land on which to settle Germans from Germany proper (*das Altreich* – the Old Territories) as well as families of German Russians brought back from Russia, especially from the Volga. This last consideration pointed to a transformation of the old Prusso-German patriotism into a neo-German racialist nationalism which, by withdrawing the outposts of "Deutschtum," threatened to disrupt Eastern Europe's old political and ethnic frontiers.
>
> Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 116.

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Hugenberg, Schwerin, and Sering, were among the specialists asked to write up memoranda.[13]

Hugenberg's response was the most radical, calling for the "clearing" of the frontier Polish space and the concomitant forcing of Germans back onto the land as farmers. Indeed, the language of his memorandum would have pleased the future Nazi agricultural and spatial planners Walther Darré and Konrad Meyer, of whom we shall learn more in Chapter 7. Adolf von Batocki, the *Oberpräsident* of East Prussia and a frequent contributor to the *AFK*, indicated in his memorandum that he somewhat liked such ideas, but balked at the removal of all Poles (a realistic nod to his *Junker* supporters who enjoyed their cheap labour). But it was Schwerin's two key memoranda of March and December 1915 that caught the attention of those in power, ensuring, in Fritz Fischer's words, that he "belonged to the inner circle of the high Prussian bureaucracy."[14] Keup helped Schwerin write both memoranda and, even though Schwerin was told to keep these plans top secret, it is clear that many members of the inner colonization elite were in on the discussions. Schwerin explained in his memoranda that the GFK had already suggested that if newly acquired territories were used for colonization, then the authorities should make sure to keep the land free of the speculation seen earlier in Posen and West Prussia, something that was believed to have driven up the price of land.[15] The frontier strip was definitely being conceived as a colonial project by Schwerin and his allies at this time, as can be seen in the language he used in his memoranda: "The German *Volk*, the greatest colonizing people on Earth, must again be called to a great work of colonization. They must be given enlarged borders within which to fulfill this work." After referring to the Germans as a "*Herrenvolk*," a "people/race of lords," he claimed that the newly acquired land "must be treated as a colonial land, equipped with a new independent authority and not just another branch of the Prussian

[13] Rutherford cites the importance of Professor Ludwig Bernhard's memorandum that fall asking for annexations, "Land ohne Menschen," and notes that Bernhard and Bethmann-Hollweg exchanged letters in late 1914. Phillip T. Rutherford, *Prelude to the Final Solution: The Nazi Program for Deporting Ethnic Poles, 1939–1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 29.

[14] Fischer, *Germany's Aims*, 116.

[15] Indeed, Schwerin was scolded for telling the other members of the GFK, to which he furiously responded that they would keep their mouths shut! See, Immanuel Geiss, *Der Polnische Grenzstreifen 1914–1918. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, Matthiesen, 1960), 90. In a letter to Sering in June, Schwerin informed Sering that, in an upcoming meeting with 300 expected attendees, confidential information will be shared but he is confident the public will not learn anything, as the attendees were all very patriotic. Schwerin to Sering, June 10, 1915.

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provincial administration."[16] Ever the careful academic, Sering's opinions on what to do in the East would have to await his direct observations of the lands and peoples in question.

Food Security, Blockade, and Submarines: 1914/15

Germany's interest in Eastern Europe never existed in a vacuum. The illegal British Blockade had largely cut off Germany's food imports and its population faced an existential crisis. Ultimately, Allied war crimes would not only lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Germans but had the knock-on effect of indirectly fuelling German exploitation of the occupied East. At the outset of the war in August 1914, Sering, Schmoller, and several other experts were called upon to research the overall food and raw material situation in Germany, and Sering quickly got to work. Although Germany was going to face several shortages, such as saltpeter for ammunition, there were workarounds, such as synthetic solutions. What quickly became apparent to Sering, however, was that the British Blockade of animal fodder was going to cause a serious food emergency, in that food for humans would shortly be redirected to animals, if Germany was to maintain its high level of meat consumption. Already in his November 1914 speech Sering was putting forward ideas such as using potatoes in bread and various schemes for making sure Germany did not starve. He said that ultimately Germany had everything it needed, and the only worry was the long-term severity of the British Blockade.[17] A month earlier, in his first publication during the war, Sering had written on this topic of emergency measures and divulged his interest in a certain idea that would later be used as a cudgel against him by the Nazis. He claimed that pigs probably ate too much fodder, and that perhaps that was not such a good thing for Germany.[18] By early 1915 Sering was sure that Germany's pigs ate too many potatoes. There had been a weak potato crop in 1914, and he thus made the suggestion to

[16] Geiss, *Polnische Grenzstreifen*, 82. See also Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815–1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955).

[17] By December, Sering was approaching former students and asking them to join him in a serious study of the war economy. The resulting three volumes were recently published along with a volume of essays, see Marcel Boldorf and Rainer Haus, eds., *Die deutsche Kriegswirtschaft im Bereich der Heeresverwaltung 1914–1918*. 4 Vols. (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016).

[18] Max Sering, "Deutschlands Versorgung mit Nahrungsmitteln," *Tägliche Rundschau*, 6 October 1914. Of course, with this suggestion he was merely making a commonsense recommendation that would be promoted more vigorously in the 1970s and onward by environmentalists and vegetarians.

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kill 75 percent of Germany's pigs.[19] It appears that Sering attempted to have as many of these pigs as possible sent to the army to have them eaten by soldiers.[20] The resulting slaughter was a botched operation but nevertheless allowed the Nazi Darré to later blame the "Jew" Sering for weakening the German nation by slaughtering "filthy" swine.

We can further trace Sering's immediate and growing concern with the food situation in Germany, first in a letter to Schmoller in August 1914, then in a report Sering co-authored in January 1915,[21] and finally with a nineteen-page memorandum entitled "The German National Economy during the War," of June 24, 1915. Early on, Sering saw the full effects of the blockade, and he expressed shock not just at its extent, but that supposedly neutral nations (i.e., the United States) were allowing the British to get away with it.[22] Indeed, he claimed that never in modern history had one *Kulturvolk* directly attempted to starve another *Kulturvolk* (after vaguely stating that Napoleon's Continental Policy was somehow different). But he then turned to Fichte's description of life under Napoleon and how, if done properly, escaping the problems of global trade and living in a closed, medieval-like system could be very good. Perhaps the romantic ideal of the medieval village taking care of itself appealed on some level to Sering. He then pointed out how the enemy had forced such a situation on Germany, but that with the imposition of price controls in 1914, the increasingly inward focus of reclaiming moorland for cultivation, and the use of forced labour (both POWs but also keeping Russian seasonal workers in Germany against their will), were all justified and prudent. He claimed that the main job of the home front was to make sure that the necessity of rationing did not affect the army in the field. Of course, Sering reassured his readers, the military had more than done its job, keeping the enemy at bay. Little did Sering realize that, at the moment of writing, that same military was in the midst of a campaign that would go a long way toward allowing it to

[19] See newspaper clippings in the file "Volksernaerung im Kriege," in BArch K, N1210/95, document #1.

[20] In a letter to Sering, the biochemist Carl Oppenheimer wrote that he agreed with sending pigs to the army and suggested that Sering contact Moltke and ask him to suspend beef eating in the military for a full month. Oppenheimer to Sering, March 13, 1915.

[21] Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 520–522. The letter is dated August 17, 1914, and, for the report, Sering's co-authors were Ballod and Treipel.

[22] Max Sering, "Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft während des Krieges von 1914/15," in *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (printed in the *Reichsdruckerei*, 1915), 438–457.

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take care of its own food needs in the newly occupied East.[23] Sering openly named the kind of economic system he was championing: "German war socialism has provided us the material basis for maintaining political independence."[24] Allowing capitalism into the system would only lead to a desire for profit and the immiseration of the poor, he argued, so war socialism was a good move. He finished the memorandum on an optimistic note: "The overall picture of the German economy in the war has mainly positive features."[25] Sering's words make it clear that, underneath his pre-1914 language of "freedom" for peasants, he was never far from happily accepting a form of authoritarian control if the circumstances warranted it.

But Sering's influence on German war conduct with these writings may well have gone past mere rationing. As Erik Grimmer-Solem explained, Sering sent his memorandum with a cover letter, on January 26, 1915, to (his daughter's future father-in-law) Admiral von Tirpitz.[26] He wrote that the rather scary food situation, detailed in the attached study, had left him with the full realization that,

> it was high time that we seek to break the blockade by way of retaliation [*Vergeltung*] and to use the same means that it has used violating international law in imposing the blockade to ruthlessly force down England. … [And] that the destruction of supplies in the currently overfilled harbors through airship attacks and the throttling of supplies through submarine blockade would force England to yield within a few weeks.[27]

He then closed the memo with what Grimmer-Solem astutely describes as "a chilling passage that enabled sliding down the slippery slope into unrestricted submarine warfare,"

> Humanitarian considerations due to the possibly unavoidable harshness involved in destroying blockade breakers must retreat to the thought of the severity and cruelty of victims that England is willing to inflict upon our own people [*Volksgenossen*]. We should not fail to remind the public that six German merchant steamers disappeared without a trace and in all likelihood became victims of English submarines that managed to slip into the Baltic Sea.[28]

[23] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 2.
[24] Sering, "Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft," 451.
[25] Sering, "Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft," 456.
[26] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 527. The cover letter can be found in Arno Spindler, *Der Handelskrieg mit U-Booten: Der Krieg zur See 1914–1918*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1932), appendix 24, 234–242.
[27] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 527–528.
[28] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 529.

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The very next day, on January 27, Tirpitz met the Chancellor and argued that the time was ripe for an all-out submarine assault and, on February 4, unrestricted submarine warfare began. I have argued elsewhere that in the face of the obviously illegal and brutal British Blockade, employing equally illegal unrestricted submarine warfare as a "reprisal," an illegal action meant to force the end of the illegal action to which it is reacting, was far from an irrational, radical position to take in 1915.[29] However, this memo is nevertheless evidence of an increasingly frustrated and bellicose turn in the otherwise moderate Sering, developed in the months before the truly radical turn that he would experience on the Eastern Front.

Further, through the words of Sering, we will see direct evidence of the thesis that the extreme, massive, and illegal action of the British Blockade resulted in stimulating, or enabling, German war crimes in occupied territory. The rapacious nature of German occupation in the West, but especially in the East, has been framed as somehow linked to German indifference to international law, a militarized state that required no justification beyond "war necessity" to commit such crimes.[30] However, Sering's later rationalization for the exploitation of the occupied East was always framed within the context of a Germany being illegally starved to death by the British Navy. It was in fact the British decision that "war necessity," in modern, total, industrial warfare, required the addition of foodstuffs to contraband that could be seized in a blockade, that became the inescapable context in which Germany decided to then take food from occupied peoples.

1915: The Transformation of Inner Colonial Thinking

Regarding space, people, and colonial opportunity it is fascinating to track the radicalization of thinking in the pages of the intellectual journal of the inner colonizers. From the opening days of the war the editor of the *AFK*, Keup, was tracking the mood of the Poles in the Prussian East and sending his thoughts to Sering and the GFK members. He presented a none too comforting picture of the fraught situation in Posen and West Prussia, evidence that surely pushed these men to fantasize about the

[29] Robert L. Nelson and Christopher Waters, "Slow or Spectacular Death: Reconsidering the Legal History of Blockade and Submarines in WW1," *University of Toronto Law Journal* 69 (2019): 473–496.

[30] Isabel Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014). See also, Robert L. Nelson and Christopher Waters, "Beyond the Mud: Revisiting the Legal History of World War I," *Michigan War Studies Review* (2015), www.miwsr.com/2015-035.aspx.

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land beyond the purview of German law.[31] Fascinatingly, throughout 1915 a new colonial space was imagined in the pages of the Keup-edited *AFK*. Even as late as 1914, Prussian Poland was described as "empty," beckoning German settlers into this "inner" colonial space. And yet, quite suddenly, in a series of 1915 articles, Prussian Poland was declared "full," and the newly conquered lands to the East, outside of Prussian Law and *Junker* meddling, were declared empty and awaiting German colonization.

The first wartime number of the *AFK*, in August 1914, contained the article "Inner Colonization and the War," in which Keup explained that the work of inner colonization had for now been "laid still." Inner colonizers, he asserted, could be proud that they had already provided Germany with many new "diligent farmers," truly "first class material for hard war work." Crucially, and in keeping with the last decades of inner colonial discourse, Keup described Prussian Poland as "somewhat still thinly settled." In other words, as of mid-1914, *Lebensraum* was present *within* Germany. Keup went on to reference another important inner colonization argument by indicating how "lucky" Germany was that the 300,000 Russians and 200,000 Galicians, upon whom the country still depended for farm labour, had already brought in most of the harvest by the outbreak of war, thus highlighting how dangerous it was to rely on foreign labour. This sobering fact led Keup to demand that, once the war was over, efforts should continue to populate Germany's East with more German farmers. He was certain, however, that the experience of the war would place inner colonization front and center in postwar politics.[32]

Already by October, Keup's opinion was shifting quickly from inner to "outer" colonization. Yet, as late as the January 1915 edition of *AFK*, inner colonization was still described as taking place inside Germany's existing borders. One author demanded that reparations after the war be used to help settlers. He then vented at the *Junker*, naming them as the chief reason for peasant flight from the land. The author invoked Sering and his argument that, wherever there were *Junker*, there was flight from the land, and conversely that wherever one found small holdings, one found an increase in population. Thus, at this stage in the pages of *AFK*, a colonial future in the East continued to mean negotiating with German landholders, the ultimate goal being the filling of space inside

[31] Keup enclosed three reports, the first is dated December 1, 1914, and is entitled, "Die Haltung der polnischen Bevölkerung in der Provinz Posen während der ersten vier Kriegsmonate"; the second covers September 12 to October 31, 1914, and is entitled, "Die Haltung der Polen in Posen"; and the third, entitled, "Die Haltung der Polen in Posen während der ersten sechs Kriegswochen," covered the period from August 1 to September 15, 1914. Keup to Sering, January 15, 1915.

[32] Erich Keup, "Die innere Kolonisation und der Krieg," *AFK* 6 (1914): 391–394.

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Germany.[33] Keup then contributed an article about the recently liberated areas of East Prussia, an area that had been so thinly settled, it had been little work for the Russians to completely "desertify" (*verwüsten*) the land when they briefly occupied it at the outset of the war. Keup declared that the province was now ready for intensive settlement, and in a slightly biological turn in his language, he argued that a "new race" was to be "planted on the *verwüstet* soil," and that only this new "wall" of farmers could save Germany from a future Slavic invasion.[34] Here we see Keup's Baltic settlement plans intermixed with the growing language of a border strip. As for the godfather of the inner colonial movement, Max Sering's mission for the government was to be much more concrete and substantial. First though, a new colonial space in the East had to be captured and secured, and in short order it was.

During the "great advance" of 1915, beginning in May and only petering out in late September, the German Army captured a vast new "empire" in Eastern Europe. By the time the frontline settled, it ran from just west of Riga, southeast past Vilnius, then almost straight south through today's western Belarus, to the Austro–Hungarian border. Shortly before the massive offensive began though, a crucial shift occurred in the pages of the *AFK*. The February 1915 edition contained the article "New Paths of German Colonial Politics," by "Sonntag," a name that never appears again, and that was likely a pseudonym for Schwerin or Keup. Over the last several years, the author argued, Germany had increasingly become a colonial power, but it had practiced a colonialism that sought worldwide influence rather than territory. This focus was deemed incorrect by the author, for, among other things, such a trade-oriented policy created an overly industrial, and therefore weaker, German people (the heart of the recent "Question of the Land" debate). Further, this colonial policy forced Germany to rely on other nations for base necessities, like food, while doing nothing to alleviate the problem of overpopulation in Germany. Then came the key shift in inner colonial thinking: the author stated that "even if all the swamps in Germany were drained, there would not be enough land in the Reich to grow all the food we need, and to settle all the people we must settle in order to have a healthy mix of both an industrial and an agrarian state."[35] Quite

[33] Dr. Nagel, "Die innere Kolonisation – die Aufgabe des kommenden Friedens," *AFK* 7 (1915): 57–62.
[34] Erich Keup, "Zur Frage der inneren Kolonisation in Ostpreussen," *AFK* 7 (1915): 21–23.
[35] Sonntag, "Neue Wege deutscher Kolonialpolitik," *AFK* 7 (1915): 117–129.

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suddenly then, in the early 1915 pages of *AFK*, Germany conceptually transformed from a land still empty to a land now full.

The author then introduced the idea of "*Aussiedlung*," settlement outside the Reich, in the pages of this "inner colonial" journal. The Romans had done this, he claimed, as did the Franks. But in an example of racial thinking beginning to enter the discourse of the journal, he pointed out that while the Teutons practiced *Aussiedlung* right in the same area now under discussion, Eastern Europe, their "national" feelings were on the wane in that earlier period and they indulged in intermarriage with the Slavs. Thus, in a clear invocation of the "border strip" discussions already underway, the author stated that, if Germany won new land in the East, it should be emptied of all "inferior" (*minderwertig*), untrustworthy populations. Allowing them to stay would lead to an "unhealthiness" (*Unheil*) and a mixing that would result in racial "deterioration" (*Verschlechterung*). The author stated that other great powers did such things and that, in fact, forced transfers of populations had now been rendered internationally legal due to the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913.[36] The author admitted that, while readers might be prompted to ask "is this fair?," he asked them to consider whether what the Russians had recently done in East Prussia was fair. In other words, here in the radicalized moment of war, anything could be rationalized. Finally, the author claimed that the implementation of such a program of settlement had now been made much easier due to all the tools provided by the program of inner colonization.[37]

This same article contained a long footnote by the editorial board claiming that such language was not unacceptable, and that this essay had indeed appeared in other publications in Germany. In the very same edition, for the first time ever, the *AFK* printed an article from the Pan-German *Alldeutsche Blätter*. In "Russians on Northwest Russia as a German Settlement Territory," the author stated that many Russians already understood that Western Russia was the proper German colonial area. Further, once the area was controlled by Germany, 100,000 Ruthenians (Belarusians and Ukrainians) a year would be shipped from

[36] For more details on the political and ethical legacy of immediate pre-war forced population transfers in the Balkans, see Robert L. Nelson, "Utopias of Open Space: Forced Population Transfer Fantasies during the First World War," in *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe's First World War*, ed. Jochen Böhler, Wlodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Oldenbourg: de Gruyter, 2014), 113–128.

[37] Sonntag, "Neue Wege deutscher Kolonialpolitik." This article aligns with the arguments of Friedrich von Schwerin, and the *Denkschrift* he was currently writing for the Chancellor. By July 1915, Schwerin was so closely associated with Bethmann-Hollweg that he was asked not to speak at a major frontier strip conference in the Chancellery, for fear his words would be taken as the Chancellor's. Geiss, *Polnische Grenzstreifen*, 90.

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there to Siberia. In a further sign of the shift to condoning forced population transfers, the *AFK* editorial team then simply added a note to say that they hoped this article was correct in its predictions.[38] In the April 1915 issue, Keup provided a list of all the important people and publications that were now calling for "new land." In this same piece, he alluded to what was surely on the minds of the veteran inner colonization thinkers, that the acquisition of new land in the East would finally transcend the endless, frustrating battle with the *Junker*.[39] Much more direct articles discussing exactly how and where to begin this "outer" colonization, namely, in the Baltics, were put forward in pieces by the Baltic–German Silvio Broedrich.[40]

In the *AFK* article, "The Necessity for the Acquisition of Settlement Land," Keup wrote up elements of a talk he had given on June 21, 1915 in the Künstlerhaus zu Berlin, in which he declared the need for a border strip. But in another, this time confidential, memorandum, he detailed the parts of that speech that had been left out of his *AFK* piece, which promoted a much more sinister plan for the populations of the East.[41] Here he indicated that the annexation of the Baltic governorates from Russia must be a goal and that it should be rendered German either through the massive influx of Germans, to the degree that they would outnumber the locals, or that one must "*remove* the current population that lies in the path of the Germans, and replace them with Germans."[42] Thus, in a speech two months before Sering would undertake a fact-finding journey to the East, Keup recommended that the three newly acquired Baltic provinces of Courland, Kaunas, and Suwalki, should receive 778,000, 488,000, and 25,000 settlers each. He further indicated that the "assimilation of the Latvians" would take place because they were Lutheran, and their "culture and education rested solely upon the German basis that has been provided

[38] "Russen über Nordwest-Russland als Deutsches Siedlungsland," *AFK* 7 (1915): 130–134. Near the end of the war, Schwerin became editor of the radically volkish *Deutschlands Erneuerung*, and both he and Keup were members of the nationalistic fraternity *Kyffhäuserbund*.

[39] Erich Keup, "Aushungerungsplan und innere Kolonisation," *AFK* 7 (1915): 152–162.

[40] Silvio Broedrich, "Kolonisationsmöglichkeiten im Ostseegebiete Russlands und in Litauen," *AFK* 7 (1915): 276–284; Silvio Broedrich, "Gründung der deutschen Bauerngemeinden Kurmahlen-Planetzen in Kurland, Kreis Goldingen," *AFK* 8 (1916): 73–84.

[41] Erich Keup, 'Die Notwendigkeit der Gewinnung von Siedlungsland,' AFK 7 (1915): 1–16. In the series, *Schriften des Unabhängigen Ausschusses für einen Deutschen Frieden*, which was marked "secret," this article of Keup's appears in the first issue, volume one. It is identical to the *AFK* article, except here, pages 6–10 are included and contain this radical language.

[42] "aus denen im Wege der *Umsiedlung* die bisherige Bevölkerung durch Deutsche ersetzt werden könnte" (original emphasis).

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by Baltic Germans." Interestingly, along the same ethno-religious lines, he suggested that German Catholics be sent to settle in Lithuania, along with Catholic seasonal Polish labour (in the hope that the latter would then no longer come to Germany). Keup then called for a vast border strip beginning far to the East, running south of Grodno, along the Narew, turning west near Plock, encompassing the western portion of the Warsaw *Gouvernment*, into the Kalisz area, through Czestochowa and into Galicia. This strip would encompass 33,945 km^2 and 3,214,000 inhabitants. "Here we must undertake determined action: with regard to thoughts about '*resettlement*' of large amounts of people it is time to get used to it so that once peace comes we will be in good shape."[43] Keup claimed that some 250,000 Polish families would have to leave, but added that, luckily, there happened to be a similar number of *Deutschrussen* families that would need somewhere to go. Further, and highlighting the extreme nature of the ethnic cleansing he proposed, Keup suggested that the Russian Empire could move 250,000 Belarusian (White, or "small" Russian, was his language, *Weiss-* or *Kleinrussen*) families from the Grodno area to wherever the *Deutschrussen* had departed, and then provide the newly emptied Belarusian land to the (soon-to-be) ethnically cleansed Poles! Shockingly, Keup indicated that he believed this would all be accomplished with willing participation from all parties, especially that last move, as the Poles had long had their own "Drang nach Osten," a desire to attain land in the East, and that this desire (*Trieb*) need only to be rekindled.

Referring to the earlier efforts of inner colonization to get workers onto the land, a series of articles in mid-1915 came out in favour of using those same organizational skills to provide land for, and to help settle, war invalids. "All that we have learned will help Germany in this endeavour," claimed Keup, and "the land is the best place for them, for their health, and for Germany."[44] Here, and in proceeding articles, inner colonial thinkers made clear their expertise, for they would easily be able to wade through the vast legal and monetary issues that would accompany such a program. And they could move quickly. On May 7, 1915, a request to settle war invalids, signed by key members of the group, was officially sent to the *Reichstag*. For the latter half of 1915, this theme dominated the *AFK*.[45]

[43] "Hier muß mit entschlossener Tat zugegriffen werden: an den Gedanken einer '*Umsiedlung*' großer Volksmengen heißt es sich rechtzeitig zu gewöhnen, um im Friedenschlusse mit entsprechenden Forderungen hervortreten zu können."

[44] Erich Keup, "Invalidenansiedlung – Voraussetzungen und Wege," *AFK* 7 (1915): 189–198.

[45] "Eingabe an den Reichstag, zur Frage der Invalidensiedlung," *AFK* 7 (1915): 250–254. Examples include: Alfred Mayer, "Die ländlichen Invaliden zurück auf das Land," *AFK*

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Figure 5.1 German conquest in the East, 1915
(Drawn by graphic company – original created for author)

Sering's Journey to the East: 1915

An actual plan for settling the newly conquered Baltic lands, specifically the placing of up to two million German colonists in Courland, was drawn up and submitted in September 1915 by none other than Max Sering. Since his travel through the vast open western frontier of North America thirty-two years earlier, Sering had always equated large spaces of fertile, temperate soil with world empire, be it the British in the Americas or Russia in its adjacent colonial lands that stretched from Poland to Siberia. *Lebensraum* meant power, and it had been Sering's greatest frustration that Germany had so little of both. Yet, until the Great Advance of 1915, he had never personally pushed for aggressive continental expansion. Only in the headiness of victory, and while standing on the "empty" Latvian farms he first saw in the Summer of 1915, did he see how many "problems" a war appeared to solve. Those Latvian farms would form the heart of an actual military colony that would soon be set up by Ludendorff. The General's title, the "Oberbefehlshaber der gesamten Deutschen Streitkräfte im Osten," the Supreme Commander of German Forces in the East, or *Ober Ost*, was in fact the same title given to this new fiefdom, officially set up in 1916, that extended from occupied Lithuania, through Latvia, and into Belarus. As richly described in

7 (1915): 199–224, and Delius, "Zur Fürsorge für Kriegsinvalide auf dem Lande," *AFK* 7 (1915): 225–239.

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the seminal work of Liulevicius, *Ober Ost* was organized for total German control, and the native population was put to work in what was ultimately an extractive imperial economy.[46]

Ever the "historical school" adherent, Sering wanted to see the facts on the ground before offering his suggestions as to what should be done in the East. As the front moved eastward, new opportunities began to present themselves, and Sering began negotiating for permission to travel deeper into the occupied territories. In July 27, 1915, Sering wrote to Hellmuth von Moltke, then working for the General Staff, asking that he be allowed to investigate the situation in occupied Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, and here he clearly linked the desperate economic situation in Germany to possibilities in the East. Moltke gave his assurance that travelling to the *Ober Ost* to study the settlement conditions there would be fine and, on August 13, the Chief of the General Staff, Falkenhayn, wrote to confirm that Sering was allowed to travel through to Courland.[47] Alfred von Gosslar[48] had asked Sering to travel along with Silvio Broedrich to map out ideas for German colonies in the Baltics. However, after Gosslar was appointed as a civil administrator in the newly conquered Courland and would thus be too busy to advise the colonial scientists, Ludendorff appeared to call off Sering's journey. Sering wrote to Ludendorff on the very day he was departing for the East, August 17, to state that this was not simply a private scientific tour, but in fact much more important and that he would arrange some other host: "My mission is in no way merely of a private nature. It is to form a judgement as to the development and colonial possibilities in the Baltic area."[49] With arrangements already made, Sering simply left for the eastern frontier. Before he arrived, this colonizer already knew what he wanted to find. In a letter, also written on the day of departure from Berlin, Sering told Undersecretary Arthur Zimmermann: "Grodno and Minsk are overwhelmingly settled by White Russians, a people with less of a developed sense of property than the Great Russians, to the extent that expulsion (Aussiedlung) will be easily accomplished."[50] In the same letter he went on to claim that this

[46] Liulevicius, *War Land*.

[47] Falkenhayn to Sering, August 13, 1915. See also, Rainer Haus, "Die Ergebnisse der Wissenschaftlichen Kommission beim Preußischen Kriegsministerium im Spannungsfeld divergierender Interessen," in *Die Deutsche Kriegswirtschaft*, 21–22.

[48] See Gosslar's description in his memoir, "Lebenserinnerungen," in *Nachlass Alfred von Gosslar*, BArch M, N 98/1.

[49] Sering to Ludendorff, August 17, 1915, in BArch K, N/210/140.

[50] "Grodno und Minsk sind überwiegen von Weissrussen besiedelt, sie so wenig die Grossrussen noch einen ausgeprägten Eigentumsbegriff haben, also einer Aussiedelung leicht zugänglich sein würden." Max Sering to Undersecretary Zimmermann, August 17, 1915. BArch K, N/1210/121.

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Belarusian strip of land would be "a worthwhile trade item," a place where the overcrowded Prussian Poles, crammed as they were against the Germans in the west, could migrate to; it was the very self-deportation idea Keup had mooted the previous Fall. In any case, to Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, Sering did go, from August 17 to October 11, spending eight weeks speaking to many people and shifting his colonial gaze to a new and much more promising space.

By mid-October Sering had written a thirty-page memorandum. He claimed that there were still 52,000 Baltic Germans living in Courland, the main area to which German settlement should be directed. Regarding the "natives," Sering stated that there were three groups of Latvians: (1) the farmers, (2) the working class, and (3) the intelligentsia, who had formerly been Germanized but were now russified. Despite this last point, Sering claimed that Latvian culture was "solely" founded upon German *Kultur*.[51] Sering visited several of the estates that the Baltic German Silvio Broedrich had been purchasing and settling Germans upon since 1908, as part of the latter's personal colonization program. Sering was happy to report that, while the Latvians had a low birthrate, these settled Germans were having ten to twelve children. Ever the assimilationist, Sering said that this project, the creation of a class of German farmers, was the best way to Germanize the local Latvians. Nevertheless, war had created an incredible opportunity as the retreating Russians had taken most military-aged Latvian males with them, their Latvian families had often fled as well, and Sering noted the existence of thousands of newly empty farms. In fact, in Sering's colonial gaze, war had created the conditions found in one of the most ideal settler countries in the world, with its concomitant emptiness: "The average population density is, at twenty-five PPSKM, and outside the cities nineteen PPSKM, the same as western America."[52] The second part of the report dealt with Lithuania, a country already being courted as a German ally in the East, as opposed to strictly settler colonial territory. Sering adjusted his gaze appropriately, noting that this land was already more thickly populated than German Baltic areas. He then made one of the most radical statements he would ever put to paper when he suggested that Russian holdings in Lithuania should be liquidated and that the "White Russians" (Belarusians) currently living in Lithuania should

[51] The influence of his travelling partner, the Baltic German Broedrich, is obvious in a statement like this.

[52] Max Sering, "Bericht über die eroberten Gebiete des Nordostens und über die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen von Geheimrat Sehring(sic) (Professor der Staatswissenschaft an der Universität Berlin)," BArch K, N1210/131.

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be "moved" to the soon to be emptied old German areas of Russia (the land of the *Deutschrussen*). In other words, a population exchange was being proposed. Echoing language he would later use about the Belarusians, whom he considered the most "primitive" of eastern groups, Sering claimed such a forced population transfer would not be complicated as White Russians did not really own much anyway.

In his first major speech upon his return, in late October at the "The Conference for the Preservation and Strengthening of German National Power (Volkskraft)," Sering began his campaign for settlement in the East in a somewhat tentative manner, yet nevertheless laid down some fundamental themes. After restating his usual position about the importance of an agricultural life balanced by a certain level of industrialization, he stated that the "previously empty continents [were] now covered with settlements and gigantic empires," and that they produced cheap agricultural products that overwhelmed the German market.[53] He lamented that overstuffed Germany did not have the possibilities one found on the American East Coast, a place that had no need for overseas colonies, as men could simply set off into the interior of the continent to find land and settle. But now, for the first time, Germany had such an opportunity:

> Without any overconfidence we can speak today of victory. The land that we alone in the East have conquered encompasses an area three-fifths the size of the German Empire. Many believe that peace should provide us with a major increase in the agricultural basis of our economy and social composition. But it seems wrong if from this they conclude that the importance of the work of inner colonization in the old lands is lost.[54]

In other words, there was a very serious opening in the East, so long as Germany did not abandon her good old inner colonial system.

Nevertheless, two weeks later, in mid-November, Sering was quickly moving down an ever more expansive, radical path when it came to Germany's settler colonial future in the East, giving a paper in Rostock to the "Commission for the Preservation of Farmers, Small Settlement, and Agricultural Work."[55] The speech is incredible for the degree to which one can palpably sense Sering's enthusiasm at being free of the frustrations of the *Junker*, Poles with German citizenship, the laws

[53] Max Sering, "Ländliches Siedelungswesen," *Deutsche Kurier*, n. 8, January 8, 1916.
[54] "Ländliches Siedelungswesen."
[55] Max Sering's speech is found in the minutes recorded in, *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung. Studienkommission für Erhaltung des Bauernstandes, für Kleinsiedlung und Landarbeit. Vierte Sitzung am 15./16. November 1915. III. Rücksiedlung von Auslandsdeutschen und Sammlung deutsch-russischer Kolonisten in Kurland. V. Ausschaltung der Bodenspekulation im neuen Ostland* (Rostock: Carl Boldt'sche Hofbuchdruckerei, 1915), 207.

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regarding settlement in Germany, and the claustrophobia of an "overstuffed" land. He opened by telling the audience that he had just returned from a two-month journey through Poland, Lithuania, and Courland, premising his remarks with the defensive language of the occupier. He claimed that, although the German nation did not set out to conquer, only to defend itself, through sheer luck they had come into a bunch of land: "I am of the opinion that, what we possess, under no circumstances should we let slip between our fingers (hearty applause)."[56] Indeed, Sering argued, only by holding onto this land and its people, would Germany prevent itself from being overwhelmed around 1930 by the relentlessly growing Russian Empire. He argued that Germany must keep this land which, he reminded his audience, represented merely an eighth of the Russian population (though he very much hoped the front lines would edge a bit further east, "[i]f we, as I hope to God, gain all of Latvia and Estonia.")[57] He then went further in a direct appeal to the overseas colonial dreamers, and made the mental shift of a European Empire that possessed land in Africa and Asia, to one based in Eastern Europe: "For us this land means four to five times as much as similar land that we could have gotten in overseas colonies, something that German patriots have sought, in vain, for decades."[58] This was the equivalent, Sering claimed, of winning land two to three times as big as Germany in South America, Siberia, or Asia Minor. This acquisition would now release Germany from its agrarian dependence on imports, and free Germany of its biggest weakness: "the small size of our settlement and agricultural areas."[59]

Sering then shifted his attention to the actual "natives" in the Baltics. Sering claimed that, in each area, the people could "melt," or assimilate, into the German nation, both culturally and at the state/civil level. Strikingly, just as land could transform from empty to full in the colonial gaze, the same could happen with specific groups in terms of their ability to assimilate, or not. After decades of seeing the major ethnic group of Germany's East as assimilable, Sering stated here that assimilation "will not work in areas that are overwhelmingly settled by **Poles**."[60] Congress Poland, the area that had been under Russian control, had always resisted assimilation, he argued, and at 100 PPSKM, it was in any case too thickly populated for German settlement. Sering was an early adopter

[56] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 189.
[57] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 190.
[58] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 190.
[59] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 191.
[60] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 191 (bold in original).

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of the idea of an autonomous, German-friendly Kingdom of Poland. Such a state would be militarily and economically bound to Germany but was to be treated as a fellow nation to the extent that Sering wanted to provide the Poles with their own eastern colonial empire. Sering stated that the Grodno, Minsk, and Volhynia area, that is, roughly modern western Belarus, were merely "occupied" by Ukrainians and White Russians, and in a shockingly clear rendition of the sloping "cultural gradient" from west to east, he was unsure as to whether or not this was thus Polish or Lithuanian colonial territory. Lithuania then became the focus of this talk, with Sering asserting that Lithuanians were an Indo-Germanic people who were ethnically as close to Germans as they were to Slavs (a kind of Métis in Sering's mind?). Although the occupied Lithuanians would be taught in their mother language, "[o]bviously German would be taught everywhere." He stated that they would learn German and assimilate quickly, but that the whole process would only work if it was accompanied by an all-encompassing German colonization. This was to be accomplished through the seizure and parcellation of large landed estates, with small plots then provided to German colonists. This was of course something dear to Sering's heart. Such estates, he claimed, were owned by Russians, Poles, or polonized Lithuanians. The first would be forced out, just as Russia had expelled Germans from their farms in Russia. The second would move to the new Polish colonial land in Belarus. The last would move onto smaller plots as, à la inner colonization, the large estates were to be broken up into 10 ha plots for 200–225,000 families, or 15 ha farms for 133–160,000 families. In other words, there would be room for a lot of Germans.

At this point in his speech, Sering turned to the jewel in the colonial crown, Courland. It was the smallest conquered area, but for the Germans the most precious. He cited the mere twenty-eight PPSKM, explaining that: "Only in the rare Russian region was the population as thinly settled as in Courland."[61] Not only was Courland's soil as good as anything in the German East, Sering claimed there was a deep German character to this land. After giving his statistics on the number of Baltic Germans, he referred to the half million Latvians, most of whom were landless labourers living in a pseudo-feudal state on small plots of land. With no real path to land ownership, Sering claimed that it was easy to understand why they had rebelled in 1905. Although some German authors had stated that the Latvians could never be assimilated, Sering argued in an incredibly colonial fashion that in fact their entire culture

[61] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 193.

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was given to them by the Baltic Germans. This, coupled with the fact that Latvians hated the Russians even before the Russians absconded with hundreds of thousands of their young men during the recent retreat, meant that they could easily be won over. In fact, Sering said, in his purest nineteenth century global colonial language, this "little people without history"[62] would welcome us.

Sering then proceeded with a comparison to the long and difficult inner colonial history of Posen and West Prussia. Unlike the fecund Poles, the Latvians usually had only one or two children and, unlike the long struggle to find German "inner colonizers," there were 400–500,000 Germans already living in Congress Poland, as well as the many German–Russians (*Deutschrussen*) who had been forced out of Russia and were now actively seeking a new place to call home. Further, Sering made the interesting claim that many Latvians wanted to escape their difficult circumstances, sell cheap, and move to North America. This entire settler colonial program had been made even easier due to the "emptying" of Latvia facilitated by the Russians at the outset of the war; by Sering's estimate, only 250,000 of the prewar 600,000 Latvians were still around. During the hours-long drive from Mitau to Libau, right through the heart of the old Teutonic Courland, Sering had seen only abandoned farms. In this area, Sering wanted to create 100,000 10 ha settlements for 6–800,000 Germans. In a fascinating reference to another frustrating experience in the history of German adjacent colonialism, Sering wanted Courland to be directly governed by Prussia, and not be deemed a *Reichsland* like Alsace-Lorraine. Thus, combining his plans for Lithuania as well as Courland, the opening settlement numbers would ultimately be 1.2–1.6 million; and lo and behold he reckoned there were 1.5–2 million Germans coming from Russia alone. They would not all come to the Baltics, he admitted, and so, ideally, 100,000 settler families would come from the *Altreich*. Sering said that, when crossing the Prussian–Lithuanian border, one suddenly encountered bad streets and a poor railroad system. The colonizer would quickly improve these, as transportation networks were Sering's sine qua non of inward expanding land empires. Finally, and to sum up, Sering made the direct juxtaposition between the frustrating experience of inner colonization he had overseen for decades and the colonial experience he had witnessed as a young man and fantasized about ever since: "Simply put, we must rely more on this American-seeming model for Courland than our own native experience."[63]

[62] *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 200.
[63] "Kurz wir müssen uns an das amerikanisch anmutende kurische Vorbild anlehnen mehr als an unser heimisches." *Vereinigung für exacte Wirtschaftsforschung*, 207. In the

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Although Sering very much used the language of population shifting, he drew back from the logical conclusion of his positions. In a letter a few days after this speech, he stated that he had serious reservations about the "border strip" idea, for, after all, where would one put the two million Poles who were forced out? Although the idea of a new Polish Belarusia (White Russia) as a place to put them was appealing, he was already seeing that area as possibly an additional site for Germans from Russia. Then, in his continuing recalibration of colonial/not-colonial space, Sering wrote that Poles were thickly settled, difficult to uproot, and "through and through a people in possession of western European concepts of property, something the Russians almost completely lack."[64] Finally, he hoped that those Poles remaining inside the *Altreich* would move to a new Polish Kingdom once they were forced to choose between that and the German military, what today we might call "self-deportation." He finished the letter stating that he would continue to analyze the issue on an upcoming trip to Poland and White Russia. All of this, however, was rather sensitive among "moderate" inner colonizers. In early November, Sering received a letter from fellow traveller Emil Stumpfe, who had long dreamt of annexing territories in northwestern Russia and was overjoyed that Sering had come around to such thinking. But Stumpfe, after informing Sering that he had also recently written an article on this subject, admitted that he had done so under a pseudonym, and if Sering could please keep his identity secret it would be much appreciated.[65]

In this same period, Sering also pushed forward his linked project of finding ways to alleviate the stresses on the overall German war economy. At the end of August 1915, General Lieutenant von Wandel formerly asked Sering to undertake a serious and official study of the war economy. Sering thus founded the Scientific Commission on the War Economy on November 9, 1915 and, throughout the remainder of the war, he oversaw major studies of various elements of the economy, often conducted by former students of his. At his seventieth birthday party, in 1927, he would reference this appointment as one of the greatest honours

interesting discussion which followed, Wangenheim hoped that, after peace, Russia would allow Germans to emigrate, but that hopefully they would not go to Canada (224). In a closing statement, Sering indicated he did not want bad blood with the Latvians and thus "force" (Zwang) was to be avoided. Further, he had heard there were already people travelling from Germany to Courland in order to participate in land speculation. This must be stopped, implored Sering (252–256).

[64] Sering to Rittmeister Elppmann (almost illegible) 9th reserve corps, November 19, 1915, BArch K, N1210/146, document #2.

[65] Stumpfe to Sering, November 2, 1915.

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of his life.[66] As will be mentioned in Chapter 6, however, for various reasons, the fruit of this gigantic labour, a series of monographs edited and overseen by Sering, never appeared. Although this chapter focuses on how he imagined and planned for settler colonialism in the East, the reader must keep in mind that, throughout, Sering was daily concerned with and working on the incredibly stressed German national economy. It bears repeating however, that, in the figure of Sering, we have a link between the results of the illegal British Blockade of Germany and the way Germans conceived of their role in the East. The radicalization of German actions in the East, from 1915 to 1918, traced by Liulevicius, was in many ways a result of the original sin of enforced starvation invoked by the Allies upon Germany.

Sering in fact immediately began scheming to get back to the East, writing a letter to the Military Governor of occupied Poland, Hans von Beseler, on October 18, 1915. He was sorry to have missed Beseler in Warsaw, but happily reported that the German colonies in the Lodz area that he had just visited were doing very well, despite more than a century of separation from the Fatherland. He had hoped to get to White Russia and here stated that it had already been largely emptied by the war and was ripe for Polish settlers in exchange for a border strip. Again, such language of moving whole populations hundreds of kilometres represents a major evolution in the thinking of this formerly assimilationist inner colonizer. In any case, Sering here asked Beseler for permission to conduct a five to six week research trip to White Russia, as he had the winter semester off from teaching.[67] Beseler thanked Sering for the memorandum he had sent along with his letter, and assured him that his words were being closely studied in Warsaw. In fact, Beseler wanted to set up a commission that would study all of Poland, but especially the White Russian areas that Sering was so interested in.[68] He then sent Sering a copy of the letter he had written to the Kaiser on October 27 encouraging the setting up of a geographical commission in Warsaw to study geology, climate, etc. Sering followed up by providing Beseler a list of professors he believed should be sent to Warsaw for the planned reopening of the university there. Beseler told Sering, in mid-November, that if Sering could send him something official, he would then forward it

[66] Haus, "Die Ergebnisse der Wissenschaftlichen Kommission," 17; Constantin von Dietze, "Gedenkrede auf Max Sering anläßlich der 100. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages. Gehalten auf der Tagung der Forschungsgesellschaft für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie in München am 21. Juni 1957," *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 6 (1958): 1.

[67] Sering to Beseler, October 18, 1915. This exchange can be found in BArch K, N/210/121.

[68] Beseler to Sering, October 25, 1915.

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to the Ministry of the Interior in order to get permissions rolling for his travel.[69]

That same October, one of the most famous books to be published during the entire war appeared, Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*. Naumann had worked alongside Sering in the Navy League during the period when men like these conceived of a German Empire by land *and* sea. From the earliest days of the war, however, many were shocked at just how clearly and quickly the British Blockade indicated that the dreams of an overseas empire were probably over. Beginning in the last days of August 1914 and continuing throughout the war, Sering and roughly twenty others regularly attended an intellectual gathering every Wednesday night in Berlin, hosted by Hans Delbrück.[70] There was much talk about the economic catastrophe of the blockade and what was to be done about it. Out of this stew, Naumann began to develop his ideas that the trading empire for Germany had to be that of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, especially after he realized in January 1915 that the overseas options were closed for good. He wrote the book over the course of the summer, and it was heavily covered in the press when it appeared. Indeed, the VfS produced three volumes in 1916 dedicated to the idea of *Mitteleuropa*, but crucially (and unlike Sering) this was based on an economic relationship, rather than a settler one. These strictly economic ideas quickly faded in 1917 and 1918 with the massive military gains in the East and resulting direct German control of much of this territory.[71] It bears mentioning again just how significant a shift this was in overall German imperial thinking. In 1914, there had for many years been a consensus among German imperial thinkers that their empire would be by land and sea. By 1916 that consensus had largely dropped the "sea," and it would never return.[72] Sering was in the vanguard of this shift and, although he was firmly in the settler camp, Naumann's book had a major influence upon his thinking. As we shall see in Chapter 7, in the last years of his life, Sering was very much pushing the economic version of

[69] Beseler to Sering, November 14, 1915. On these university negotiations, see Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), ch. 5.

[70] Paul Rühlmann, "Delbrücks 'Mittwochabend'," in *Am Webstuhl der Zeit. Eine Erinnerungsgabe. Hans Delbrück dem Achtzigjährigen von Freunden und Schülern dargebracht*, ed. Emil Daniels and Paul Rühlmann (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1928), 75–81.

[71] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa*, 140–151, 159–160, 194–217, 250–252.

[72] Geoff Eley, "Empire by Land or Sea? Germany's Imperial Imaginary, 1840–1945," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 19–45.

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Mitteleuropa for Germany's future. Hjalmar Schacht, an important future ally of Sering's, had attended the Wednesday evening meetings in the fall of 1914, and would later attempt to convince Hitler of the merits of *Mitteleuropa*.[73]

1916

For the inner colonizers, 1916 began with a talk at a GFK event held at Frankfurt an der Oder, on January 12, "The Implementation of Settlement Work in a new Settlement Land in the East." Here the speaker, Paschke, directly tied earlier inner colonization to this great new project, asking that existing settlement societies in Germany should take over the work of settling the conquered East, though he did admit that the number of settlers required was far greater than those found in pre-1914 Prussian Poland. Acknowledging how difficult it had been to attract settlers over the last thirty years, he indicated that one of the biggest obstacles would be convincing the *Deutchrussen* and the veterans to actually stay in, and settle, the East.[74]

Sering was convinced that he could make it all happen and, on January 2, he received a letter from Ludendorff:

> That the will to hold onto our eastern conquests grows makes me happy. You know my opinions on this. In my opinion, the conquered land from Mitau to Bialystock is enough. I say this especially because normally one only speaks of Courland, Lithuania and the General Government of Poland. These extensive lands, namely the area that surrounds Bialystok, is often disregarded, yet is a very important and difficult question. … I deeply wish that the new year will fulfill our hopes and that we can create a German colonization in the East that does not involve the use of force to Germanize the existing native population.[75]

Sering responded on January 10 that he had unfortunately not gotten to White Russia on his first trip but had since waded through the literature with the help of a translator, as it was almost completely in Polish. He then asked Ludendorff for permission to make a research trip to the area, first to better analyze the conditions, but also for a second reason that would have struck a chord with the General. Sering had heard from a relative as well as his son Max that morale was low among the troops serving in this region. He explained that they did not enjoy the diversions available to troops stationed on the Western Front and, further, did not

[73] Meyer, *Mitteleuropa*, 312–314. [74] The speech can be found in BArch K, N1210/148.
[75] Ludendorff to Sering, January 2, 1916, in BArch K, N/210/140.

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understand the importance of their "work" in the East.[76] Sering declared that "trench books" (*Schützengrabenbücher*) must be written, and he would be more than happy to hold lectures for the troops. He finished the letter asking that Auhagen be allowed to accompany him, as a Russian speaker, and that, by the way, his previous trip had been eight weeks in length and had only cost 600 marks. This trip would only be four weeks, but if there was no money available, he would pay his own way.[77] This last remark is unsurprising, as Sering always believed that a professor's work should be in service to the state. A follow-up letter from State Secretary Jagow indicated that yes, Ludendorff was happy to see him but, for now, no lectures to the troops please, as other professors would feel slighted and he did not want the headache.[78]

Sering departed once again for the East on May 9, 1916, returning home on June 18.[79] We happen to know Sering's thoughts while he stood on the frontier of this new colonial landscape, as he wrote them up at the end of May while in Brest-Litovsk, in a seven-page memorandum for Beseler entitled "The Future of Poland."[80] Although Sering had already been intrigued by the land east of Poland in 1915, this document reveals that now that he had seen the space personally, Sering became obsessed with it, especially as Polish land receded further and further into the "inner colonial" past for him. After declaring that no one wanted a "fourth" partition of Poland, Sering made the argument that an "autonomous" Poland, tightly joined to Germany and Austria–Hungary would make an excellent bulwark in the East. He stated that the Bobr and Narev rivers in the north, and the Warta in the west, would need to be the borders of the new Kingdom, but that expelling the 1.5 to 2 million Prussian Poles from the German Empire into this new Kingdom would be, in his opinion, impossible. Instead, Poland should be provided with land onto which these Prussian Poles could be enticed to settle. As it happened, Sering was currently standing on said land, the land of Grodno and Minsk in Belarus. He noted that this land was far less thickly settled than "overstuffed" Poland, and contained only White

[76] On the experience of German soldiers in the East, see Liulevicius, *War Land*, ch. 5. See also, Robert L. Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[77] Sering to Ludendorff, January 10, 1916. There is another letter from an adjutant at *Ober Ost* (the name is illegible), dated January 12, 1916, stating that Sering's report on settlement was very much enjoyed, and that opportunities grow every day for a future here in the East. BArch K, N1210/140, document #13.

[78] Jagow to Sering, February 11, 1916.

[79] Beseler to Sering, May 6, 1916. See also a one-page list documenting all of Sering's trips during the war, in BArch K, N/1210/121.

[80] This document, written in Belarus, can be found in BArch K, N/1210/121.

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Ruthenians, an "amorphous mass," already heavily influenced by the Poles, with barely a trace of modern national identity. In his own version of Locke's argument for the theft of Indigenous land in the Carolinas some two hundred years earlier, Sering opined that, in effect, White Russians *passed over* the land, but did not really *use* it, and thus had no "right" to it.[81] He reasoned that this meant that these people would therefore have to make way for Polish settlers. At this point, Sering did not yet make the argument that a new Poland would provide hundreds of thousands of soldiers to Germany, but his acceptance that massive population shifting would be part of a German Eastern Empire was fully on display.

On his return journey, Sering alighted at the estate of Count Tyskiewicz, at Krasny-Dwor, some 100 kilometres west of Posen, on the banks of the Warta. On Friday, June 16, a fascinating discussion took place there for which we have a transcription (of which only six copies existed and were not to be shared).[82] In attendance were Gosslar, Sering, Professor Kurt von Rümker, and the "Prussian *Junker*," most likely Schwerin, who took down the proceedings.

SERING: I am surprised at how good [this estate] looks. But it shouldn't hinder us in dividing up these Polish estates.

ME: Well, as soon as we have peace, we'll be able to decide how much the Polish landowners can settle the real Poland.

GOSSLAR: There are many ways to do this.

SERING: The big question that will come out of this is, what of inner colonization? Hopefully we will avoid the mistake we made and make in the homeland. May the great goal, set by the fate of the German colonizer, be fully achieved.

(SCHWERIN): As I wrote a year ago, before our huge offensive, this is an incomparable colonization land, Lithuania and Courland. We can also learn from our enemies, we must, if I may, colonize in the Great Russian style: (1) only the state colonizes, (2) settlement directors have complete authority in their area, (3) they decide the partition of the land, providing it to pure German farmers, first from lower Saxony, then Swabians, (4) *Erbpacht*, and only allowed to sell if pre- or re-sale guaranteed. The goal must be: a strong wall of German farmers.

[81] Of course, they were "using" the land, but throughout worldwide colonialism in this period, anything short of "modern, western" farming techniques were considered primitive and failed to equal proper use and thus ownership. I discuss this in Robert L. Nelson, "Emptiness in the Colonial Gaze: Labor, Property and Nature," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79 (2011): 161–174. On Locke, see Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[82] The transcript is attached to a letter from the unknown author, a "Hauptmann und Adjutant," to Sering, June 21, 1916. In the letter, the author indicated that this was a transcript of the discussion "we" had, that only six copies exist, and please do not share.

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SERING: I'm happy to say that, in all fundamental points I am able to agree. I can't believe I'm hearing it from a good old Prussian *Junker*. Colonization belongs to the farmers.
RÜMKER: But colleague, we need large landowners.
SERING: To a certain degree, but too many big ones, there won't be enough land for the goals of colonization.
GOSSLAR: I heartily object. We need *Junker* to lead Germanization, and we have learned that only through a mix of large, medium, and small [estates] does everything work.
SERING: I know that in east Friesia and Schleswig-Holstein, we've held the land with no *Junker*, and in the German East, we have problems and that's where the *Junker* are.
RÜMKER: Well, it's an open question as to whether the colonists there are today what they used to be. Some believe they're not made to be colonists. They might not have the strength against the Poles. I don't know if there would be enough small landowners.
SERING: Don't worry, there are more than enough, from Germany and Russia.
(SCHWERIN): Under the dictatorship it will be hard to simply sell. We want to prevent private capital from functioning here, to stop speculation. It would be a shame to lose all that we won through weapons to stupid private capital.
RÜMKER: I think we're all of one voice on this. We'll have more than enough land when we follow through with my suggested relocation of the Polish large landowners [*Übersiedlung des polnischen Grossgrundbesitzes*]. But Gosslar, how is it in Courland? I've heard the [Baltic German nobility] will give one third of their land?
GOSSLAR: Yes, it is so.
(SCHWERIN): We'll work it out, how to do this.
SERING: Agreed. Let's not get into too many details for now, leave that to the future.

It appears, at least in unpublished form, that Sering had become every bit the radical colonizer that his more overt colleagues were.

Throughout 1916, negotiations over what, if anything, "Poland" would be, reached a fever pitch. For the most part, discussions were between German and Habsburg representatives concerning the degree to which each empire would control all, or a portion of, a new Poland, where the borders would be, and ultimately how much independence a new Kingdom would really have. This high-level politicking has been detailed very well, and many times, elsewhere.[83] Here, I wish only to add Sering's role to the ledger. He was a well-respected professor, had the ear of those in power, and his agenda may well have had some influence.

Not long after his return to Berlin, on July 18, 1916, Sering had a meeting with Wilhelm Feldman, the editor of the *Polnische Blätter*, as well

[83] See, for example, Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*.

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as Professor Adolph Weber, and Michael Lempicki, a member of the Duma. Lempicki would become minister of the interior in Pilsudski's postwar cabinet and at the time was returning from the recent "Conference of Oppressed Peoples," in Lausanne (June 27–30). Sering indicated that, although the borders outlined for a proposed Kingdom of Poland would exclude much of Northern Poland, as well as about 100,000 Poles, in return the Kingdom would get the Grodno-Minsk area as a land for colonial settlement. And, Sering added, a new Poland would provide troops for the Germans.[84] This is the first mention of the provision of soldiers, something that Sering became convinced would be the case, and he would use as a carrot to convince Ludendorff and others that a Kingdom of Poland was a good idea. On July 30, Sering wrote his report on the meeting as a memorandum for the German government, very much pushing the idea that proceeding along these lines would produce Polish soldiers for the German army. He wrote that he told the Poles that, "only by promising to take part in the war with men would Poland get its biggest wish, a colonial area east of the Bug, Grodno, Minsk and even Vilnius."[85] He reported that Lempicki had stated that the world's democratic powers would have to support the Poles being given their own Kingdom, and Germany doing something like this would send a positive message throughout the "cultured world" (*Kulturwelt*). Sering also warned that England would do everything it could to keep the war going, so Germany needed extra manpower. He thus indicated that a trade was in order, Polish soldiers in return for colonial land. The attachment of Vilnius to the list of what Poland would get indicates that the Poles definitely impressed upon Sering the enormous national importance of that city. Sering wrote that the Poles complained about too much land being taken in the north, but that he responded that the planned Grodno–Lomza line was very important and, yes, it would mean 100,000 Poles would be outside the new Kingdom. But, Sering wrote, "[i]t appears to me that, once we have the Polish Army in hand … we should show as much concession as possible with regard to the demarcation of the northern border." Sering then appears to have drafted what he hoped the Poles would agree to:

> We say that the German Kaiser alone will have the ability to mobilize Polish forces, and that they will be subservient to him. We want to be a bridge [or interior land, *Binnenland*] between Germany and Austria–Hungary, in the coming *Mitteleuropa*. We want to be in the German Customs Union. We'll change our gauge to that of German trains, and our telephone system, etc., to German … [L]and with more

[84] "Protokoll der Beprechung mit Sering," BArch K, N/1210/121.
[85] "Bericht über eine Unterhandlung mit polnischen Politikern," BArch K, N/1210/121.

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Poles should be taken from Russia and incorporated by the Polish Kingdom, and … Germany will get some land … Our people will only enjoy a happy development if our overpopulated land is given an area of colonization in the thinly settled land east of the Bug. The allocation of said colonization areas will be the price of a meaningful Polish army cooperating in this war.

The memorandum may also have been sent to Sering's old mentor, Schmoller, for, at the end of August, the latter wrote Sering that the idea to declare a Kingdom and thereby raise an army of a half million soldiers "has kept me quite busy."[86] Schmoller went on, however, to complain that such a bargain would still leave Germany with the problem of how to expel the Prussian Poles. And on this topic, the now 78-year-old Schmoller was a good deal more bloodthirsty than Sering: "The appearance of voluntariness should be maintained as much as possible; but behind that must be unrelenting force."[87] A few weeks later Sering received a letter from Leo Wegener, a colleague based in Posen, that threw cold water on Sering's ideas and must have dampened his excitement. Wegener claimed that the mood in Posen was overall neutral, that the nobility leaned German but that the peasantry had more links with Russia, economically speaking. But more important, Wegener pointed out, the latter believed that an independent Polish Kingdom would result in a Polish nobility that merely stole from their own peasantry. In other words, Wegener wrote that he saw little support for a Kingdom, and, crucially, "very few soldiers would be found."[88]

In any case, in early August 1916, Sering put together his official report on settlement opportunities in the East. He wrote along the lines of his October 1915 study, only now with the necessary Belarusian information.[89] He began the report with the demographic information that around twenty million Poles lived in the areas of occupation, with the addition of Latvians and Lithuanians in the North, White Russians in the East, and Ukrainians in the South. Overall, in Poland there was a population density of 105 PPSKM, which Sering pointed out was much more than the eastern provinces of Germany (except for Posen), and thus Poland was out of the question for settlement. However, in adjacent land the density was 47 PPSKM and, specifically in Courland, 28 PPSKM.

[86] Schmoller (but signed Boese) to Sering, August 27, 1916.
[87] "Der Schein der Freiwilligkeit ist möglichst aufrecht zu erhalten; aber dahinter muß unerbitterlicher Zwang stehen." See also, Gustav Schmoller, "Deutsche und Polen," *Polnische Blätter* 1, no. 3, 76–79, 1915.
[88] Leo Wegener to Sering, October 17, 1916.
[89] Max Sering, "Siedlungsmoeglichkeiten in den eroberten Gebieten des Ostens, besonders in Kurland und Litauen," for the "Reichsausschuss der Kriegsbeschädigtenfürsorge," in BArch K, N/1210/17, document #4.

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Interestingly, he claimed that the old German-inhabited area in southeastern Poland, Vohlynia, was not on the table, as it formed an "ethnographic unity" with Ruthenian eastern Galicia. Further, it was doubtful whether the overwhelmingly "White Ruthenian" area of Grodno would be suitable for Germans. Thus, Courland and Lithuania were the ideal lands for German settlement. This area could produce great amounts of wheat and rye, but its current farmers, Sering argued, were not taking good care of the soil. Sering claimed that Courland was currently empty, and land was sitting there, waiting for farmers, and therefore should be taken over. Lithuania was a rather less clear situation but, perhaps, Sering proffered, the Russian and Polish nobility could be dispossessed. In total, if 10 ha were provided for each homestead, 230,000 families could be settled. Crucially, in the cover letter to this report, Sering reckoned that 700,000 Polish soldiers would soon be available for the German Army. Ironically (in hindsight), Sering dismissed the figure of one million soldiers he had been told by Polish politicians, as he found this to be too optimistic.[90]

Sering must have been given permission to make these highly controversial thoughts much more public, for, in the October 1916 edition of *Der Panther*, he published an article laying out the basics of this settlement framework, entitled, "Settlement Conditions and Possibilities in the Occupied Areas of the East."[91] He opened with the statement that he did not have political points to make, but instead just wanted to detail the conditions and possibilities on the ground. Currently (as of 1916), 300,000 km^2 of western Russia was occupied, an area some three-fifths the size of Germany. He then made his now familiar case that Poland was no longer a land for settlement, with its average of 105 PPSKM. Yet, Poland was suffering due to a steady stream of migration, mainly to the United States. Expressing his newfound concern for the future of the Polish state, Sering noted that, unlike other countries where industrial cities soaked up rural overpopulation, Poland simply did not have an industrial future. Instead, if it wanted to keep its people, it would require colonial land for settlement and, sure enough, this land was available, east of the Bug.

He then moved on to lay out the argument for the German settlement of Courland. After declaring that it had been the Teutonic Knights to

[90] Sering to Admiral von Mueller, August 7, 1916. See also, Sering to Prussian Minister of the Interior Loebell, July 7, 1916.

[91] Max Sering, "Ansiedlungsverhältnisse und Siedlungsmöglichkeiten in den besetzten Gebieten des Ostens," *Der Panther: Deutsche Monatschrift für Politik und Volksturm* 4, no. 10 (October 1916): 1265–1276.

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first bring civilization to Courland (Sering claimed that only with the russification that began in the 1880s did illiteracy begin to appear in Latvia), he pointed out that in large part Germans and Jews were the elite, save in the countryside where the Polish aristocracy was still ascendant. In an incredible dig at his old enemy, Sering claimed that in agricultural areas where Baltic *Junker* reigned, there had been flight from the land, but in Polish areas, where landlords had allowed peasants to have land (specifically in the wake of the 1863 uprising), the population density was as high as northeastern Germany. Sering claimed that in the years before the war Russia had been undertaking its own program of inner colonization, right up to the German border, but, he asserted, this was not substantial and these properties were not in possession of truly "hearty" colonists. The thinly populated areas of Courland, then, were to be settled by 1.5 million Germans, mainly those *Deutchrussen* who had been displaced, but also Germans from the *Altreich*. The ultimate plan would settle 230,000 German families on plots of 10 ha.

The Act of Fifth November saw the Kaiser and the Austrian Emperor declare that there would be a future Kingdom of Poland. A few weeks later Sering summed up his reaction with an article in the *Polnische Blätter*. Here, Sering noted that, while a new Poland would be a "cornerstone" of Europe, there was the problem of a Polish irredenta in Posen and West Prussia that had to be dealt with, and the best way to do so involved exploiting Polish hatred of Russia. Sering had travelled throughout Russian Poland and he claimed to have never seen a "more poorly governed land," full of illiterates, with, for example, few canals outside of Warsaw, a situation that led to overflowing rivers when the snow melted. Poles were of course initially wary of the Germans, Sering indicated, but Beseler had performed wonders:

> This has awoken the deep desire for the Polish people to seize their destiny, to expand the Polish Legions into an army, to fight to achieve complete victory alongside their liberators [the Germans] on the battlefield and in the factories. The Legionnaires and our soldiers are excellent comrades, and fighting together will only cement this young alliance.[92]

In the final paragraph, Sering returned to the problem of the ethnic admixture found in the Prussian provinces but argued that simply offering Belarus to the Poles would relieve this "battle for the land" and result in a nice understanding, a modus vivendi.

Sering went so far as to state that he had spoken with Polish leaders and that they were prepared to renounce their claims to Prussian land in

[92] Max Sering, "Die Wiedererrichtung Polens," *Polnische Blätter*, 20 November 1916.

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return for the liberation of Poland. Sering sent this article to Beseler and asked that he help distribute the newspaper in Warsaw. Sering further indicated that he agreed with Beseler that a committee in support of a new Poland should be formed, but that the time was not yet ripe politically.[93] Ultimately, although a Kingdom of Poland was indeed "founded," Polish territory remained under German control for the remainder of the war. There was little Polish allegiance to this new "Kingdom" and, crucially, virtually none of the 700,000 Polish recruits Sering had promised ever appeared.

The weight of Sering's impact upon what exactly transpired in the East, like almost any history of intellectual influence, is impossible to pin down. But Sering's specific role in the push for the creation of a Kingdom of Poland was already controversial in the years after the war. In 1919, Dietrich Schäfer published a pamphlet entitled, "The Guilt with Regard to the Re-foundation of Poland." Written in the face of the newly created and truly independent Poland threatening Germany's eastern reaches, Schäfer pointed a blaming finger at those who, during the war, thought it would be a brilliant idea to recreate Poland. After admitting that the Chancellor bore ultimate responsibility, Schäfer's vitriol quickly turned toward the person he considered the brains behind the entire operation, Max Sering. In September 1916, according to Schäfer, Sering gave a speech in Berlin to an important gathering in which he claimed that the creation of Poland, with colonial land in the East, would surely result in 500,000, if not a million fresh Polish recruits ready to fight with Germany to free their land from the Russian yoke. Schäfer claimed that not one person in the meeting agreed with Sering that this could possibly be true, yet the professor had held his ground. And of course, the Chancellor and Beseler very much wanted to believe this was true.[94] Writing in 1958, Werner Conze claimed that Schäfer placed too much importance upon Sering's influence with Beseler. Conze claimed that Sering spoke to Beseler twice in May 1916, in Warsaw, and that a single note in Beseler's diary reads: "Sering here to talk about the Polish Question and I gave him a few historical points on this theme."[95] Were

[93] Sering to Beseler, November 27, 1916. The letter exchange continued and can be found in BArch K, N/1210/121.

[94] Dietrich Schäfer, *Die Schuld an der Wiederherstellung Polens* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1919). In a letter from the Summer of 1916 to Sering, Schwerin indicated that Schäfer liked the idea of forming a committee to discuss the "Polish Question." Schwerin to Sering, August 11, 1916. There is no reason to doubt Schäfer's account, as this September talk from Sering would have been right in line with his August report.

[95] Werner Conze, *Polnische Nation und Deutsche Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1958), 178–180.

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this to be their entire exchange, Conze would be correct. However, as should be clear, by mid to late 1916, when Beseler was heavily influencing the Chancellor on the Polish Question, he had been exchanging letters with Sering for nearly a year, including Sering's sending him his own memoranda. The fact that Ludendorff was directly involved in having Sering work on these issues, mainly regarding Belarus, provides even more evidence that this eminent settler colonial specialist had some influence on the course of events in the East during the war. How much is impossible to tell, but that he helped shape thinking about the East in settler colonial terms, in terms that involved hierarchies of populations, and population movements, was only going to increase over the next two years.

1917

By 1917, a heady excitement ran through the language of the inner colonial experts. Not only were they convinced that they would hold and settle new lands in the conquered East, they managed to convince themselves that many Germans would migrate to this "new" German Empire, from within Eastern Europe but also from overseas, from Canada, and from Brazil. At a gathering of the Society for German Settlement and Migration, in February,[96] Sering and other experts laid out their plans to strike four committees to report on all available areas for settlement as well as provide their best guess as to how many German settlers would soon be arriving. In addition to identifying the settlement needs of *Deutschrussen*, as well as overseas Germans, there were Germans in Galicia and a substantial number of wounded veterans supposedly in need of land.[97] A skeptical Schaefer asked where the land for these settlers could be found. He pointed out that Polish independence had closed that country's land to settlement and asked why were prospective German settlers telegramming the Kaiser to inquire about Vilnius, an area likely to be in the new Kingdom? Where, he wondered, could they possibly settle Brazilian Germans? Keup added that, with more Germans now possibly coming from the Dobrudja region along the Black Sea, as well as ethnic Germans currently in POW camps (who would one day be released), where indeed would such land be found? At this point, Sering intervened with a sudden and shocking return to his roots. With "thickly"

[96] "Verhandlungsbericht," Presented to the Vereinigung für Deutsche Siedlung und Wanderung, February 10, 1917. BArch K, N1210/62.

[97] Sering had already written a report in 1915 pushing the idea of war wounded as settlers in Courland. See, Sering, "Siedlungsmoeglichkeiten."

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settled Poland out of the picture, and Courland ultimately only able to settle so many Germans, it was time to seriously visit the original plan of all settlement, an intensified inner colonization of the German East! Using pre-1914 language, one member chimed in pushing for the creation of "Neuland" in the German East, meaning draining of swamps, alongside a well-planned infusion of settlers amongst and between Latvians and Estonians in the northeast. The once again inward-looking Sering nevertheless pointed out that the politics of expansion to the East was crucial, for he believed many German colonists would be arriving and needed to be settled. Along these lines, the discussion ended with the sober realization that an increasingly independent Poland was closing the window for land and population exchanges in the East. The economist Carl Ballod asserted, finally, that only through victory would Germany acquire land east of Poland.[98] One sees here the multitude of possibilities, from a conservative retrenchment of old school settling inside Germany, to global movements of all Germans into a new rising eastern empire. 1917 was in fact the eve, before these thinkers' wildest dreams seemingly came true the following spring.

German Freedom

In May 1917, five eminent professors, Adolf Harnack, Friedrich Meinecke, Sering, Ernst Troeltsch, and Otto Hintze, gave speeches to the Parliament in Berlin. These talks were published together under the title *The German Freedom* (*Die Deutsche Freiheit*). Sering's talk was entitled, "The State and Social Constitution among the Western Powers and Germany." With the passage of every month of the increasingly painful blockade, Sering more and more clearly saw the English as the main enemy of the German people, and it was with them in his sights that he began his speech. He stated that, according to the English, this was supposed to be a war against despotism. But, Sering argued, if one looked at the facts, England was run by a landed aristocracy where some men could still not yet vote, while the "much scolded Prussian suffrage is more democratic than the English. After all, the poorest man has a voice that merely carries less weight than that of the biggest taxpayer."[99]

[98] This would appear to be the vaguely Belarusian *Ostland* of which Sering wrote.

[99] Max Sering, "Staat und Gesellschaftsverfassung bei den Westmächten und in Deutschland," in *Die deutsche Freiheit. Fünf Vorträge von Harnack – Meinecke – Sering – Troeltsch* – Hintze, ed. Bund deutscher Gelehrter und Künstler (Gotha: Perthes, 1917), 43.

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The French and the Americans were also corrupt, Sering claimed, but allowed that, out on the western frontier of America, one did find a good system, as good as Germany anyway. Further, these latter two nations were much better than England, Sering stated, and it "must be acknowledged that North America, like France, enjoys a large independent rural middle class."[100] But only in Germany, Sering asserted, did one find the concept of freedom rooted in German idealism, at the very foundation of German thought and political will. And this idealistic German thinking resulted in "more real freedom," and this in turn led Sering to his real interest, the occupied East: "We are the protectors not only of our own freedom, but also the freedom of all small and weak countries and peoples whose independence and character are, like ours, lethally threatened."[101] He ended his speech attacking his old nemesis, the *Junker*, stating that the only area of power-sharing in Germany that had to change was the Prussian *Landtag*, where more power had to be shifted to the lower orders. Sering was not pushing for a kind of mass, or class power, "instead an equality of the social powers," whatever that might mean.[102]

Belarus

While preparing for this speech Sering was putting the finishing touches on an edited volume that would quite publicly make clear his feelings, and obsession, with his newfound colonial frontier, *Western Russia and Its Importance in the Development of Central Europe*. In his long introduction, Sering revisited some themes of the previous year, such as the fact that, though this was a war of self-defence, Germany had to take its proper place among the Great Powers of the world. Holding onto the new lands in the East, three-fifths the size of Germany with twenty million people, would make this possible. Sering then wrote that Germany had to bind these new lands and peoples to the German spirit, and not simply create a fortress (*Festungsland*).[103] While England had its huge overseas empire, Sering argued that America and Russia were truly Great Powers because of all their land. He went on with his Ratzellian argument that Great Powers must expand their territory, and directly mentioned the

[100] Sering, "Staat und Gesellschaftsverfassung," 58–59.
[101] Sering, "Staat und Gesellschaftsverfassung," 70–74.
[102] Sering, "Staat und Gesellschaftsverfassung," 75.
[103] Max Sering, ed., *Westrussland in seiner Bedeutung für die Entwicklung Mitteleuropas* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1917), viii. It should be noted that he wrote this part while simultaneously putting together his "German freedom" speech with its promises of freedom for the little and weak peoples.

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Mexican–American War, the invasion of Panama in 1903, and the Monroe Doctrine. Russia took such actions in its own East, he claimed, while the United Kingdom extended its reach globally. This would be alright, argued Sering, if each Great Power would simply work within its own corner (i.e., the Monroe Doctrine). This had worked well in the nineteenth century when white powers shared in ruling over "culture-less" peoples, argued Sering, but now, the conquest that a victorious England and Russia were planning would break this global race-based pattern of rule, as Germans would become the colonized, a land of helots. And once a "ruling people" (*Herrenvolk*) were truly restrained in their freedom, Sering claimed, they would be broken. Sering spent the rest of the introduction making quite clear that the "little peoples" of East Central Europe had always, and would continue to be, controlled and colonized by either Russia or Germany.

After invoking the nightmare of losing to the English and Russians, Sering described what he had encountered in the Russian Empire and therefore what life would be like under Russian hegemony. From Lithuania all the way to the Pacific Ocean, Sering claimed, one found the same "wood-gray village" full of people that the Russians had enslaved (unterjocht). Russians as colonial masters had simply created "the same dreary monotony with its dearth of schools, streets and sanitation."[104] Here, Sering complained about assimilation, something he saw happening in many democratic empires, where differences were eventually extinguished, with only rare holdouts, such as the Quebecois, the Boers, and Germans in the United States. This kind of democracy would not, Sering stated, lead to a truly free state. In fact, Germans did not require such democracy as they, as a people, were "spiritually the most educated and possessed individual freedom of thought" and were the most "discerning [*kritischste*] people on Earth."[105] Finally, he argued that, based on these "facts," no nation was better positioned to truly protect the "little peoples" of *Mitteleuropa* from the oppression of the Great Powers, by way of a military and economic alliance. In an interesting calculation, Sering claimed that, if Germany kept all the land it currently had, which encompassed an eighth of the Russian population, the result would be a Russian army in 1930 with 25 percent fewer troops than it would otherwise have.

Within this East European Empire, Sering asked that only Poland be an independent state because it had always been the greatest nation of Eastern Europe, there were universities in Lviv and Krakow, and its land

[104] Sering, *Westrussland*, xxi. [105] Sering, *Westrussland*, xxii.

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was in any case already as thickly settled as Wurttemberg. He then stated that all Poland required in order to have "a powerful development was a good government and colonial land."[106] That land was east of the Bug and would be given to them, but, argued Sering, since so many Germans had died in order to free Poland(!) they must in exchange have a military alliance with Germany and provide troops. As for the rest of the conquered East, Sering stated that it was a mishmash of peoples, "everywhere thinly settled" at between forty and forty-seven PPSKM, and that any urban areas, beyond some central towns like Grodno and Bialystok, were "mainly the typical small, dirty and horrible Jewish town, overfull with peddlers and their miserable craft."[107] The only way to improve this space, claimed Sering, was via heavy settlement, and it was Germany's "holy duty" to provide this land to the two million Germans coming out of Russia. Unlike life under the Russians, Sering stated that local peoples would be allowed to learn their culture in school, and ultimately this area, called *Ostland* by Sering, would provide both Germany's defence as well as allow for German economic autarky.

The chapters that followed continued to make this case. The unnamed author (Sering or perhaps Broedrich) of "The Baltic Provinces" argued, after pointing out that the Baltic lands were "organically" connected to East Prussia and therefore the German Empire, that there was space today for four and half million Germans. The author then lamented that if only the *Deutschrussen* had earlier migrated out of the Russian Empire and into this space, Germany would today be autarkic. Finally, and provocatively, the author claimed that Latvians were of "Aryan origin."[108] Erich Zechlin's chapter on Lithuania depicted a situation similar to how Sering saw Poland, a space that was already thickly settled and best served as a stalwart ally of Germany in the East.[109] The contribution on Poland was again anonymous, but was very Sering-like, with discussions of population density, arguing that a strong Poland would be an excellent German ally, as the Poles were European and not "half Asian" like the Russians. There followed chapters on Ukraine, German colonists in Russia, "The Cultural-Political Meaning of Germans in Russia," "The Eastern Jewish Question," and lastly a piece on agricultural reform in Russia. The Jewish chapter may well represent the starkest example of how far Sering had moved to the right. The author, the anti-Semite Georg Fritz, indicated that assurances must be made that eastern Jews be able to migrate east, and not west, as any influx of more

[106] Sering, *Westrussland*, xxiii. [107] Sering, *Westrussland*, xxx.
[108] Anon, "Die baltischen Provinzen," in Sering, *Westrussland*, 54.
[109] Erich Zechlin, "Litauen," in Sering, *Westrussland*, 69.

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Jews into Germany would upset the slow but steady assimilation (*Eindeutschung*) of German Jews.[110]

Colonial Expeditions

While Sering was publishing his opinions on the new eastern empire, his inner colonizer colleagues continued to gather "facts" on the ground. From 22 July to 12 August 1917, Schwerin and Keup, along with Friedrich von Lindequist, the Chair of the Association for German Settlement and Migration, toured Courland and Lithuania, then sent their full report to Ludendorff later that summer. After laying out the usual case for rural settlement (i.e., more food, more soldiers), Schwerin and Lindequist pushed the Sering-like argument that Poland was no longer the goal, and that instead Courland and Lithuania were the only "empty" (*menschenarm*) lands left (they list 700,000 ha as "unclaimed"). The authors moderately stated that the inner colonization model of Posen and West Prussia should simply be copied in the conquered Baltic lands, and that Germany had been the "nursery" for how to do this. They then, however, made the newer, more radical suggestion that, after the war was over, any Russians and Poles should be forced to leave Courland and Lithuania. Invoking ever more classic imperial language, the authors stated that newly arriving Germans would be the "bearers of culture" (*Kulturträger*), teaching the locals what to do. Finally, the authors realized that these new lands should not have too much power, and so, instead of receiving the equivalent status of a German province, they could perhaps be treated like Germany's overseas colonies.[111]

[110] G. Fritz, "Die Ostjudenfrage," in Sering, *Westrussland*, 251–254.

[111] "Bericht des Staatssekretärs a.D. von Lindequist und des Regierungs-Präsidenten von Schwerin über die in der Zeit vom 22. Juli bis 12. August ausgeführte Reise durch Kurland und Litauen," in BArch K, N/1210/17, document 11. They also mooted the model of the southern German states' subordinate status during the *Norddeutschebund*. At the same time, the historical geographer, Fritz Curschmann, who had attended the GFK inauguration in 1912, conducted a "fact-finding" mission to Belarus, to sort out the various nationalities and report to Ludendorff whether or not the "Ruthenians" would be loyal to Germany. From a rough draft of: "Denkschrift zu einer geplanten Volkszählung im Operationsgebiete der 10. Armee," by Hauptmann d.L. Curschmann, Volume 2, Universitätsbibliothek Greifswald – Handschriftenabteilung, Curschmanns "Kleine Schriften." Sering was in contact with Curschmann, see his draft of a letter to "Kurschmann," March 27, 1918, in BArch K, N1210/151, document 3. See also Benno von Knobelsdorff-Brenkenhoff, "Prof. Dr. Fritz Curschmann (1874–1946), Begründer der Historischen Geographie in Greifswald. Ein Beitrag zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte," in *Perspektiven der Historischen Geographie. Siedlung – Kulturlandschaft – Umwelt in Mitteleuropa*, ed. Klaus-Dieter Kleefeld and Peter Burggraaff (Bonn: Büro für Stadt- und Landschaftsforschung, 1997), 497–521, and

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Already with the February Revolution, cracks in the foundation of the mighty Russian Empire were rapidly spreading, but with the October Revolution in the Fall of 1917, victory in the East was increasingly on the cards for the Germans. And as total victory looked ever more likely to Sering, he continued to radicalize his increasingly colonial vision of the East. In May 1917 he wrote a memorandum entitled, "The Raising of Agricultural Production in Courland as a Necessity for the Feeding of Germany's People," in which he complained that Ludendorff's order to extract as much as possible from *Ober Ost* was not being fully carried out and that "we" could do much better.[112] He further pointed out, however, that strict price controls were removing any incentive for the Latvians to help Germany in this endeavor, and perhaps it might be a good idea to change this policy. Although such a rapacious approach to colonial land must be seen within the context of Sering's deep understanding of just how tenuous Germany's food situation was due to the crisis of the British Blockade, this was nevertheless evidence of the slide from settler to extractive colonialism (à la Oak Point and other fur trading posts) he had previously despised.

In a letter written at the end of 1917, Sering was increasingly excited about an emerging eastern empire.[113] He indicated that Courland was ready for settlement with fully a third of the land now available. Estonia, like Lithuania, wanted independence, but Sering hoped that the example of what was developing in Courland would result in both countries being open to something similar taking place on their land. Sering stated that things looked good on the eastern and southern fronts and that he hoped the war would soon end due to either a victory in the West, or the Allies simply realizing that the gain of an eastern empire would make Germany unassailable, and that there was therefore no option other than to sue for peace. This idea, that a conquered East would solve Germany's problems, led Sering in the final year of the war to devote most of his time to developing his plans for this emerging empire. At the end of 1917 he was once again contacting *Ober Ost* with the idea of professors travelling to Riga, which had just been captured in September, to provide lectures on the history and culture of this new land, to its new conquerors.

more generally Robert L. Nelson, "The Baltics as Colonial Playground: Germany in the East, 1914–1918," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 42 (2011): 15.

[112] Max Sering, "Hebung der landwirtschaftslichen Produktion in Kurland eine Notwendigkeit für Deutschlands Volksernaerung," in BArch K, N1210/135, document 1.

[113] Sering to Borchert, November 17, 1917, in BArch K, N/1210/120, document 7.

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1918

Sering spent much of the final year of the war travelling around the newly expanded empire, thinking through settlement possibilities, and speaking to many groups about the great and promising future of these lands. He actually began the year touring the western edge of the German Empire, inspecting the industrial parts of Lorraine from January 28–30, an area that would be at the centre of annexation talk in these heated months. Schwerin would make the argument that the specialists of inner colonization should also oversee the *Westmark*, especially with the industrial expertise of someone like Hugenberg in their midst.[114] Sering wrote to Ludendorff on February 28, explaining that he believed a series of lectures on the German spirit would function much like a model of good behavior for the Lotharingian population. Here we see a direct echo of the very world in which Sering grew up, around the University in Strasbourg whose mission was exactly that, to "improve" the Alsatians via the model of a hardworking group of German professors. Sering claimed that the thirst for such lectures had been strong on his recent tour of Lorraine and, further, such a lecture tour of occupied areas would also work well in Ghent, Belgium. This series of suggestions to Ludendorff ended with a detailed schedule of the two week "college course" (Hochschulkurs) that he and other professors would be holding in Warsaw from March 4–23.[115]

One of the main catalysts of these tours for Sering was his growing understanding that all was not well at ground zero of the future German settler empire, Courland. In January he had received a report detailing, on the one hand, the rather brutal confiscation regime of the occupying Germans and, on the other hand, the unsurprising lack of excitement the Latvians were expressing toward their new relationship with Germany.[116] Further, on February 25, Sering received an alarming letter, informing him that the Lithuanian government was being pushed into the arms of the Bolsheviks and other radicals, as Germany failed time and again to recognize their independence. The Ukrainians were watching, warned the author, and they did not like to see this wishy-washy approach of their new overlords.[117] As Liulevicius

[114] Fischer, *Germany's Aims*, 833. [115] Sering to Ludendorff, February 28, 1918.
[116] BArch K, N/1210/17, document 6.
[117] Unknown author to Sering, February 25, 1918. There is much evidence among Sering's papers that he was very well aware of the growing problems in *Ober Ost*. See the memorandum from Hermann Hessel where, after declaring that he is with the *Kriegsbeuteabteilung* in Latvia, taking whatever Germany needs, he states that although the Jews and Baltic Germans initially saw Germany as a liberator, they now view them as

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describes, *Ober Ost* functioned increasingly like an extractive, resource colony, and not a place where the local population was being assimilated into good citizens of a larger German Reich.[118]

By the time Sering arrived in Warsaw, utter and complete victory on the Eastern Front had arrived. On March 3, 1918, the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk was signed, signalling not only the defeat of Russia, but the surrender of a huge territory to German control, encompassing not only Belarus but Ukraine and much beyond. Germany had won the war, at least as far as the East was concerned. After the Warsaw lectures,[119] Sering and several fellow professors made a second journey, this time to the Baltics. They moved from city to city giving the same set of lectures, with Sering speaking to German officers as well as interested locals about "The Point [Sinn] of the World War," on April 10 in Riga, April 15 in Dorpat (Tartu), and April 19 in Reval (Talinn).[120]

In *War Land on the Eastern Front*, Liulevicius depicts the Sisyphean task of the German occupiers of the East, the impossibility of sorting out peoples who did not properly understand "one space, one race, one language," and how this led to so much frustration. In addition to the plans for population shifts I have already referenced, Liulevicius traces a mindscape of the East that developed and radicalized among the thinkers at *Ober Ost*, one that began with attempts to define and categorize "land and people" (*Land und Leute*) but that culminated with complete frustration and the rise of a "race and space" (*Rasse und Raum*) conception of the East. Thus, the seeds of a later mindset were planted. If one could not "sort" the populations, or in any case "assimilate" them to the new modern requirements, the new ethos was that the land should ultimately be cleared of backward elements. In both the actual plans for Courland, and in the growing frustration with occupied peoples, a solid foundation for future "*Flurbereinigungen*," the clearing of the floor of non-Germans, had been set. Whereas Liulevicius traces this as a phenomenon that began with the arrival of German occupiers into a vast new colonial empire in 1915, I would argue that the very planners of the settlement of this empire, Sering, Schwerin, et al., had already endured decades of a simmering and growing frustration with the annoying mix of Poles and Germans in the unsorted eastern provinces. In other words, the first

the latest oppressor. See also Dr. Lewinski, "Die Kriegsrequisitionen von Fabrikrohstoffen in Lodz," in BArch K, N1210/105, Documents 2 and 3.

[118] Liulevicius, *War Land,* ch. 6.

[119] Sering first met his future student, collaborator, and legacy builder, Constantin von Dietze, in Warsaw during this lecture series. See, ALUF UA, C100/675.

[120] Documentation on the lecture tour, including all lecture titles and schedules, in BArch K, N1210/140. Presumably, the audience would have been officers.

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change in the "mindscape of the East" occurred when these settlement experts fled the frustration of "laws," Polish citizenship, and selfish *Junker*, for a new, open frontier of possibilities. Layered onto Liulevicius' depiction of occupiers who evolved into seeing race and space, we can add the evolution of settlement planners who saw the requirement of a radical, colonial space in which laws would not apply to the actions of the colonizers.

Yet even those allied to the colonizers were to be treated in a lawless manner, for fully one third of the land of the Baltic German *Junker* was to be seized by the occupiers and turned over to incoming German settlers. The very act of expropriation, which in 1912 had only been used on the smallest of scales against Prussian Poles, was now to be implemented on a massive scale against the old Baltic German landed elite of Courland. One can only imagine the suppressed glee of Sering when no less a Conservative hero than Hindenburg called for this expropriation to take place. Keup, working with Hugenberg, spent the opening months of 1918 setting up settlement societies in Berlin, namely the *Neuland AG* and the *Landgesellschaft Kurland*, with the specific goal of using the inner colonization model for Courland. These companies, by late Summer, had made their first official land purchases, east of Mitau and west of Goldingen. And in the Fall, the very first – and last, as it would turn out – transports of *Deutschrussen* from the Caucasus and southern Russia had arrived in Courland. They were put to work on crown lands, as renters initially, and were to be given land from the settlement societies in 1919.[121]

Sering travelled deep into the new empire, arriving in Kiev in late August.[122] Earlier, in May, Sering had written a memorandum on Ukraine for the newly occupying powers, detailing the overall agrarian situation, and pointedly stating that this was not to be settlement land for Germans.[123] In fact, in a memo Sering produced at the same time, he

[121] Ernst Dietrich Holtz, *Deutsche Siedlung im Baltenland.* Schriften zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation 31 (Berlin: Deutsche Landbuchhandlung, 1920). See also, Dankwart Guratzsch, *Macht durch Organization: Die Grundlegung des Hugenbergschen Presseimperiums* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1974). On the headiness of 1918 among Germany's leaders, see Holger Herwig, "Tunes of Glory at the Twilight Stage: The Bad Homburg Crown Council and the Evolution of German Statecraft, 1917/1918," *German Studies Review* 6 (1983): 475–494.

[122] The journey was from August 22 to September 11. Further to the unreal elements taking place in the East at this time, on September 15, the old German university at Dorpat was re-founded. Hans von Rimscha, "Adolf von Harnack, Theodor Schiemann und Karl Dehio in ihren Bemühungen um eine deutsche Universität in Dorpat," in *Reval und die Baltischen Länder. Festschrift für Hellmuth Weiss zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Jürgen von Hehn and Csaba Janos Kenez (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 1980), 55–74. See also Nelson, "Baltic Playground."

[123] Max Sering, "Gutachten zur Agrarfrage in der Ukraine," BArch K, N1210/126.

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claimed that, while the blockade/submarine starvation plans of both the British and the Germans had failed in their goals, Germany's "situation would be economically invincible were the bounty of the Ukraine and southern Russia made accessible."[124] Now in the late summer, Sering organized a program of instruction on German culture for officers in occupied Ukraine, running from August 26 to September 5, similar to what he had already done in Warsaw and the Baltics. Alfred Weber and Auhagen were accompanying him, along with the Heidelberg professor Hermann Oncken speaking on "Russian Imperialism." Sering lectured on the "Political and Economic Problems of the World War."[125] A newspaper report on Sering's talk portrayed a man whose once moderate vision of the East was expanding to an unrecognizable degree in the heady days after Brest-Litovsk, a vision in no way sobered by the assassination of the overall German commander in Ukraine, Field Marshall Eichhorn by Ukrainian leftists, on 30 July. After detailing how Germany's new eastern empire would solve the shortages at home, from wood, to leather and eggs, Sering declared that the prize of Ukraine had opened Germany's access to Central Asia, an "incredibly backward" territory that Germany could now control for decades. But the salivating Sering was only getting started. In the West, the Germanic population in Flanders was to be removed from Belgium and become a separate state closely allied to Germany, and, by the way, ready to provide its coal deposits to the Germans. But Sering quickly returned his attention to the East, declaring that the Russian Empire was a mixture of nationalities that was to be broken up, thereby creating (alongside an independent Poland) the Baltic states, and a state of twenty-one million Ukrainians, all of which would be closely allied to Germany.[126] Finally, Germany had ninety years' worth of petroleum in defeated and occupied Romania. During the first years of the war, Sering had remained the careful inner colonizer, still practicing what he always professed to be the only true colonialism, settler colonialism, something more akin to the Métis of St. Laurent, and not the fur trading fort of Oak Bay. Now, in the headiness of post-Brest-Litovsk Eastern Europe, Sering as naked, "extractive" colonizer was on full display. It is worth pointing out the degree to which the behaviour of these highly educated civilians, men with all kinds of contact to the military, seemed to be completely in the dark as to what

[124] Max Sering, "Die Wirkungen des Unterseebootskrieges (bis Mitte 1918)," BArch K, N1210/140 document 17.

[125] The bullet points for every professor's lecture can be found in "Vorträge Kiew," BArch K, N1210/129.

[126] The details of Sering's speech come from a translation of an article in *Kiewskaja Myssl*, September 1, 1918, and *Russky Golos*, no. 77, September 3, 1918. BArch K, N12010/249, document 4/1-3.

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had been unfolding on the Western Front since early August. Somehow, the relentless success of the never-ending Allied offensive did not reach people like Sering until some point later in September, and therefore the true shock to the German people in late October that they were in fact about to lose the war, is all the easier to understand.

From the Zenith of German Victory, to the Nadir of Sudden and Total Collapse

Within weeks of having given his frothy speech on the Ukrainian Steppe, Sering was in front of students at the Aula at the University of Berlin.[127] At the end of October, a chastened and very sober Sering spelled out for his audience how his Fatherland was quickly preparing for defeat. In what could be seen as a counter to the first whisperings of a "stab in the back," Sering declared that Germany had put in place a more accountable parliament, and that the German people should stand behind these men who had taken responsibility into their own hands. This conservative who had long been leery of democracy, warned that although this governmental change appeared to move in the direction of the West, Germany would still keep the institutions that had made it strong, with a press free from capitalist bosses, unshackled universities, and a peasantry that would not be allowed to waste away. This was, after all, argued Sering, an economic war started by England: a "war of the land rich versus the land poor, the giant states and their allies versus the smaller but more vigorous states of central Europe." Sering returned to his "liberation" mode, claiming that Germany had freed Poland, Lithuania, and the Baltic States, making them independent nations, creating good, strong independent free markets for German goods. He finished this speech declaring that Germany could not participate in an armistice, because they would lose everything. Instead, Sering parroted the words of Hindenburg to the Chancellor, an "honourable Peace or Battle to the utmost."

Already when he gave this speech, Sering was transitioning into the postwar era. As the German Empire was falling all around him, Sering was being asked to prepare postwar settlement plans, this time "back to the roots," within the shrunken borders of a soon to be defeated Germany. As we will see in Chapter 6, one wonders to what degree he even noticed the "official" armistice on November 11. A mere seven days earlier, on November 4, Sering's only son, Max Jr., had been killed on the Western Front.

[127] A draft of the speech can be found in BArch K, N/1210/122.

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